

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

months and believes that Israel has a clear interest in a change in the regime in Baghdad. . . . In such a case, the geostrategic map will change to Israel's advantage. During his visit to Washington two weeks ago, the Prime Minister was told that the U.S. administration expects Israel to avoid escalation, lest it create obstacles to American plans. According to a government source in Jerusalem, 'The question is how to hold on for four to six months,' until that expected U.S. attack on Iraq."

On Feb. 20, the Director of Policy and Planning at the U.S. State Department, Richard Hass, arrived in Israel to meet with officials, including Director General of the Foreign Ministry Avi Gil, Minister Dan Meridor, National Security Adviser Uzi Dayan, and Sharon's foreign policy adviser, Danny Ayalon. He also met with Palestinian officials Abu Ala and Abu Mazen. It is doubtful that Hass' mission had anything to do with getting the Oslo peace process back on track, since Hass, as a member of the administration of George H.W. Bush in 1991, played an instrumental role in building the coalition that went to war against Iraq. Hass often seeks advice from old friends such as Henry Kissinger.

## Peace Movement Expands

While Sharon is being told to "hold on for four to six months," opposition to his policies is growing in Israel. On Feb. 16, Peace Now and the Peace Coalition brought 20,000 people to a demonstration in Tel Aviv, under the slogan, "Get Out of the Territories, Get Back to Ourselves." It was held one week after a coalition of 28 peace organizations held a demonstration of 10,000 in support of the Israeli reserve soldiers and officers who have signed a letter refusing to serve in the occupied territories.

Among the speakers was Palestinian representative in Jerusalem Sari Nusseibeh. Speaking in Hebrew, he told the demonstrators, "Is there anyone to talk to? There *is* someone to talk to. He is the President of the Palestinian people," Yasser Arafat. "Is the question, what to talk about? [That] is also clear, and there's an answer: We talk about two states for two peoples. . . . The path to peace is through the return of the refugees to the state of Palestine and the return of the settlers to the state of Israel."

Yossi Sarid, the head of the Meretz Party, declared, "We call on Sharon and Arafat: Enough blood!"

The demonstrators chanted, "Brother, brother, get out of the territories."

Although the demonstration did not officially support the soldiers' letter of refusal, several speakers did so, including former Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair, who told the crowd that he supported the reservists' right to refuse service. Roman Bronfman, a member of the Knesset (parliament), and leader of the Democratic Choice party, told the demonstrators that the soldiers were "the nation's conscience," and "I salute you."

The driving forces behind the peace movement are not

the political parties or the traditional peace camp, but the reserve soldiers and officers who have signed the letter of refusal. Paradoxically, many in the "official" peace camp have not given 100% support to their action, because of its "illegality"; nonetheless, the reservists' actions typify the deep moral outrage that is beginning to grow within the Israeli population. One Israeli veteran of the peace movement told this writer, that in many respects the population is ahead of the leaders of the peace camp, and is demanding more forceful leadership. The soldiers clearly represent the vanguard of this awakening.

Asaf Oron, a reserve staff sergeant and father of two, summed it up, in a statement he wrote upon signing the soldiers' letter: "We are putting our bodies on the line, in the attempt to prevent the next war. The most unnecessary, most idiotic, cruel, and immoral war in the history of Israel." These soldiers are prepared to suffer going to jail or worse.

The soldiers also provoked another initiative. On Feb. 18, the Council for Peace and Security, a group of 1,000 reserve generals, colonels, and Shin Bet and Mossad intelligence officials, announced their intention to mount a campaign for unilateral withdrawal from all of Gaza and much of the West Bank. They called for evacuating all the Jewish settlements from Gaza and some 50 settlements in the West Bank. The plan would be to establish a defense line along the 1967 armistice line, plus blocks of settlements. This would be followed by opening negotiations with the Palestinians for the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state.

The president of the Council, Maj. Gen. (reserve) Danny Rothschild, told *Ha'aretz*, "I was convinced by the contacts I have through back-channels with Palestinians in recent months. I've learned from them that the street has taken over the entire moderate camp, and the moderate positions they take behind closed doors change the minute there's fear that they will be exposed to the threatening street. I also took into account the demographic issue, and without any chance right now for negotiations, it requires withdrawal in order to preserve the Jewish character of the state." But, he said, the deciding factor for him was the soldiers' letter of refusal. "Four months ago, it was clear to me that the movement would grow, if we continued calling up reserves to accompany settlers to music lessons and to protect real estate that has nothing to do with ideology. . . . Shifting a company of soldiers from protecting a settlement to protecting the seam is the proper use of force. . . ."

Rothschild, who had been involved in Oslo peace talks, went on to say, "The negotiations for a permanent agreement have to be based on Oslo. But an army commander cannot be dogmatic. When conditions change on the ground, he must change his behavior. If Oslo is dead, it's because we killed it, and now we're shooting. But now there's no choice except what's best for us."

