



## Let's Question Written History-Elizabeth Ohene

by Dr. E. Obiri Addo

African historians and academics have been challenged to take writing and re-writing about Africa seriously because what they write today will be the "history of tomorrow."

Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, a former Minister of State of Ghana and veteran journalist offered this challenge in a keynote address at the Second Biennial Conference of the African Association of Africa (ASAA) at the University of Ghana, Legon, on October 12-14, 2017.

She opined that history is a set of "sacred facts" on which many people agree at specific



Keynote Speaker Ms. Elizabeth Ohene

time and place. But these facts should be subject to questioning by another generation. "History belongs to the victors; the winner writes the history books, but the victor-written history needs to be consistently questioned," she stated. She also cautioned that the distortion of history occurs when we don't take enough interest in current affairs, adding, "when we don't take adequate interest in what is happening around us now we will be teaching distorted history in the future." Ms. Ohene observed that if Africa is unfairly portrayed in the media today it is mainly

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## Ghanaians in New York City abhor funerals - survey says

by Kofi Ayim

Most Ghanaians in New York are not enthused about the importation and practice of traditional funeral rites from Ghana to New York City. A survey conducted by Amansan Radio of New York, after elaborate panel discussions on the theme "Should Ghanaians Observe Strict Traditional Funeral Rites Abroad?" on the program *Yen Mre Nie* (This Is Our Time), shows that 70% of females between 18 and 40 years of age opined that the practice should be abol-

ished, while 65% of their male counterparts toed the same line. Of those between the ages of 18 and 40, 75% identified themselves as Christians and/or regular churchgoers, 20% Muslims, and 5% non-denominational. On the flip side, 44% of both sexes between the ages of 40 and 70 believe the tradition should be allowed to continue, and 40% out of this category think the practice should be limited to Ghanaians living abroad, rather than importing funerals from Ghana. However, 16% of all surveyed would rather abol-

ish funerals in their entirety, citing financial and time constraints.

### Analysis

Poll analysts contend that those between the ages of 40 and 70 are more likely to be 1st generation Ghanaians who migrated to the U.S. at a ripe and mature age and with deep attachment to their culture; those 18-40 years are either 2nd-generation Ghanaians born in the U.S. or were sponsored to come to the U.S. by relatives with a modicum of culture and a mega

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A mourner disguised as centuries-old traditional executioner at a recent funeral at Koforidua Afidwase, Ghana

EDITORIAL

Indiscipline, the bane of a nation's development

On Saturday, October 7, 2017 a gas explosion hit a part of Accra and claimed seven lives. Three died immediately while four died on admission in hospital. Many others are still in hospital receiving treatment from burns and other related injuries.

One thing most noticeable in Ghana's capital and most urban towns are gasoline stations and liquefied natural gas (Lng) depots.

On a stretch of one mile in Accra as many as six such installations can be found. They are sited indiscriminately, an indication of a breakdown in discipline as well as institutional failure. Town planning and environmental laws are all flouted with impunity.

The former minister of Environment Mahama Ayariga in an interview stated that efforts to regulate the siting of gasoline stations were thwarted by big men in government. It was an admission that those in authority are themselves part of the problem making any solutions hard to attain. This happens in all areas of endeavor and the repercussions are vast and heinous.

Amandla investigated the case of a gasoline station sited between two dwelling houses and a food processing factory that went nowhere. Not even the representations to the sector minister and the Environmental Protections Agency were heeded.

A similar explosion at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle a couple of years ago that resulted in the death of more than 200 people obviously did not register as something to learn from. Once bitten, twice shy, they say. We mourn with the families who lost loved ones and hope measures and regulations available would be observed and measures taken this time would either prevent or minimize those occurrences. We appreciate the government's efforts at rooting out corruption and indiscipline at all levels and hope Ghanaians would rally behind it. As the president used to say in his campaigns, Amandla believes "Ghana will work again."

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Let's Question Written History—Elizabeth Ohene

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because African people do not tell their own stories. "The ways in which we define ourselves make it cumbersome for us to sell ourselves," she explained. She also lamented that the African story has been left to be told by outsiders, hence the massive distortion of history the continent continues to experience.

what others think? he asked. Nana Nketsia lamented that contemporary African people seem to have "an Euro-African studies of Africa, rather than African studies of Africa." He maintained that culture should be the bedrock of history, for it is a "protective skin for survival." He encouraged African historians in particular and academics in general to put the experi-

Vice-President of ASAA highlighted the conference theme, "African Studies and Global Politics." She explained that Africa seems to be silent in the discussion of Global politics. "Knowledge about ourselves is silent and buried in the global knowledge-production industry. If we don't know how the great African empires such as the Oyo, Zulu, Asante,

sentations covered topics including beneficiaries of global restricting, migrations within Africa, gender and development, dependency and conditionality, and the role of African Studies in African renewal. Conference participants and plenary speakers included Professor Takiywa Manu, Director of the Social Development Policy Division at the United



From Left to right, front: Prof. Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Prof. Samuel Agyei-Mensah, Nana Kobina Nketsia V, Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, and Prof. Takiywa Manu

Addressing the Conference as a Special Guest of Honor, Nana Kobina Nketsia V, Omanhen of Essikado Traditional Area, observed that every historical discussion is mere entertainment if it doesn't promote survival, self-reliance, and human growth. "Whose experience do you bring to the table - your own mind or

ences of their ancestors at the forefront of their conversations, rather than those of the colonizers. "Knowledge should be centered in African realities," he concluded. In her Welcome Address, Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo, former Director of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, and

Dahomey, and others managed themselves, how can we manage our contemporary politics?" she queried. Professor Ampofo reported that 260 academics from all over the world registered for the conference; this included 142 from the African continent. There were 27 Sessions and 63 panel presentations. Pre-

Nations Economic Forum for Africa; Professor Jean Allman, Director of the Center for the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis, and Professor Seth N. Asumah, State University of New York Distinguished Teaching Professor.

photo credit: Dr. E. Obiri Addo

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## Ghanaians in New York City abhor funerals - survey says

*continued from front page*

dose of religion in their veins. “Those that proposes the abolishment of the tradition are neither here nor there,” said one analyst not involved in the survey.

Back home in Ghana, funeral ends at the close of the day, or dusk at the latest. As much as there is nothing attractive about death, Ghanaians living

abroad are confronted with the acute challenges of a hitherto sacred funeral observance that tend to make it even less “attractive” to participate. In New York City and elsewhere outside Ghana, to maximize attendance, funerals are held late at night when most in the community are free from daytime work and chores, and into the wee hours of dawn. This involves

nighttime driving, with all the clear and imminent dangers that poses for most drivers especially during inclement weather. For this and other reasons, funeral attendance is compromised for the elderly. The second and third generation of Ghanaians are by default not interested in the cultural aspects of funeral. They see no motivation to attend a funeral at night – un-

less the decedent is closely related or they are specifically requested to – when American culture depicts it otherwise. Further, because funeral protocol and processes are conducted in a traditional Ghanaian language which most do not speak or understand, it makes no sense to the average Ghanaian youth to attend a funeral where there is no un-

derstanding, culturally speaking, of the dynamic processes. The question of “Should Ghanaians Observe Strict Traditional Funeral Rites Abroad?” will be irrelevant in the very near future when second generation Ghanaians and beyond become senior citizens in their communities, according to one expert. Meanwhile the debate continues unabated.

## Ghana is on the move and the world has noticed

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Even as the government of Nana Akufo-Addo is engaged in introducing new interventionist programs existing ones that were left in abeyance by the previous administration are being revived and revamped. The National Health Insurance Scheme is being restored to its full glory. The school feeding program, free maternal care, and many other programs that were either truncated or mismanaged are all being revamped and restored. In addition, allowances for students of nursing and teachers in training that were all withdrawn have been restored and those students who could not be placed in jobs are now getting jobs.

What is probably getting the world’s attention is Ghana’s efforts at joining the cyber revolution. Digitization is the

vogue in Ghana now: the national identification program is finally taking off on November 7 this year. Obtaining a driver’s license, registering a company, clearing goods from the ports and harbors, as well as obtaining a passport, among a host of services have all been consigned to the digital world and sooner than Ghanaians think, they can sit in the comfort of their homes and obtain all or most of the services mentioned.

Galamsey or illegal mining is now being phased out as almost all of them have been stopped. A joint military and police task force is working hard to chase out the miscreants. Already, rivers, forests and farmlands that were devastated are being gradually reclaimed.

