

Africa Report by Thierry Lalevée

The 'continent of the 21st century'

The Sudan crisis serves to remind Africans and their friends of the urgency of implementing great infrastructure projects.

Preliminary estimates put at close to 1 million those rendered homeless in Khartoum and its surroundings by the floods in Sudan, which are expected to continue until early September. Most dwellings, which cannot be described as houses, but huts made of sticks and mud bricks, have been simply washed away by the overflowing waters of the Nile. The destruction of homes and the river of mud which has invaded the cities now threaten Sudan with an unprecedented outbreak of epidemics from typhoid to cholera. And there is an additional food crisis, as road networks and food distribution circuits have been disrupted.

The last weeks of rain have also created a hotbed for breeding locusts. According to an urgent release on Aug. 15 from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the locust swarm threatening central, western, and southern Sudan and northern Ethiopia is of "Biblical dimensions," at least "ten times larger than the swarm of 1987."

International aid, which is now mobilized both to rescue flood victims and to face the locust threat, comes quite late. Hundreds of thousands will die in Sudan. This doesn't bother the international financial community. On Aug. 16, in its lead editorial, the *Financial Times* argues that economic priorities should not be forgotten: "On the economic front at least, there has been some progress. In June, the government introduced wide-ranging reforms which, should they be followed up by a devaluation, will pave the way to an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Given the plight of Sudan today, it is unrealistic and un-

charitable to expect the government to implement an economic recovery program. . . . Nonetheless, Mr. el Mahdi will have to settle the misgivings about his government."

While the editorial does call for Western economic support for Sudan, nowhere are mentioned any of the basic infrastructure plans which should be set into motion now. A clear indication of what has to be done has been given by the Egyptian reaction to the flood. While the flood has devastated Sudan, it has been greeted with relief in Egypt. Not because the Egyptians do not care—they'll be probably the first African nation to come to Sudan's help. But because the Aswan Dam had fallen to catastrophic levels, below 150 meters, cutting the electrical output of the dam by close to 50% in the last few months, hampering both Sudan's industrial production and its elaborate irrigation system.

Egypt's Aswan Dam is a dramatic demonstration of what stands between the life and development of millions, and their death. A group of yet unnamed Italian companies has put together an ambitious project called Transaqua, according to the Aug. 13 issue of *Il Giornale* newspaper. Reportedly the group of companies, backed by the Italian government, has finalized a feasibility study for the building of a 2,400-kilometer linking the Zaire lakes to the Central African Republic, western Sudan, and Lake Chad. According to the study, the canal could be used both for irrigation and for creating new farm areas, as well as a large and navigable waterway for intra-African trade. More details of the project, which has received

the backing of the Presidents of Zaire and Chad, are expected within the next weeks.

Such projects are the result of systematic lobbying by several African-based organizations which are committed not to give up on Africa. In an interview with *EIR*, Dr. Farouk Shakweer of the Tangiers-based African Organization for the Promotion of Trade, stressed that "Africa is the continent of the 21st century," where opportunities for economic and industrial growth are located. Created several years ago at the initiative of the Organization for African Unity and the African Development Bank, the Tangiers organization wants to ensure that trade between Africa and the rest of the world is also paralleled by an increase in intra-African trade, which represents today only 4% of the volume of African trade.

Interestingly, according to Dr. Shakweer, this is meeting with major obstacles from the European Community in Brussels. While negotiating for the fourth round of the Lomé agreement linking Europe to Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific—the ACP trade zone—Brussels is showing no enthusiasm in helping finance a trading system which would endanger a traditional one-way system.

The economic battle at stake is also considered important by Farouk Shakweer, given that many of the bilateral agreements between African and European countries will be put into question by the Europe 1992 agreement. By then, country will have to negotiate with a bloc of economically unified European countries. A very uncomfortable situation, unless the Africans by then will have developed their own trade ties within Africa, and with other developing countries. But the Sudan crisis is there as a reminder that there is no time to lose.