The campaign will be carried out under the slogan, "Saying *Shalom* to the Palestinians," which plays on the Hebrew

word *Shalom*, meaning “peace,” and also as it’s used as a greeting.

Sharon refused to meet with the group. They have met with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (Labor Party) and Labor Party leader Yossi Beilin, and were expected to meet Israeli President Moshe Katsav and even former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, both of Sharon’s Likud Party.

The initiative received a mixed response from the peace camp, and is opposed by the Palestinians who fear that a new defense line would become a de facto border, at the expense of Palestinian territory. Nonetheless, everyone agrees that the initiative is a clear vote of no-confidence against Ariel Sharon, by his own peers in the military and security establishment.

### The Economy Continues To Collapse

The other important contributing factor to the sea-change developing within the Israeli population, is the dramatic collapse of the Israeli economy. At 258,000, the number of unemployed has now reached the highest level since the founding of the state—10.2% of the population, and a 19.7% increase over the past 12 months. This sharp increase is hitting hard at the university-educated part of the workforce. Israel’s Gross Domestic Product has collapsed—a whopping 7.2% annualized rate of collapse in the fourth quarter, the worst since 1953. This followed a 4% annualized rate for the third quarter. Thus Israel, alongside Japan, are the only two advanced economies to have officially registered negative growth for 2001. Per-capita GDP was even worse, falling 9.5% for the fourth quarter and 7% for all of 2001.

The Israeli currency, the shekel, continues to remain very volatile, having gone through an 8% devaluation in the last two months. Hovering around 4.7 to the dollar, it is feared that it could collapse beyond 5 to the dollar.

Writing in the *Jerusalem Post* on Feb. 18, David Kimche, former director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and a member of the Council for Peace, warned: “The clock has begun ticking for Ariel Sharon,” and if he doesn’t change his policy, he will find himself out of power. “Like a giant spider caught in its own web, Sharon is entrapped in our own sick political system. Our economy is bleeding,” Kimche wrote, “yet billions of shekels that could have been used for productive purposes and for reducing the soaring unemployment are siphoned off to placate coalition partners. Within months, perhaps weeks, this country will be engulfed by some of the worst demonstrations we have yet seen, as more and more unemployed take to the streets. . . . Factories are shutting down? More people drop below the poverty line? Too bad, but settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip take precedence over ailing development towns.”

Kimche wrote that the increasing attacks “have shown once more [that] military might on its own cannot overcome terror gangs.” Kimche concluded that either Sharon changes his policies and begins to negotiate, or both his government, and Israel along with it, are going to face a catastrophe.

## The Truth Sticks: Sharon Is a Liar

by Dean Andromidas

Over four decades ago, then-Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion called Ariel Sharon, now Israel’s prime minister, “an incorrigible liar.” On Feb. 17, the Israeli Supreme Court seconded Ben-Gurion’s judgment, in another case dealing with Sharon’s infamous role in the 1982 Lebanon War, where he earned the title “The Butcher of Lebanon.” Although the case is entirely separate from the case now in the Belgian courts accusing Sharon of direct responsibility for the massacre of Palestinians at the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps, it nonetheless represents another failure of Sharon to gain some form of “legal” legitimacy for the lies he has continued to peddle about his role in that war.

The case involves a libel suit that Sharon had filed against journalist Uzi Benziman, who wrote in the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz*, in 1991, that Sharon had lied to then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin. This was in 1982, when Sharon told the Israeli cabinet that his proposed Lebanon invasion would penetrate no more than 40 kilometers, to secure Israel’s borders from cross-border attacks by Palestinian fighters. He told the Israeli public and the United States the same thing. When the Israeli Army did not stop until it had encircled Beirut, Sharon asserted that this was only a response to an unfolding situation, and not preplanned.

Nonetheless, it became widely accepted that Sharon did in fact lie to Begin and everyone else about his real intention, which was to kill Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, and establish an Israeli puppet government in Beirut, led by the Christian Phalange. These are the same Phalangists Sharon is accused of ordering into the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps to solve the “Palestinian refugee problem,” through a bloody massacre which killed 1,700 Palestinians.

Benziman demonstrated in his article that Sharon was not to be trusted. “Menachem Begin knows very well that Sharon deceived him,” he wrote. But this lie about the Lebanon War was just one of several Benziman wrote about. After the Supreme Court’s decision, Benziman was quoted by *Ha’aretz* as saying, “I wrote this sentence 11 years ago, on a subject that was entirely different than the Lebanon War—it was about a different lie of Sharon’s, in which he said that Begin had told him that Jordan was the Palestinian state. Begin, who at the time was in seclusion in his home after he had resigned the premiership, suddenly issued an angry announcement,