The questions on the lips of many Ghanaians and the opposition is where the money for all the programs are com-

ing from. President Akufo-Addo has been full of praises and gratitude for his economic team led by Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia. He credits in particular Minister of Finance Ken Ofori Atta for the ‘magical’ manner in which he finds money for the programs. To the credit of the ruling government the collection of taxes and levies at all government agencies has increased, may be not exponentially, but well enough to make a difference in the earnings of government. The president made it clear that he would not hesitate to use earnings from oil and other resources to fund his programs

In a visit to China led by the vice president, Ghana was able to obtain a MOU for more than US\$20 billion using five percent of the nation’s bauxite deposit as a

leverage. The opposition screams it is a loan but the vice president explains it is another way of raising funds for the country’s needed developmental efforts without the yoke of interest rates and other conditionalities. Alhaji Bawumia insists that there is nothing untoward in leveraging some of the nation’s vast natural resources for money for development and that is what he did. Much of that money would go into the development of the country’s broken down railways that is already attracting other foreign investors. The president has not overlooked the danger posed by corruption that in the past has wreaked so much havoc on the West African nation’s integrity. As legislation for a special prosecutor is ongoing at the Parliament, the president has indicated that anyone with evidence of wrongdoing or

corruption by any member of his administration must report to the appropriate authorities for action to be taken against such officials. When some government officials were accused of taking bribes a full investigation was launched and whistleblowers backed out saying they did not have any evidence. It was an eye opener.

On September 21, 2017, Ghana’s president said that it may not be necessary for Ghanaians to travel out of their country to seek greener pastures [sic] because their country does not lack. Critics may frown on that declaration as being too preemptive but what little has been shown to Ghanaians by the man who authored that statement shows faith is not lost in Ghana after all.

*The writer is the editor-in-chief of Amandla*

## Sudan: Sanctions Lifted, Now Development Is Imperative

*continued from page 10*

The Port of Sudan is officially on China’s Maritime Silk Road, and the Ports of Mombasa, Djibouti, and Dar es Salaam are there implicitly.

Sudan is geographically positioned to become the nexus point for the East-West and North South trans-Africa rail-lines, possibly crossing in the city of Sennar on the Blue Nile. The Sudanese government has already prepared an ambitious multi-phase plan to connect all parts of its territory with its neighbors by rail. China has been a consis-

tent economic partner of Sudan and is a likely candidate to collaborate on these rail projects.

Sudan is also in urgent need of more electricity to power its economy. The erection of the Merowe Dam, with a capacity of 1.2 gigawatts, was a significant accomplishment in 2009-2010, and there have been smaller hydropower projects in the eastern portion of the country. However, Sudan, like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, is suffering from a huge deficit in electrical power that is now holding back, and will continue to retard economic growth until it

is rectified. Sub-Saharan Africa needs over 1,000 gigawatts of power to begin to obtain the level of modern Afro-industrial societies

**Sudan Is Open for Business** Speaking in Washington, D.C. on October 16, at a forum sponsored by the Corporate Council of Africa, Sudanese Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, Dr. Mohamed Othman Al-Rikabii outlined the areas of potential investments in Sudan’s resources, including; water, gold, oil, mining, livestock, gas, and tourism. He emphasized the enormous potential

for investment in agriculture in Sudan, with presently only 20% of its sixty million hectares of fertile land under cultivation.

For the first time in decades, Sudan has the opportunity to design policies that focus on the development of the nation. Productive employment must be created to provide hope for a better future for the Sudanese people, especially its youth, who are living in poverty. This will require immediate construction—shovels in the ground—of vitally needed infrastructure. China, in the “Spirit of the New Silk Road,” will undoubtedly be a

willing partner to Sudan’s future economic growth. Whether the U.S., under President Trump, will be wise enough to contribute to Sudan’s development after twenty years of failed sanctions, remains to be seen. As for the government of Sudan, there is no time to waste, and no acceptable delays. Economic development is the agenda.

*The writer is a Political - Economic Analyst For Africa*

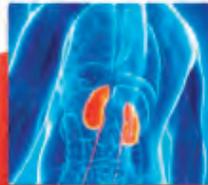


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## AFRICA

## US ends 20 years of sanctions on Sudan

bAnthony Morland

The United States has lifted decades-old economic sanctions against Sudan even though it still considers the country a state sponsor of terrorism and despite the fact Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir still faces arrest on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court.

In July, Washington said a decision on whether to do away with the sanctions, which Barack Obama had suspended shortly before leaving the White House, would be delayed for three months.

Khartoum's recent move to end its support for North Korea seems to have tipped the balance in its favour and Donald Trump's administration said there was now enough evidence of progress to justify the move.

The sanctions were imposed in 1997 when then-president Bill Clinton issued an executive order citing Sudan's "continued support for international terrorism, ongoing efforts to destabilise neighbouring governments, and the prevalence of human rights violations."

Including a comprehensive trade embargo and blocking the assets of Sudan's government, they were expanded in 2006 to target individuals involved in the conflict in Darfur. The ICC's charges against Bashir relate to acts, including murder, rape, and torture, committed by Sudanese troops in Darfur between 2003 and 2008.

Obama stipulated that the sanctions would only be ended if Sudan made progress in five areas: co-operation on counter-terrorism; resolution of the conflicts in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur; improving access to humanitarian aid; ending support to armed opposition groups in South Sudan; and addressing the threat of the Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army.

On Wednesday, Sudan's State



U.S. President Donald Trump

Minister for Foreign Affairs Hamed Momtaz told the Reuters news agency that his country had "fulfilled all the necessary conditions relating to the roadmap and the US administration is a witness to that and therefore we expect the sanctions to be lifted."

Khartoum had already won significant international support for this claim, with Israel and Saudi Arabia busy lobbying on its behalf. And back in July, the UN Country Team in Sudan, which includes all United Nations development and humanitarian agencies working there, called for Washington to take a "positive decision" on the sanctions, saying there had been a "marked improvement in humanitarian access over the past six months" in areas from where aid agencies had previously been restricted.

Some key figures in the UN, however, paint a less rosy picture. Civilians in Darfur still face "violence and criminality", the UN's then-head of peacekeeping told the Security Council in January. Hervé Ladsous pointed in particular to the "widespread proliferation of weapons and the inadequacy of law and justice institutions" as well as inter-communal violence over land, water, and other resources.

Human rights activists have warned that lifting the sanctions will embolden Sudan and other states to continue committing atrocities.

On Thursday, Human Rights Watch Senior Researcher Jehanne Henry tweeted: "recent attacks on Darfur IDPs [Inter

nally Displaced Persons] and new political arrests. Has Sudan made 'progress' on human rights? @potus"

#### Reaching out to "emerging donors"

Henry's tweet linked to a May position statement by HRW that criticised Obama's 11th-hour suspension of sanctions for its failure to "identify clear benchmarks for progress or explicitly require improvements to the human rights situation before making the suspension permanent."

Twenty years after the sanctions were first imposed on Sudan, "the human rights situation has not improved," according to HRW.

"Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and aligned forces, notably the newly created Rapid Support Forces, have continued to attack civilians in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile with utter impunity. National security agents engage in entrenched patterns of repression, targeting civil society leaders, human rights activists, and students for harassment, arbitrary detentions, and torture; restricting civil society organisations and independent media; and using lethal force to disperse protesters, killing hundreds in broad daylight," the May statement said. And as researcher Jerome Tubiana pointed out in an opinion piece for IRIN in August, accurately measuring progress in human rights in theatres of conflict is almost impossible. "Arguably, less is now known about what's happening in



Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir

Darfur than at any time since 2004, because access for international observers, aid workers, researchers, and

journalists is constantly squeezed and is more difficult than ever. Those who do manage to get in are so afraid of being kicked out that they often prefer, consciously or not, to under-report, not to report, or even to deny the extent of the violence," Tubiana wrote.

He also noted that "the wars in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile have not ended, and humanitarian access is far from what it was in Darfur in 2004, when the conflict there was at its peak. "The international narrative that the wars in Sudan are now 'low-intensity conflicts', with sufficient security on the ground to implement early recovery and development programmes, is a dangerous fiction."

IRIN

#### Editor's take – It's not about human rights

The lifting of US sanctions against Sudan 20 years after they were imposed marks a long-fought victory for Khartoum, in particular al-Bashir and his inner circle. A trade embargo and a freeze on Sudanese government assets essentially isolated Sudan from the global financial system and prevented any US citizen or entity doing business with it. By contributing to the freefall of Sudan's economy, the sanctions made it harder for al-Bashir to maintain his grip on the country. Yet nei

ther the sanctions, nor an ICC indictment for genocide and crimes against humanity made the Sudanese president a pariah among his African peers; indeed several African countries have blithely ignored their Rome Statue obligation to arrest al-Bashir during his visits to their territory.

