

# There is no sovereignty under the British Commonwealth

by Sally Agame

*The following speech was delivered at a seminar on Africa, in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Sept. 20. Mrs. Agame is the Coordinator of State Affairs of Lado, and the General Secretary of the Black African Woman's Association. Subheads have been added.*

First of all, I have to say where I come from, because every-time I say, "I come from Lado," everybody says, "Where is it? I haven't seen it. I don't know it." So, I will take half of my time to say where I come from, and in the remaining few minutes, I will say what I think about the problems in our African countries.

Lado is not an independent country yet. Lado was supposed to be independent in 1960, but it was blocked by Britain, because the Agofe, that is, the King of Lado, refused to sign, because for most of the countries, when you sign, you have to promise how you are going to behave when you are independent. So, he refused to sign that Lado is going to be under the British Commonwealth, when it is independent. Therefore, from that time on, the independence of Lado has been blocked, because Britain doesn't want, or most of the European countries who had colonies, do not want African countries to have sovereignty.

Lado is bordered by Uganda, Sudan, now Congo, and the Central African Republic. This is important to note, because what is going on now in northern Uganda, in southern Sudan, and in Congo-Zaire, are wars all affecting Lado directly, especially [Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army leader John] Garang's wars in southern Sudan, are fought from Lado grounds.

There is also one important thing that we have to note about the problem of Lado. Why is it, that it is not independent up until today? It's a long story, but to cut it short, it goes back to the history of the partition of Africa in 1885. The Europeans had agreed, that any African chief who signed over his authority—or that he should be protected by a European power, automatically came under that European power, and they were colonized, and they would be treated as such under that power. In the case of Lado, we managed to fight, and none of our leaders signed, up until today. Agofe John Bart Agame did not sign, and hasn't signed up until now.

As punishment for that, he was sentenced on Sept. 12, 1962 to jail. He was supposed to be in prison for seven years, in Luzira Upper Prison, Room 8. Those of you who are Ugandans, know where Luzira is, and Upper Prison is maximum security, and you know what happens there. They had hoped that he would probably die there, but he had friends, and he escaped after some fighting.

So up to now, we are not independent, but we are fighting for our independence. We have already put all of our demands for independence before the United Nations. It is Belgium and Britain, which are the colonial administering powers of Lado's territory. So, since it is a complicated history, we prefer that Lado's independence should be negotiated through the United Nations, to avoid unnecessary fights. That's what we have been doing since 1947. When we are going to get it, we don't know, but for sure, we are going to get it. So much for Lado. (More information is available from me.)

## The proper starting point

I feel that I should comment a little bit about what our chief speaker said. Africa seems to have a lot of problems, and indeed we have a lot of problems. He went back 20 years, but, me, I feel that in order for us Africans to find a good standing point, where we should start examining our problem, we should go back to the time when the slave trade was started, come through colonialization, then come through decolonization, and then examine how the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and World Bank are controlling the financial issues of Africa, thus the economic development of Africa, then come to the present campaign for globalization. What are all these? Where does Africa fit in?

According to our observation, all of these are techniques which are being used to control the economic resources of Africa. When I say economic resources, that also includes the Africa personnel, the Africa people. According to me—I'm sorry, I might be a little bit hard, but according to me, the official European policy of governments, seems to see Africa as nothing except a source of economic resources, and cheap labor. Therefore, when they say there's genocide in Burundi, genocide in Uganda, or genocide anywhere in an African



*Sally Agame, Coordinator of State Affairs of Lado (second from left): "The independence of Lado has been blocked, because Britain doesn't want, or most of the European countries who had colonies, do not want African countries to have sovereignty."*

country, it does not affect the European governments, so long as they can still continue getting the economic advantage. That explains why, when [Zaire's] President Mobutu was being fought to be overthrown, everybody knew that President Mobutu was going to die shortly anyway. Why do you need to have such a big war, to overthrow a man who is already going to die? Now, he was thrown out. Now he has died, but where is the peace? Where is the economic advantage? You may say it is too a short time to see it, but if you see it as it is, chasing President Mobutu out will definitely not bring a solution to the problem of Congo-Zaire.

### **The colonial apparatus is still effective**

So, where does our problem lie? One, it lies in the colonial apparatus, which is still effective in Africa, either under the British Commonwealth—I know there are some Africans who will say, "Oh, we're independent," but I will assure you, that those of you who are under the British Commonwealth, you have no sovereignty. You don't have it. And if you don't believe me, those of you who are members of the UN, I don't know whether they have changed it, but the British High Commissioner, or the British ambassador in the UN, calls weekly meetings for Commonwealth ambassadors, so that when you go to vote, you are going to vote as Britain says.

And it is internationally legally correct, because when

you became a Commonwealth member, you signed a Privy Council document, which says that you are surrendering your sovereignty to the British sovereign. So when we are complaining, "Why is [Uganda's] President [Yoweri] Museveni behaving like this?" "Why is so and so doing that?" he is getting his orders from somewhere. He does not operate on his own. For heaven's sake, President Museveni doesn't make guns. How would President Museveni support all that war, support Mr. [Laurent] Kabila all the way to Kinshasha? That is one problem.

