

UN Adviser Tells The Hard Truth About Africa

by Lawrence K. Freeman

While the world's public attention is focussed on the United States' "war on terrorism," the worsening economic holocaust of the African nations is virtually ignored. At a Washington seminar organized by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies on Feb. 4, an important review was given. Prof. Ibrahim A. Gambari, former Nigerian Ambassador to the UN, who is currently the Undersecretary General and Special Adviser on Africa to the Secretary General of the United Nations, described "Some Current International Issues and The Challenges Facing Africa." Professor Gambari is an honest and knowledgeable participant in Africa affairs. The most glaring omission from his otherwise constructive presentation, is the failure to recognize, that the only solution to Africa's horrific living conditions lies in a complete, and dramatic overhaul of the presently bankrupt global financial-monetary system.

The Challenges of AIDS and Poverty

The most urgent challenge facing Africa is "poverty prevention and development," according to Gambari, who provides the following facts and figures. "Over 42% of Africa's population lives on less than \$1 a day, and 40% in inhuman poverty. Out of 700 million Africans, 120 million women are illiterate, and 150,000 die every year as a result of complications related to pregnancy. Even worse is the death [in the last decade] of 22 million children who die before they reach their first birthday." This misery is concentrated in Africa's Sub-Saharan region.

Professor Gambari discussed the effects of "debt overhang" on Africa's development. "The heavy debt burden of many countries is robbing them of their sovereignty, and impeding their pursuit of economic and social policies. The sad part is that debt overhang is hitting generations that had little or nothing [to do] with its contraction. As the UNDP poverty report observes, the 'truth of the matter is that demands of debt servicing are no longer a matter of money, but a source of the excruciating impoverishment of people's lives.' "

Removing the constraints of diplomatic language, Gambari said that Africa's unfair debt burden is killing its nations' populations, and snuffing out the lives of their young and innocent babies before they have the opportunity to experience life.

While not attacking globalization directly, Gambari diplomatically discussed its consequences for African economies—"the unequal benefit from the globalization process."



A desperate picture of Africa's economies and loss of national sovereignty was drawn in Washington by Nigeria's Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, an adviser to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Globalization, "driven by market and capital expansion, often pays little attention to governance of these markets and their repercussions on people," and does not guarantee "equity and human development." The results of globalization are that "Africa's share of world trade has declined from about 40% (1980s) to less than 2% at present."

"Africa," said Gambari, "also continues to be the least industrialized continent in the world. The factories are still being operated, generally, at less than 30% of installed capacity. Moreover Africa's share of private foreign investment continues to decline, from a peak of \$10 billion (1982) to about \$5 billion (1996)."

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the other diseases associated with it, is the other major challenge of Africa. Gambari told the audience that the pandemic has killed more than ten times more people than the total fatalities in armed conflicts on the continent. Since the disease was discovered, over 24 million people have died from AIDS and AIDS-related illnesses. According to one report released by UNAIDS in June 2000, there are about 25 million more people in Sub-Saharan Africa living with AIDS, and among those, nearly 4 million are children. The infection rate among people 25-49 years old exceeds 10% in 16 countries.

Sovereignty of Africa's Nations Challenged

Gambari reported: "There are about 17 ongoing conflicts in Africa at varying levels and degrees of intensity of violence. These conflicts have killed millions of people, destroyed homes of many more millions, and [destroyed] their economic and social infrastructures, such as factories, roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools. They have also created millions of internally displaced persons."

The UN official's summary leads one to take a hard look at the devastation of Sub-Saharan Africa. Wars, crushing debt, extreme poverty, and AIDS are literally devastating the continent, and most people—most Africans included—are unwilling to address this elementary truth.

One of the nations crushed by years of warfare and economic destitution is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.). Media coverage of the volcanic eruption in Goma in January, has brought some minimal attention and awareness of what life is like in the Congo. But as terrible as the hardships resulting from the flow of lava are, they are dwarfed by existing conditions that threaten the physical existence of tens of millions of Congolese.