When he imposed the sanctions in 1997, Bill Clinton cited Sudan's rampant violations of human rights as the main justification. But there is little evidence of a major improvement in the country's human rights record, even though this is one of five areas of progress cited by Washington in justifying the lifting of the sanctions. In its latest report on human rights across the world, the US State Department cited "aerial bombardments of civilian areas by military forces and attacks on civilians by government and other armed groups in conflict zones" as well as abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and rape, all committed with impunity by intelligence agents. Reducing internal wars was another US benchmark, but armed conflict continues to simmer in the regions of Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, where humanitarian access remains very restricted. It seems the US decision to lift sanctions is more closely linked to Khartoum's role in global counter-terrorism and its recent cutting of ties with Pyongyang.

## Haiti Looks To Benin For Guidance On Voodoo Crimes

Three senators from Haiti pause in reflection in front of a statue of their country's independence hero Toussaint Louverture in Allada, southern Benin, where he had his roots.

The West African and Caribbean countries, separated by thousands of kilometres (miles) and ocean, share the same history but also the same religion — voodoo.

Jean Renel Senatus, Jean-Marie Junior Salomon and Ronald Lareche came to Benin late last month on a research trip as part of Haiti's reforms of its 19th-century penal code.

Part of the process is taking advice from countries where their ancestors lived before they were shipped abroad as slaves.

Historically and culturally, "Haiti and Benin are two sides of the same coin," Senatus, a lawyer and president of Haiti's Senate justice commission, told AFP.

"We want to adapt these texts to modern-day life and we're here to see how Benin handles irrational phenomena in law," he said after placing flowers on Louverture's statue.

Benin — giant Nigeria's tiny western neighbour — is one



Voodoo Priest in action

of the cradles of voodoo, where it is an official religion and has millions of followers. The cult of the invisible and natural spirits travelled across the Atlantic Ocean from the 18th century, as millions of West Africans were transported to the New World as slaves.

### 'Zombification'

The very word "voodoo" typically conjures up a raft of cliches, not least dolls covered in pins. But certain phenomena are a concern for politicians and has prompted them to wonder: how should a country legislate for crimes linked to the religion?

With zombification, for example, Haitian voodoo

priests are said to administer a powder to the victim giving the appearance of clinical death. The supposed deceased — exhumed with the help of an undertaker — can then be exploited in its weakened, semi-conscious state. Salomon, the vice-president of Haiti's Senate, said zombification "is the fact of being declared dead and openly buried and then 'brought back to life'." "What's different is that the person 'brought back' then works like a slave." In working class areas and remote communities in Haiti where there is no confidence in local justice, zombification is a way of settling scores with enemies. In Benin, the same method ex-

ists but for a very different purpose.

"It is used by those initiated in the secret ways of the temples to strengthen their power but they keep an antidote to hand," said Honorat Aguessy, a Beninese sociologist.

In Benin, "voodoo is for good," he added. Some people in Benin still use charms to get rid of a rival — but the weapon stays largely hidden and for lack of evidence, the country has not legislated against occult practices.

Traditional justice, however, still plays a big role in society through the use of traditional rulers.

### Voodoo chief

In Allada, the three senators

met the traditional monarch, Kpodegbe Djigla. "He told us that he is asked to judge certain cases," said Senatus.

Traditional rulers resolve many land disputes because they know local history. Villages have a council of sages comprising elders, community leaders and a voodoo chief. "It often deals with complaints linked to custom, for example if a widow who is not supposed to leave her house at a certain time does it anyway," said lawyer Sandrine Aholou.

In her work, Aholou sees a mix of the two legal systems: "On the one hand, the civilian justice system accepts traditional justice on the other.

"Tradition influences modern law."

Most of the time, decisions taken by the elders are respected, to the astonishment of the Haitian senators.

For Salomon, it's a question of culture. "Here, people respect tradition," he said.

"In our country, because of the influence of modern life and proximity to the United States, we've abandoned it."

*Haitian Times*

## Lawmaker advocates solutions to Africa's constitutional dilemma

Nigeria's Deputy President of the Senate — the country's upper legislative chamber, Dr. Ike Ekweremadu, has been speaking on needed constitutional reforms in Nigeria and other countries in Africa.

Ekweremadu spoke while delivering a lecture entitled: 'Constitutionalism and the Challenges of Leadership in Africa: An Evaluation of Tested Models' in New York at the 10th anniversary lecture of Center for Media and Peace Initiatives, a New York-based international non-profit media and policy think tank.

Ekweremadu reviewed the long journey of constitutional democracy in Africa and noted the distortions emanating from copying western

models that did not fit African peculiarities.

The Senator who chaired the review of 1999 Nigerian constitution advocated a single-term presidency of five or six years for Nigeria and other African countries to deepen democracy and good governance. "A more modest proposal seeks not the abandonment of the presidential system per se but the re-designing of term limits for political chief executives", said the lawmaker.

"This is in order to reduce the acrimonious conflict, divisiveness and instability arising from partisan or factional competition for executive offices in the federation.

"I support the proposals to transform the current tenure of two four-year terms into a

single term of five or six years.

"Among other advertised benefits, single terms would avoid the distractions, manipulations and divisiveness of re-election campaigns while facilitating a more rapid circulation or rotation of power among the various groups".

Senator Ekweremadu delivers his lecture while Senator Godwill Akapbio, the Minority Leaders of Nigerian Senate looks on

According to him, a single term of four years is also less costly as it will reduce the cost of conducting general elections every four years.

Ekweremadu urged Nigeria and other African countries to learn from the failures and successes of older democracies, particularly, the Latin

American democracies.

He noted that many of the Latin Americans transitioned from autocratic regimes to democracies, discovering that the politics of succession, including incumbents' penchant for self-perpetuation, was overheating the system.

As a solution, they adopted the single term presidency until such a time their respective democracies matured and stabilised, he said.

"It is for this reason that the Senate Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution, which I chair, felt, in 2014, that a single term would serve the ends of our current democracy.

"Unfortunately, the recommendation failed because ethnic suspicions and parochial interests prevented reason-

able and good faith evaluation of our worthy proposal," he said. Ekweremadu also suggested a rotational presidency among the ethnic groups or geographical zones, saying it might prove reassuring to ethnic groups and promote loyalty to the nation.

According to him, rotational presidency will reassure every constituent part that power will come their way at a given interval. "Therefore, it may well be time to re-visit the idea of rotational presidency that was first muted in Nigeria by late military Head of State Sani Abacha."

*continued on page 17*

## FEATURE

## Ghana is on the move and the world has noticed

by Kwabena Opong

The speech delivered at the United Nations by Ghana's President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo was received in awe by no less a leader than U.S. President Donald Trump, among others. A picture depicting Mr. Trump and his aides trying to locate Ghana on the world map made the rounds on WhatsApp and the social media. Many a leader has made an impression on the platform provided by the world body once every year in September. Some merely craft their speeches to impress. Others on the other hand come to profess and proselytize their vision and message and that is what Nana Akufo-Addo did this year at the United Nations General Assembly meeting. The 72-year old lawyer and statesman made history this year, and as he recalled, he spoke on the birthday of his country's first president Kwame Nkrumah, exactly 60 years earlier. 1957 was the year Ghana became independent of the United Kingdom and the new country's elated president went to New York on that auspicious day to present the case for Africa and the need for then colonial

powers to relieve the continent of their exploitative hold on it. He set off a maelstrom of liberation struggle all over the continent and within a decade quite a number of European colonies in Africa had attained their independence. But that was then and this is now, however, the message this year from Ghana's leader was not much different: economic freedom and self-reliance.

Nana Addo did not merely craft his speech to impress. He came to New York already walking the talk. He had put his country on the path of self-reliance eschewing aid from the rich nations of the world, a promise he made to his people on the day he was inaugurated as the fifth president of the 4th Republic. Earlier in New York, he had declared at the Columbia University that "Africa can and must build a strong continent that is self-sufficient to sustain and wean itself off benevolent and foreign aid ..." That also became the crux of his UN speech later.

Election promises and manifestoes are, in the main, aimed at winning elections. Only a few parties are able to implement them not because in most cases they had not

planned for those promises but because they are too far-fetched. Nana Addo declared in his first state of the nation address that he was in a hurry and Ghanaians are living witnesses to a man who in spite of the state of the economy he inherited has achieved in ten months what others could not do in 27 years.

When in 2007, then Candidate Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo promised to make free Senior High School, a barrage of doubters emerged not only from the opposition but from so-called think tanks. The think tanks argued with academic fervor and feigned expertise in education funding and concluded it was not an achievable objective. The opposition would resort to insults and character assassination only because Nana Addo had dared suggest the introduction of free universal Senior High School education. President John Mahama in 2013 introduced what he called Progressively Free Education which only relieved parents of 38 GHS (thirty eight Ghana Cedis). The NPP version of free universal secondary education is absolutely free, including school uniforms and other related items. Experts claim the government of Nana Akufo-

Addo has put 20,000 GHC (US\$4,000) in the pockets of Ghanaian parents.