The other problem is, when we talk of the international community, who are the international community? Again, the international community is composed of mainly European countries. They are the ones which have the power. And North America. There is no Africa country which can say, "I'm a part of the international community," because you don't have any right to take decisions. So we only sit and say, "Why aren't they coming? We are killing ourselves." But what is the UN? Why should the Europeans send their people to go and die, in saving the miserable Africans in the corner of an Africa country somewhere?

Now, where is the problem? Again, the problem comes back, that in European policy, Africa as a land, probably should not belong to the Africans, because the Africans don't have sovereign rights. If you look at it, you see that the only Africa countries that have sovereign rights at the moment, are

Lado, though not independent, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Eritrea. Those are the ones, which can legally stand up in the UN and say, "Hey, you cannot tell me what to do, because I am myself." But the rest, they either have to consult Paris, or London, some Washington, some Lisbon. There is no way that we can do anything, so what should we do?

One of the things that I would ask our European campaigners here, is that maybe the Africans should start a campaign, to abrogate the Berlin Treaty of 1885, where Europe decided to share Africa, and decided to own Africa, so that at least legally on paper, we can say, "Hey, this law here is now removed." At least that give us room to do things for ourselves. Even the OAU [Organization for African Unity] was created under the same treaty. That is why we in Lado, cannot go to the OAU and say, "Oh, OAU, please help us," because the OAU cannot do that. They will go to London first. "London, what do you say? Can we help them?" They don't. Or they will go to Paris. Unless that thing is removed, we have a long way to go.

### **The education of statesmen**

Then, the last one, is education and training. I have been a teacher, and I've been stuck with this Lado issue for a long time. I wasn't a politician, but as soon as I got married to Mr. Agame, I got a problem of politics, so I have learned. The main problem is education. I'm sorry, but sometimes I have a lot of debate with my husband. I say the African politicians do not actually know what a politician is supposed to do for his country. They think you become a politician to make money quickly, and get rich quickly. And yet, a politician, to me, is supposed to be somebody who is dedicated to protecting his people, and the country, and to organizing the country, so that the people can produce things, and look after their own interests, but that is not the case. They behave like corrupt tradesmen. They are not there to do anything, and that explains why a person like President Museveni is being praised, and why President Museveni is being praised by Western media. It's not because they don't know that what he's doing is not political activity to protect Ugandans. They know what he's doing is damned wrong for his people. So long as the people who put him there, who are gaining from him, continue gaining what they are gaining. . . . So we have to know, what do we actually need to know, if I want to be a President of Lado, or a prime minister. What should I do? How should I behave?

The second thing is, the Africans should also learn what economics is. None of them knows the mechanism of money. "We are poor. We are poor," and yet all the minerals are there in Africa. Africa is the poorest, and yet Africa is the richest. Now, what is the problem? Why don't we learn how economics operates, how money operates? Again, it goes back to sovereignty. If you are not sovereign, you have no right to create money. So forget it.

Now, the third, is science. We need scientific knowledge. You were reading a beautiful view of this man (Cheikh Anta Diop) in the 1960s, '70s, but how many African countries have established research institutions which can really do something, so that at least, in an Africa country, a man can sit in a corner and make a bicycle, or manufacture a needle, because if we cannot do that, then you will say, "Oh, maybe the Europeans are superior," because everything we get, we get from Europe. Why is it that we cannot see it, and learn, and try to produce something? When industrialization started in Europe, they started with food production, agricultural things, but nothing like that takes place in Africa. And instead, all of Africa's poor want bread from Europe, and, of course, they will give it, just for pleasure, but it's not for free. They don't give it for free.

### **'Knowledge is the key to power'**

So what are we going to do? Maybe the Schiller Institute should take one or two Africans and train them, to see how these things work, so that when one goes to negotiate with the IMF, maybe, at least, one can get better conditions. Instead, they get a minister who knows nothing about finance, to come to negotiate. Then, maybe he drinks very nicely, and then tomorrow he is told, "You sign." He signs, and he has signed the whole country off. I remember I attended a meeting with the former person who was in charge of the World Bank. I think it was [Robert] McNamara. He said, "I have been working with the World Bank for so many years, and I have been waiting to hear an African say no, to the conditions we give them, but none has said it." Up until he retired, no African came and said, "Hey, these conditions are bad. We are not going to take it," and the explanation is, because they don't know what economics is, how it functions. Why don't they know? Because we are badly taught.

I'm a teacher. The education policy, training policy we get in Africa, is still the colonial one. We are supposed to be just clerical groups. Even if I get a Ph.D. in a university somewhere, I will get that prestige, but in reality, I don't know what I can actually produce with that Ph.D.

So, that is how I see it. I see that we need to do a lot in training, in learning, and we have to do something to remove this idea that Africa belongs to Europe. Those who may not believe me, if you take the world organization, how they group the world, you notice that Africa doesn't exist as a region, and South Africa is not a part of Africa. South Africa is attached to Australia and New Zealand.

Now, where are the African countries between the Sahara and the Kalahari deserts? Maybe North Africa, Algeria and Morocco, will be attached to the Middle East. What happens with us in the middle? So, I think we Africans have a lot to do for ourselves, and with those who want to help us, so that, at least, we can have a face as Africans. We need knowledge. Knowledge is a key to power.