Since 1998, the nation's sovereignty has been completely ignored by the West. Rebel armies backed by Rwanda and Uganda still control 50% of the Congo, looting its wealth: its precious minerals, its diamonds, gold, forests, and its people. The 1999 Lusaka Agreement between the Congolese and the Anglo-American-backed invaders has failed, because it refused to recognize the sovereignty of the government of the late President Laurent Kabila. Equating the armies of the Kabila government with the foreign invaders' rebel armies, Western governments justified their cynical acceptance of the destruction of the D.R.C., while calling for "all armies" to cease fighting. Now, the government of Joseph Kabila feels it has little choice but to accept the International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity prescriptions, while upwards of 80% of the Congo's 50 million people are considered endangered!

The same lack of respect for the sovereignty of African nations is seen in the Anglo-American support for John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army rebels against the government in Khartoum. The ongoing efforts by Zimbabwe's "made in London" Movement for a Democratic Change (MDC), led by British agent Morgan Tsvangirai against the elected Zimbabwe government of Robert Mugabe, is another example. Meanwhile, in oil-rich Nigeria, the nation is being torn apart by an escalation of violence fueled by a deteriorating economy. Since the celebrated democratic election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, and the invitation to the IMF to reside in Abuja, the capital, and take hands-on control of the economy, simple existence for the vast majority Nigeria's 120 million people has worsened.

Professor Gambari is correct when he says: "The continent's external debt is the major impediment of mobilizing resources that [are] needed to substantially reduce poverty. . . . There can be no genuine fight against poverty in Africa unless there is an international political solution to the debt." But we are well past the point where simple debt reduction or rescheduling will be sufficient to lift Africa from its current prostration. The devastation of all investment in the human population of the continent can only be reversed by a new international monetary system, a New Bretton Woods organized for physical-economic reconstruction.

Sharon's Two-Front War Against Peace

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is now waging war on two fronts. The first is his ruthless attacks against the Palestinian Authority and its President, Yasser Arafat, and the second is Israel's growing peace camp, which continues to awaken from its decade-long slumber.

The conflict with the Palestinians has escalated dramatically, and has taken on the character of a guerrilla war. Many have compared it to Lebanon ca. 1980s, but a more appropriate comparison is Algeria's anti-colonial struggle against the French of the 1960s. In Palestine, as in Algeria, an entire people are united against an occupier. And as occurred in France, there is growing realization among the occupying power's citizens, that to continue in the role of overlords is to destroy the very soul of your own nation.

The stage was set for the current escalation in violence when Sharon refused to reopen negotiations with the Palestinians, after a lull in the violence for three weeks in January. Furthermore, the Bush Administration, despite the lull, put no pressure on Sharon to implement the Tenet and Mitchell plans to resume peace negotiations. Although the Bush Administration made clear that it would not allow Sharon to kill Arafat, it nonetheless has allowed Israel to keep him under house arrest in Ramallah. Sharon simply continued his policy of assassinations until the desired effect was in hand: the renewal of Palestinian attacks.

Against the targeted assassinations launched by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Palestinian counterstrikes are more like a guerrilla war. In one week, Palestinian fighters managed to destroy one of Israel's most powerful and well-protected tank, the Merkava-3, with a land mine, using professional military tactics. The Palestinians also wiped out two IDF checkpoints in the West Bank, with their fighters being able to escape unharmed. Sharon's reaction was to order the IDF to launch "a new type of response": Chief of Staff Gen. Shaul Mofaz simply issued orders to step up the killing. Dozens of Palestinian policemen and civilians have been killed in operations, involving F-16 jets, helicopter gunships, tanks, and unprecedented numbers of ground forces. Mofaz is known for ordering his commanders "to bring back some dead bodies."

The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Feb. 20 reported that Sharon's policy is being shaped by his agreement with the Bush Administration's intention to go to war against Iraq. "Sharon thinks the United States will attack Iraq within the coming