Ghanaians are indeed in awe of the new government. Even as high school students were registering for the academic year under the new education policy, the president launched another important initiative. Concerned with the urban drift among the youths in the country, the NPP administration Nana Addo decided in its manifesto to set up industries in the hinterland.

What the party called One District One Factory (ODOF) was launched at Ekumfi Otuam, the hometown of late President John Atta Mills, also in September. So far a number of similar projects have been planned to take off in all districts in the country. Another initiative to encourage rural development and curtail urban drift comes in the form of one million dollars per constituency per year. This is in addition to the common fund disbursed to district assemblies and members of parliament for developmental purposes. The NPP aims at the rapid industrialization of the country and the availability of funds in the hinterland together with the ODOF program can ignite the fervor. The interest expressed in the

programs by foreign investors and incentives put in place for them provide hope and success for the government's efforts. Dumsor or unreliable power supply is now a thing of the past and very soon Ghana would be among the nations who produce more energy than it needs. The price of fuel is high but the government is working to bring it down.

The president declared among other things that his government was going to embark on a massive agricultural revolution and early in his administration launched the "Planting for Food and Jobs" program aimed at providing employment for rural youths. New high yielding seeds for cocoa have also been introduced to farmers and in a short time Ghanaian cocoa farmers would produce more cocoa than is done now. A massive campaign has also been launched to process cocoa for export, while local consumption of cocoa has been stepped up. Meanwhile, other markets for cocoa are being sought and China promises to be the next destination for Ghana cocoa.

*continued on page 3*

## WHO rescinds Mugabe appointment as 'goodwill ambassador'

The World Health Organization walked back on its move to make Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe a "goodwill ambassador." He has been condemned for rights violations and allowing the health care system to deteriorate.

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Sunday that it had revoked the appointment of 93-year-old President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe as the organizations "goodwill ambassador."

"I have listened carefully to all who have expressed their concerns, and heard the different issues that they have raised," said WHO Director-



President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe

General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the first African to hold his post.

Read more: WHO director general: political will needed to transform Africa's health system

The WHO came under fire immediately after it named Mugabe a "goodwill ambassador" on Friday.

Zimbabwe's once prosperous economy has been devastated under Mugabe's 37-year rule. Like many public services, the health system has collapsed, with hospitals lacking basic medical supplies and medicines; nurses and doctors often go unpaid. Critics pointed to Mugabe's need to seek medical assis-

tance abroad as a testament to Zimbabwe's crumbling health system.

More than two dozen medical organizations issued a statement saying they were "shocked and deeply concerned to hear of this appointment, given President Mugabe's long track record of human rights violations and undermining the dignity of human beings."

The groups said they raised the issue with the WHO chief but their concerns were initially ignored, while the United States called the decision "disappointing."

*dw.com*



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## Ghana: Parliament probes visa applicants maltreatment

The Speaker of Parliament, Prof Mike Oquaye has charged the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament to thoroughly investigate reports of inhumane treatment meted out to Ghanaians who go to the foreign embassies to apply for visas.

The order from the Speaker follows a statement on the floor of parliament on Wednesday by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) Member of Parliament for North Tongu in the Volta Region, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa to draw attention of parliament to the inhumane treatment being meted out to Ghanaian visa applicants by the various embassies in the country. The North Tongu MP who is also the ranking member on Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament in a statement on the floor said from numerous complaints of maltreatment by embassy staff, he personally undertook 'underground'



investigations and was shocked to see how Ghanaian visa applicants were treated at the various embassies. "Mr Speaker, you find fellow Ghanaians standing in the open spaces, some left to wait at the shoulders of the streets and roundabouts with no one caring about the associated risks posed by motorists while others are left at the mercy of the weather and in

the scorching sun," he said stressing that apart from this maltreatment, visa applicants are also subjected to verbal abuse. He also expressed concern about the exorbitant visa application fees charged by these embassies. "Mr speaker, a new trend is also emerging where some embassies apart from their standard visa processing fees, demand all kinds of extra fees

and charges under various guises of express fees, early appointment fees, email fees, text message fees and so on," he said adding that the sad reality is that embassies who charge all these extra fees do not keep to their side of the bargain while vulnerable visa applicants are made to pay for the inefficiency and unreliability of the embassies. "Mr Speaker, the time has come for all of us to accept

that visa applicants from every nation on this planet have rights. Visa applicants deserve respect from the embassies," he asserted.

The Minority Leader, Haruna Iddrisu said it is not only ordinary citizens who suffer these ordeals at the hands of embassy staff stressing that Members of Parliament and sometimes government officials go through such ordeals which are unacceptable. He said the embassies must know that there are international conventions which compel foreign embassies to treat visa applicants with dignity and respect. Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament, Frank Annon-Dompreh gave the assurance that the committee would do a thorough investigation into the matter and bring its findings to the plenary for action to be taken by parliament.

## Up to 100 Million Girls Vulnerable to Child Marriage

By Tharanga Yakupitiyage

Over 20,000 girls are married before the age of 18 every day around the world as countries continue to lack legal protections, according to a new study.

Concerned over the lack of progress, Save the Children and the World Bank teamed up to research child marriage laws around the world and found a dismal picture.

Globally, even in countries that restrict the practice, almost 8 million girls are married illegally under the age of 18 each year, making up 60 percent of child marriages.

“It is such a critical issue for young girls around the world...but also for her future family and health of her children later as well,” President and CEO of Save the Children Carolyn Miles told IPS. Marriage often has irreversible impacts on child brides who are at greater risk of poor health outcomes, living in poverty, and dropping out of school. In fact, loss of access to education appears to be both a cause and conse-

quence of child marriage.

Around the world, 32 million primary school and 29 million lower-secondary school-aged girls are out of school. Such girls are more likely to be married as children, Miles noted. “For girls, being in school is a protective mechanism really,” she said. Girls who marry also often forced to leave school, and many find it difficult to return after marriage due to social pressure, domestic responsibilities, and even government policies.

In Tanzania, schools are allowed to expel or exclude students who are married or become pregnant. By undermining their basic rights to education, girls’ life opportunities become limited, creating a domino effect that impacts the well-being of societies at large.

Some nations have made progress towards ending child marriage, including Mexico, Nepal, and Zimbabwe, all of which either raised the minimum age for marriage or eliminated exceptions to the practice.

However, many countries still allow girls to be married before 18 with parental or judicial consent while others still retain a lower legal age for marriage. Bangladesh, for example, recently passed a law to allow girls below 18 to be married in “special cases,” setting back progress towards ending child marriage.

While stories of child marriage are commonly associated with the Global South, countries like the United States are also guilty of the practice. Across all 50 states, marriage before the age of 18 has remained legal as some lack any minimum marital age while others allow exceptions such as parental and judicial consent. Most recently, New Hampshire rejected a bill to increase the age of marriage from 13 to 18 while New Jersey vetoed a ban on marriage under the age of 18. When considering parental and judicial exceptions, Save the Children and the World Bank found that close to 100 million girls around the world are not legally protected against child marriage.

The organizations also found that two-thirds of all child marriages take place even in countries where the practice is banned, indicating a lack of enforcement of marriage laws. Bangladesh, despite having set a minimum age of 18, has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world with 65 percent of girls married before the age of 18. West and Central Africa sees 1.7 million illegal child marriages every year, making it one of the highest proportions globally. Legal reforms alone are therefore not enough to end the harmful practice, Miles said. “It’s about trying to change the local customs or belief that it’s okay for a girl to be married,” she told IPS. “Yes, we need laws and yes, we need laws that aren’t going to be circumvented, but we also need to change beliefs and these underlying issues,” Miles continued.

Among such laws is a legal age of 18 for marriage and the elimination of parental and judicial exceptions.

The report also highlighted the need for countries to

adopt clear interventions to delay marriage and to increase investment in the poorest and most marginalized girls in areas such as safe, accessible, affordable, and quality education.

Efforts are also needed to address discrimination and social norms that prevent girls from attending school and limit their future opportunities. “Investing in such interventions, documenting their impacts, and implementing a broad range of gender transformative policies will all be key to ensuring a better future both for girls and countries as a whole,” the report concludes. The globally adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognizes the harmful practice and includes a target to eliminate child marriage by 2030.

The report was launched ahead of an African-led High Level Meeting on Ending Child Marriage where there are high hopes that it could be a turning point to move the continent away from the practice.

## Sudan: Sanctions Lifted, Now Development Is Imperative

by Lawrence Freeman

On October 12, the U.S. announced the long overdue, official removal of some sanctions on Sudan. Now, new and exciting potentials lie ahead for the future of Sudan and its people. This is not the time to delay; the government of Sudan should seize the moment to implement policies that will lead to the economic development of this vast nation, and the raising of the standard of living of its more than forty million citizens.

According to U.S. government representatives, President Trump’s executive decision does not terminate President’s Clinton’s E.O. 13067, issued on November 3, 1997, but it removes those sanctions that had enforced an embargo on commercial transactions with Sudan. Thus, now companies and individuals wishing to export, invest, and trade with Sudan

can conduct business using the international banking system without fear of being penalized. However, targeted sanctions remain, and there are licensing requirements for agricultural and medical exports. This milestone in U.S.-Sudan relations is, in large part, due to the relentless efforts by Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour, especially his leadership over the last sixteen months. Professor Ghandour, who was appointed to head Sudan’s foreign office in June 2015, has successfully changed the dynamics of a detrimental and hostile U.S. attitude against his nation. Nearly twenty years of sanctions have accomplished nothing except to cause greater suffering and hardship for the Sudanese people. Finally, this suffocating policy has ended, allowing Sudan the opportunity to move forward. However, the U.S. now maintains a peculiar and contradictory policy

towards Sudan: Lifting trade sanctions allows companies to conduct commercial activity in Sudan without penalty, but the U.S. cannot offer financial support to investors from any of its lending institutions, because Sudan remains on the U.S. State Department’s list of “states sponsoring terrorism” (SST). Under the administration’s new executive order, Sudan is removed from a short list of nations under “comprehensive sanctions”: North Korea, Syria, Iran, and Cuba, and is placed on a broader list of nations subject to “targeted sanctions.” The government of Sudan intends to seek redress of its wrongful inclusion on the SST list. Removal from this list would allow Sudan to seek relief from its onerous forty-plus billions of dollars of debt, and make it eligible to receive favorable treatment from U.S. lending facilities. Unfortunately, removing Sudan from the SST

list would require the approval of the U.S. Congress, which is still antagonistic towards Sudan. Shaping a Better Future with China’s Belt and Road Since Sudan’s liberation from colonialism, during which, the British Imperialists codified into law the artificial division between the so-called North and South,

Sudan has never realized its full economic potential. This lack of development has been at the core of Sudan’s difficulties. This can now change. The spirit of China’s 21st Century Silk Road has created a new dynamic on the African continent that Sudan is well positioned to harness. Sudan’s neighbors in East Africa are already participating in a density of construction of new rail lines going East to West that have the potential to transform Africa, becoming the eastern leg of the long-awaited East-West railroad that would link the

Atlantic to the Indian Oceans. Ethiopia has completed the first electrically driven railroad connecting the capital Addis Ababa to the Port of Djibouti, and has devised a strategy to connect to all its neighboring countries by rail. Kenya has completed the first phase of the standard-gauge railroad, from the Port of Mombasa to Kenya’s capital, Nairobi.

This the first phase of a plan to connect the nations of the Horn of Africa to those of the Great Lakes Region. Tanzania has begun the first two stages of Dar es Salaam-Isaka-Kagali/Keza-Musongati (DIKKM) rail project, a 1672-kilometer railroad connecting Kigali in Rwanda and Musongati in Burundi to Kenya’s Port of Dar Es Salaam. Most of these

*continued on page 3*

## OPINION

## Can Congo's new child-free army bring lasting change?

by Sandra Olsson

The Democratic Republic of Congo's military has been removed from the UN's 'list of shame' of armed groups that recruit and use child soldiers – only the second ever delisting after Chad in 2014.

It's a hugely positive step. The UN's annual Children and Armed Conflict report, released last week, is a key document in highlighting the militaries and armed groups that recruit and commit grave violations against children. This year, 56 state forces and armed groups from 14 countries were named.

However, the progress made by the Congolese armed forces, the FARDC, has been a long time coming, and serious concerns remain over sexual violence committed by its soldiers.

### History of abuse and recruitment

Officially formed in 2003, the current national army has for much of its existence been mired in conflicts with Congo's multiple militias. Violence has long scarred the country, as national and foreign armed groups vie for power and survival in the mineral-rich east.

These conflicts have left a trail of death, sexual abuse, and child recruitment across the region. For many years during the 2000s, FARDC forces were among the perpetrators.

Exact figures on child recruitment by the army since 2003 are not known. But international observers and human rights groups believe it's in the thousands, with minors exploited as fighters alongside less official roles as look-outs, porters, messengers, cooks, and sexual slaves – often referred to as "wives". One of the most significant enabling factors in the army's use of children has been the fractured and disorganised way it has integrated disparate armed groups into its ranks as part of various peace



Sensitisation initiative by local NGO with armed groups in Lubarika, South Kivu. CREDIT: Child Soldiers International

settlements.

In 2009, 12,000 fighters from the National Congress for the Defence of the People and many local self-defence 'Mai-Mai' groups surrendered and joined the Congolese army.

It was envisaged as a way to stem the deadly conflict – at this point 800,000 civilians had been displaced and thousands more killed in the east. The integration process resulted in hundreds of children being integrated alongside adult fighters. It also led to senior militia commanders maintaining power bases, only now as members of the armed forces, and still continuing to recruit and use children. A 2012-2013 recruitment campaign by the FARDC targeting 18 to 25 year olds also permitted hundreds more children to enrol due to lack of robust screening procedures.

### UN action plan

The signing of a 2012 UN action plan by President Joseph Kabila's government and the UN marked a major step forward. Between 2009 and 2015, the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, MONUSCO, and the FARDC assisted with the release of 8,546 children associated with Congo's armed groups,

including from within the army itself. The training of the army and other security forces on child protection issues, and the creation of standard operating procedures on age verification have all helped eliminate the recruitment of children by the armed forces; as has the appointment, in 2014, of Jeanine Mabunda Lioko as special advisor to the president on sexual violence and child recruitment, and the systematic screening and separation of children in the ranks of the armed forces.

### Culture of impunity remains

However, an end to the sexual violence committed by the FARDC and others is yet to materialise. Significantly, the UN report still lists the FARDC as committing "rape and other forms of sexual violence against children". High-ranking officers of the FARDC, the national police, and leaders of armed groups have been arrested and convicted of sexual violence against children. Members of the FARDC have also been charged with child recruitment, but there have been no convictions to date. Further, in contravention to the action plan and a 2013 Ministry of Defence directive prohibiting

the practice, the detention by government forces of children formerly associated with armed groups persists.

MONUSCO has noted incidents where children freed from groups are being detained "for periods ranging from a few days to several months," by the security forces. Eradicating such practices is crucial if the army's reputation is to be restored. Many Congolese children are still routinely exploited by armed groups in both combat and support roles. And for girls, who account for up to 40 percent of Congo's child soldiers, serious sexual and physical abuse continues, as well as stigma and family rejection of those able to return home. The scale of the enduring problems is demonstrated by the fact that the latest UN report found that 12 armed groups active in Congo were still using child soldiers.

And worryingly, recent violence in the restive Kasai region has created hundreds more child soldiers. MONUSCO chief Maman Sidikou told IRIN in September that recruitment in the central region "has never been so extensive in DRC". Previously, when the country has spiralled back into conflict, the use of children by both armed groups and the

FARDC has resumed.

The UN's delisting of the Congolese armed forces shows tangible results are possible. To avoid a regression, the government must maintain the progress made within its own ranks and intensify its efforts to stop recruitment by armed groups, while at the same time respecting human rights across the country. It is paramount that children who are released or escape, and the communities to which they return, receive adequate support if victims are to recover and lead normal lives again. Any assistance given must be holistic and community-based otherwise recruitment and re-recruitment will occur when conflict flares up. Cementing progress will not only ensure Congo's removal is lasting but also inspire other countries to take concerted action to tackle the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

*Programme manager at Child Soldiers International, a human rights organisation that seeks to end the military recruitment of all children*

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## AFRICA

## Shell executives charged in lead up to landmark trial over billion dollar Nigerian bribery scheme

Senior Royal Dutch Shell executives have been charged in Italy for their role in a vast bribery scheme that deprived the Nigerian people of over a billion dollars, the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office confirmed on Friday. Those facing trial include Malcolm Brinded CBE, the second most powerful person in the company when the deal was struck (1). Shell itself is also facing bribery charges alongside the four named individuals.

This historic decision follows a dramatic U-turn in which it admitted that it knew its billion dollar payment would go to convicted money-lauderer and former Nigerian oil minister, Dan Etete, in exchange for Nigerian oil block OPL 245 in 2011.

"This could be the biggest corporate bribery trial in history, and a watershed mo-

ment for the oil industry. The top brass of the UK's largest company is in the dock after it finally admitted dealing with a convicted money launderer. There can be no clearer sign that wholesale change is needed. Shell must first apologise to the Nigerian people, then take clear steps to reassure investors and the broader public that this won't happen again," said Barnaby Pace of Global Witness.

In April, Global Witness and Finance Uncovered revealed that Shell executives knew that \$1.1bn they paid for OPL 245 would go to Dan Etete and were likely to be used in a vast bribery scheme. For years, Shell has claimed that it only paid the Nigerian Government. But after our investigations Shell shifted this position and acknowledged it had dealt with Etete, via his front company Malabu. Dan

Etete was convicted of money laundering in France in 2007. Etete had awarded his own company the OPL 245 oil block while oil minister during the rule of former dictator Sani Abacha.

In December, the Milan Public Prosecutor alleged that \$520 million from the deal was converted into cash and intended to be paid to the then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, members of the government and other Nigerian government officials.

Now, Italian authorities have brought bribery charges against Malcolm Brinded, then Head of Upstream, alongside three others (2). According to the Shell Foundation, Brinded has stepped down from his role as Chairman of the Board of Trustees due to the legal action in Italy. Brinded remains a

trustee of the Foundation as well as retained positions as Chair of Engineering UK and President of the Energy Institute.

In September 2017 BHP Billiton announced that Malcolm Brinded will not return to the BHP Billiton board due to judicial inquiries over the OPL 245 deal. In 2002, Brinded was awarded the CBE for services to the U.K. Oil and Gas Industry. These individual charges are in addition to existing charges brought against Shell, Italian oil major Eni, Eni's CEO, former CEO and Chief Operations Officer, middlemen and several Nigerian officials.

"Shell's current CEO Ben van Beurden has described the emails we leaked as "pub talk", but most pub chats don't end up in criminal proceedings. Mr van Beurden

has had four years as CEO to address a scandal that now threatens to engulf his company, but has done next to nothing. He should draw a line under the case by admitting the company's guilt, removing Mr Brinded from his position, and setting out his plan for overhauling the company's anti-bribery efforts for the future," said Pace.

"These charges are a clear signal that it is no longer business as usual for oil companies in Nigeria. It's now time for the Dutch and British authorities to follow Italy's lead and hold their biggest company to account," said Olanrewaju Suraju, of Human and Environmental Development Agenda of Nigeria.

*global witness*

## Plague alert over Madagascar's dance with the dead

*continued from page 21*

bacteria can still be transmitted and contaminate whoever handles the body," said Willy

not be buried in a tomb that can be reopened and instead their remains must be held in an anonymous mausoleum. But the local media have re-

in Madagascar question the turning ceremonies.

"I don't want to imagine the dead like forgotten objects. They gave us life," said He-

ancestors -- plague or no plague.

"The plague is a lie."

Josephine Ralisiarisoa was even more strident in her

presidential poll (in 2018), so they invent things to get cash from lenders," said Ralisiarisoa. "I have participated in at least 15 famadihana cer-



In Madagascar, a sacred ritual sees families exhume the remains of dead relatives, rewrap them in fresh cloth and dance with the corpses. By RIJASOLO (AFP)

Randriamarotia, the health ministry chief of staff. To limit the danger, rules dictate that plague victims can-

ported several cases of bodies being exhumed covertly. Despite the serious risks publicised by the authorities, few

lene Raveloharisoa, a regular at the ritual.

"I will always practise the turning of the bones of my

view that the plague risk had been exaggerated.

"The government in power is short of money for the next

emonies in my life. And I've never caught the plague."

*modernghana.com*

## CONFLICT

## Togo unrest a test for West African leaders

by Mathias Hounkpe

Political violence in Togo claimed more victims this week. On Wednesday at least four people were shot dead in clashes between security forces and protestors in the West African country's two biggest cities. On Tuesday, two soldiers and a teenager died. The deaths came amid unrest following the arrest of an imam with close ties to the opposition, and against a backdrop of months of anti-government protests.

Demonstrations calling for political reforms began in August, at the instigation of the opposition Parti National Panafricain, and have since taken place on an almost weekly basis in the capital, Lome, as well as in Sokodé and towns such as Kara and Anié. More than a dozen other opposition parties, civil society organisations and elements of the diaspora have allied themselves with the calls for change.

The numerical and geographical extent of the protests against the government of Faure Gnassingbé, which have taken place in all regions of Togo, including the historically pro-government north of the country, and in several capital cities across the world, is virtually unprecedented.

The tens of thousands of Togolese who have taken to the streets want an end to the Gnassingbé dynasty. The current president came to power in 2005, when the army installed him after the death of his father, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who had ruled since 1967.

Ever since Faure Gnassingbé came to power 12 years ago, the opposition has called for the restoration of a two-term limit for heads of state, which is in line with the rest of West Africa and with a revision made in 1992 to the country's constitution. This limit was abolished in 2002 and Gnassingbé is currently serving his third term. The way the oppo-



Togo opposition on the march for removal of neo-colonial regime in Lome (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

sition sees it, the reintroduction of the limit would mean he would have to leave office immediately.

According to a 2015 poll conducted by Afrobarometer, 85 percent of Togo's population favour the reintroduction a two-term limit.

Other demands include the restoration of a two-round system for presidential elections, and the release of political prisoners.

The government has reacted mainly with repression – breaking up demonstrations, banning them outright on weekdays, and cutting internet connections on protest days.

Its efforts to make concessions have been unilateral and have failed to appease the opposition. In September, it put draft constitutional revisions, including the restoration of the two-term limit, to parliament. But without making the restriction retroactive, that could mean Gnassingbé would stay in power, and even run for re-election in 2020, and again in 2025.

Opposition legislators boycotted a vote on the revisions, so they failed to win the four-fifths majority needed for

constitutional amendments, leading the speaker to announce the proposed changes would be decided in a referendum.

For the opposition, the referendum is a red herring – all that matters now is a change of president.

#### Regional response

Amid this increasingly fraught impasse, international bodies such the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, have failed to bring the protagonists closer together or ease tensions.

On the contrary, the three organisations appeared to alienate the opposition with a 4 October joint statement which lauded the proposed referendum as “an important step in bringing Togo in conformity with democratic norms reflecting best practices in West Africa”, and urged the opposition to take part.

(A subsequent joint statement released on Wednesday to condemn the latest violence and call on all parties to exercise restraint and pursue dia-

logue made no reference to the referendum.)

If the unrest continues, the credibility of ECOWAS (and to a certain extent that of the AU and UNOWAS as well), which won praise for its role in Gambia's crisis early this year, would be dented. In the months ahead, Togo could face at best intermittent instability and at worst a serious crisis which could affect its neighbours and the sub-region.

There are a number of options that could stop that happening.

First, Faure Gnassingbé, being the focus of the current discontent, could clearly state when he intends to leave office, for instance in 2020. Even if he is widely mistrusted, such a public statement would go some way to steering Togo out of its crisis. Second, dialogue between the antagonists needs to be initiated, with the help of ECOWAS, the AU and UNOWAS. This would allow political solutions with broad support to be developed and subsequently incorporated into legal texts – such as constitutional revisions. Building such consensus is more likely

to deliver a sustainable path out of the crisis than the unilateral moves made so far by the government.

Third, legislative changes could be made if antagonists reach an agreement that fixes the president's current term in office as either his last or his penultimate. Once such a political deal is struck, precedents in West Africa and the rest of the world suggest that the issue of whether the law is retroactive could be left to jurists.

Whatever formula is agreed, the likes of ECOWAS, the AU and UNOWAS should be invited to help Togo put it into effect.

In the absence of effective follow-up mechanisms, previous political agreements in Togo collapsed, or were ignored, leading some key stakeholders to lose faith in dialogue. It is essential such faith is restored.

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# SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

## 'Big void' identified in Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza

by Jonathan Amos

The mysteries of the pyramids have deepened with the discovery of what appears to be a giant void within the Khufu, or Cheops, monument in Egypt.

It is not known why the cavity exists or indeed if it holds anything of value because it is not obviously accessible. Japanese and French scientists made the announcement after two years of study at the famous pyramid complex. They have been using a tech-

structures.

The Great Pyramid, or Khufu's Pyramid, is thought to have been constructed during the reign of Pharaoh Khufu between 2509 and 2483 BC.

At 140m (460 feet) in height, it is the largest of the Egyptian pyramids located at Giza on the outskirts of Cairo.

Khufu famously contains three large interior chambers and a series of passageways, the most striking of which is the 47m-long, 8m-high Grand Gallery.

sions.

"We don't know whether this big void is horizontal or inclined; we don't know if this void is made by one structure or several successive structures," explained Mehdi Tayoubi from the HIP Institute, Paris.

"What we are sure about is that this big void is there; that it is impressive; and that it was not expected as far as I know by any sort of theory." Khufu contains compartments that experts believe may have been incorporated

of stone.

The higher King's Chamber, for example, has five such spaces above it.

The renowned American archaeologist Mark Lehner sits on a panel reviewing ScanPyramids' work.

He says the muon science is sound but he is not yet convinced the discovery has significance.

"It could be a kind of space that the builders left to protect the very narrow roof of the Grand Gallery from the weight of the pyramid," he

ference; it's an anomaly. But we need more of a focus on it especially in a day and age when we can no longer go blasting our way through the pyramid with gunpowder as [British] Egyptologist Howard Vyse did in the early 1800s."

One of the team leaders, Hany Helal from Cairo University, believes the void is too big to have a pressure-relieving purpose, but concedes the experts will debate this.

"What we are doing is trying to understand the internal structure of the pyramids and how this pyramid has been built," he told reporters.

"Famous Egyptologists, archaeologists and architects - they have some hypotheses. And what we are doing is giving them data. It is they who have to tell us whether this is expected or not."

Much of the uncertainty comes down to the rather imprecise data gained from muography.

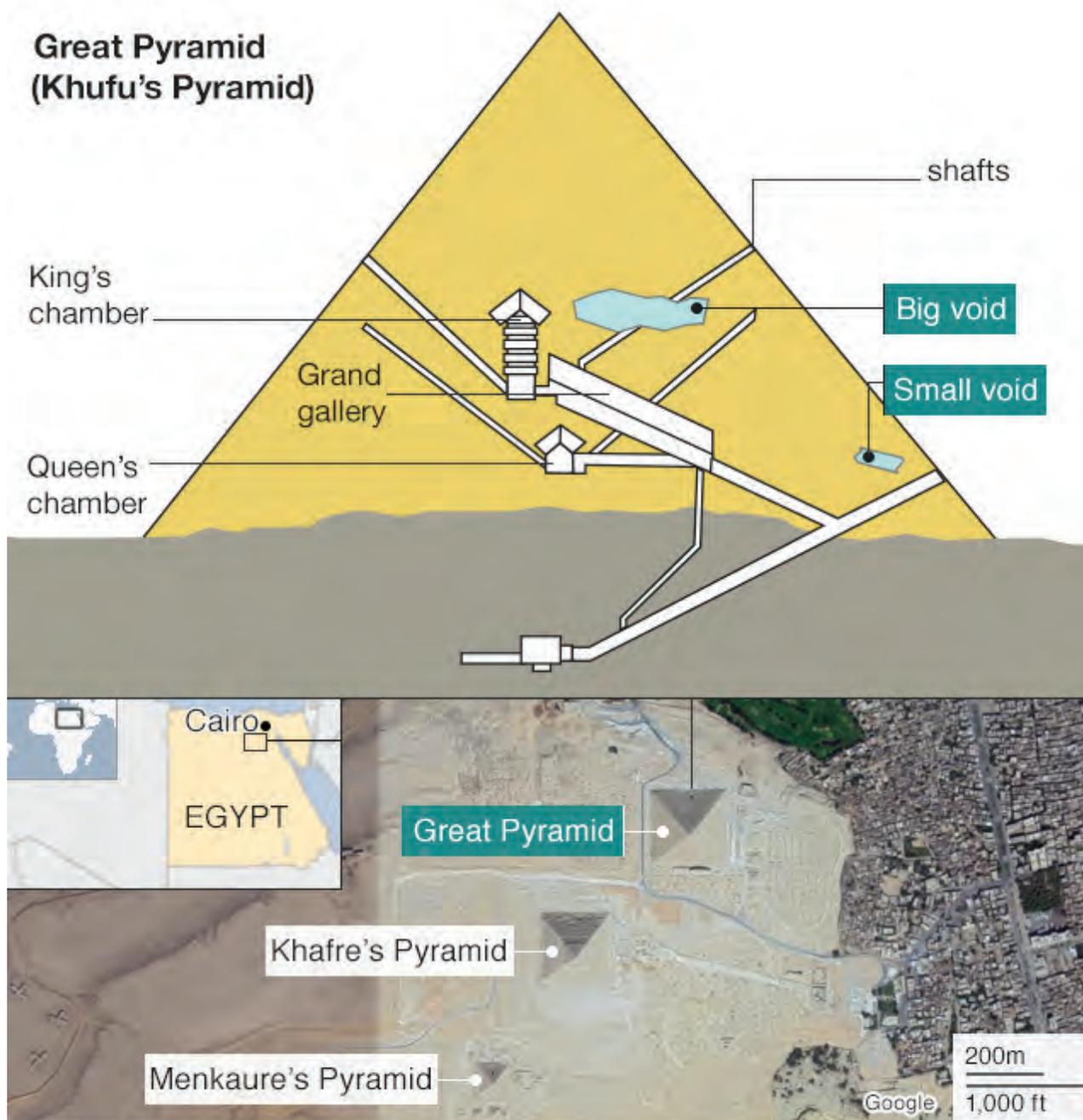
This non-invasive technique has been developed over the past 50 years to probe the interiors of phenomena as diverse as volcanoes and glaciers. It has even been used to investigate the failed nuclear reactors at Fukushima.

Muography makes use of the shower of high-energy particles that rain down on the Earth's surface from space.

When super-fast cosmic rays collide with air molecules, they produce a range of "daughter" particles, including muons.

These also move close to the speed of light and only weakly interact with matter. So when they reach the surface, they penetrate deeply into rock.

But some of the particles will be absorbed and deflected by the atoms in the rock's minerals, and if the muon detectors are placed under a region of interest then a picture of density anomalies can be obtained.



Source: ScanPyramids



nique called muography, which can sense density changes inside large rock

The newly identified feature is said to sit directly above this and have similar dimen-

by the builders to avoid collapse by relieving some of the stress of the overlying weight

told the BBC's Science In Action programme.

"Right now it's just a big dif-

*continued on page 17*

## 'Big void' identified in Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza

*continued from page 16*

The ScanPyramids team used three different muography technologies and all three agreed on the position and scale of the void.

Sébastien Procureur, from CEA-IRFU, University of Paris-Saclay, emphasised that muography only sees large features, and that the team's scans were not just picking up a general porosity inside the pyramid.

"With muons you measure an integrated density," he explained. "So, if there are holes everywhere then the integrated density will be the same, more or less, in all directions, because everything will be averaged. But if you see some excess of muons, it

means that you have a bigger void.

**"You don't get that in a Swiss cheese."**

The question now arises as to how the void should be investigated further.

Jean-Baptiste Mouret, from the French national institute for computer science and applied mathematics (Inria), said the team had an idea how to do it, but that the Egyptian authorities would first have to approve it.

"Our concept is to drill a very small hole to potentially explore monuments like this. We aim to have a robot that could fit in a 3cm hole. Basically, we're working on flying robots," he said.

*bbc*



The newly found void is directly above the Grand Gallery

## In East Africa, Uber and its rivals are fighting over drivers rather than passengers

*by Abdi Latif Dahir*

Last month, the Estonian ridesharing platform Taxify, revealed it was launching in the Ugandan capital city, Kampala. What's interesting about the company's launch there is that it's equally focused on marketing the promise of lower prices for riders as it is on taking lower commission fees from drivers: 15% instead of the 25% competitors take.

Taxify's expansion across East Africa is the latest sign of how ridesharing apps are promising to contribute to "healthy competition" by improving both quality and customer service but also to allow drivers to make a sustainable income. Given that most large sub-Saharan African cities are overwhelmed by unemployment and difficult economic envi-

ronments, the debate over driver wages has become a contentious issue. So while slashing fares for customers has been welcomed, the reduction of revenue for drivers with high commission fees has led to violent protests and strikes. The trend towards both cheaper rides and lower commission fees for drivers also shows how competition is working with ridesharing apps in East African cities. The top companies are battling to outflank each other and attract more customers—but also drivers.

Ever since Uber launched in Kenya in 2015, and then expanded to Uganda and Tanzania in 2016, various competitors have entered the market or have been established locally to take on the controversial but deep-pocketed US behemoth. These include Taxify, Little, and

Dubai-based Mondo Ride. Together, they have tussled over fare rates, tweaked and innovated around their product to respond to local challenges, and pegged their success on expanding into more cities and countries and hiring more drivers to boost their numbers.

When Little was established last year by Kenya's largest mobile operator Safaricom, it was resolute in offering cheaper and more localized solutions. Developed by the Kenyan tech firm Craft Silicon, the ride-hailing app offered customers free Wi-Fi, cheaper fares, and promised to give drivers a higher share of revenues. Not to be outdone, Uber launched its premium service UberSELECT last month, allowing users to opt for a slightly more expensive trip with a higher-rated driver with a newer car. And

to lure more drivers, Uber relaxed its rules to accept older cars—important in markets where drivers with newer cars are a rarity, and even partnered with Stanbic Bank in Kenya to get highly-rated drivers loans of up to 100% to finance their vehicles. Yet, even after all the fancy additions and features, the biggest opportunity and challenge in the market is still about the pricing. Uber, Taxify, Little and others have all cut their rates to attract more riders. The problem with this strategy is that it has proved fickle every time a new entrant comes into the market—and now at least one company is allowing customers to bargain prices, as you would with traditional taxis in African cities.

These price cuts have also been met with fierce resistance in the industry, both

from ridesharing drivers and their rivals at local taxis, who are incensed that the apps are distorting market prices. Then there are services like SafeBoda in Uganda and Maramoja in Kenya who are trying to convince consumers boda boda motorcycles are the better option to wade through the nightmarish city traffic. Ultimately, these challenges are not uniquely East African. Uber already in eight African countries sees some of these problems elsewhere as does Taxify which is in four countries. Little is currently fundraising and hopes to enough money to establish its presence in 8 to 10 countries by 2018. But as these rival firms compete for driver attention and approval, probably only one winner will ultimately emerge: the consumer.

*qz.com*

## Lawmaker advocates solutions to Africa's constitutional dilemma *continued from page 7*

He suggested a modification of the present presidential system to curtail presidential excesses, and importantly, create greater overlap and affinity between the executive and the legislative arms of government. "To this end, a hybrid of both the presidential and parliamentary systems will go a long way in

keeping the presidency in check, while also reaping the benefits inherent in presidential system." He advocated such modification as the introduction of 'Question Time' in the parliament to hold the ministers consistently accountable and the replacement of impeachment with a procedure for vote of no-con-

fidence, among others. He called for measures to check imperial presidency in Africa and the excesses of many leaders who are allegedly tyrannical and abusive as the military and civilian despots they criticized and replaced. Earlier, Dr. Uchenna Ekwo, the President of the center, said it had fostered more crit-

ical journalism devoted to peace building and holding practitioners accountable. "We are building a media system that supports peace, dialogue, non-violence and democracy," Ekwo said. The Permanent Observer of Africa Union to the UN, Ambassador Antonio Tete, and Sudan's ambassador to the

UN, Omer Mohamed, said Africa should be allowed to adopt a version of democracy peculiar to the continent. Both diplomats acknowledged that Africa had had its peculiar challenge and particularly expressed regret over the sectarian crises in many parts of the continent.

*Source: CMPI*

## OPINION

## If UN is to be credible, it must act on Burundi before it's too late

by Dominique Fraser

*The Burundian government carries the primary responsibility for protecting its citizens from crimes against humanity, but instead it's the main abuser.*

A UN Commission of Inquiry reported last month that the security forces, the intelligence service, and the ruling party militia bare the greatest guilt for two years of killings, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, disappearances, and sexual violence in Burundi.

With the government unwilling to protect its population, it falls to the international community to provide that shield.

But although Burundi remains on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and the Security Council in New York, the reaction by the world body has so far been insufficient.

During the most recent session of the Human Rights Council last month, two resolutions on Burundi were adopted.

The first, led by the European Union, extended the mandate of the commission of inquiry – set up to investigate human rights abuses – for a further year. It received support from two African member states, Botswana and Rwanda.

The second resolution was a last-minute bid by the African Group, which sought to discredit and dismantle the panel of inquiry launched by the Human Rights Council in 2016.

It called for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to send three separate experts “to engage with the Burundian authori-



Burundi Police on patrol

ties and all other stakeholders”.

Burundi has promised to cooperate with those experts. But the likelihood they will have any real impact is in doubt given Burundi's past refusal to cooperate with UN initiatives that seek an end to the crisis in the country, which pits President Pierre Nkurunziza against an opposition that claims his rule is illegal, and demands his ousting.

For example, in July 2016, the UN Security Council authorised 228 police officers to monitor the security situation. The resolution was an attempt to salvage the reputation of the Council, which needed to be seen as doing something. However, due to government opposition, the police officers were never able to deploy.

Following the outcome of the Human Rights Council meeting last month, it is unlikely that the Security Council will take strong action – such as targeted sanctions – despite Burundi rejecting its legally-binding resolutions.

#### Divided UN

In New York as in Geneva, Burundi remains one of the most divisive issues. Some Security Council members – primarily China, Russia, and Egypt – see the situation as an internal human rights affair rather than a peace and security issue.

The position of those who want the Security Council to be more engaged on human rights issues, led by the United States, is sharply opposed by those who want the Council to remain focused on more traditional security matters.

All members of the Security Council are waiting to take their cues from African states – primarily Burundi's neighbours – Tanzania and Uganda.

Given the relatively strong African consensus in Geneva opposing what is characterised as outside interference, and the ongoing – although stalled – mediation efforts led by the East African Community, those members of the Security Council interested in stronger action are unlikely to push for that in

the current climate.

Despite the new UN secretary-general's focus on crisis prevention, the case of Burundi shows how difficult it is to implement prevention measures in specific cases.

The Human Rights Council has no way of enforcing decisions and relies on the cooperation of UN member states, including Burundi. The Security Council is unlikely to act until a situation has already spiralled out of control and threatens international peace and security.

On the ground, three scenarios could jolt the Security Council into action.

The first could be an escalation of attacks from outside Burundi, such as by the Democratic Republic of Congo-based rebel group, the Popular Forces of Burundi. The FPB's leadership recently vowed to increase attacks. This would likely intensify the violence and could even lead to civil war in the long term.

The second scenario could centre around the more than 400,000 refugees in neighboring countries. Tanzania,

which hosts almost 60 percent of fleeing Burundese, has already reached a deal with Burundi and the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, which will see the repatriation of almost 12,000 refugees, many of whom want to leave ill-equipped camps.

If the refugee flow does not stop, Tanzania may change course and ask the Security Council to do something.

A third scenario could see an intensification of internal division within the ruling party, which would likely see a deterioration of the security situation, especially if an attempt is made to prevent Nkurunziza from running for a fourth term. All three of these scenarios would pose an even greater risk of mass atrocities. If the UN is serious about prevention, it must take credible action on Burundi now before it is too late.

*IRIN*

The author is a Research Analyst at the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

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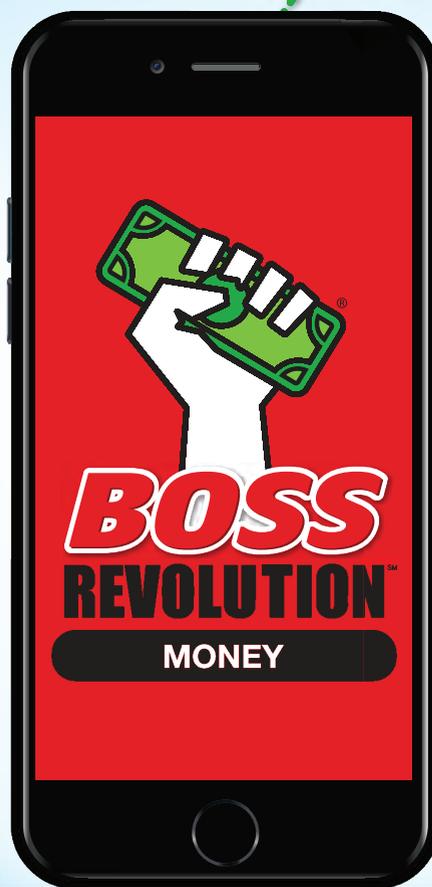
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## OPINION

## Who owns Kenya?

by Patrick Gathara

Two elections in two months have not settled Kenya's political crisis. But the impasse is not really about who will sit in State House. It's a deeper question: it's about who owns Kenya – its citizens or a historically entrenched political elite.

Kenya went back to the polls on 26 October after the Supreme Court annulled the first attempt in August. Incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta won easily after his main opponent, Raila Odinga, withdrew from the race alleging the inability of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission to carry out a credible poll.

Some have proposed that the political crisis is nothing more than a dispute between two of Kenya's famously power-hungry politicians, each accusing the other of trying to vault into office by fraudulent means.

Others blame the ethnicisation of Kenya's politics and the deep tribal fault lines within Kenyan society. Still others maintain that the country's winner-take-all political system, which does not allow those rejected by voters a cushy and safe landing.

All these diagnoses fail to identify the central conflict that connects all these issues – the struggle to bend the country's post-colonial extractive state to the will of a new and progressive constitution.

It is a war that has been silently waged for at least 55 years.

#### Colonial constitution

In 1962, Kenyan representatives to the Lancaster Constitutional Conference agreed on a constitution broadly similar to the one the country finally adopted in 2010. It established a Bill of Rights. It created regional assemblies and local government in an effort to devolve power from the centre. It even had a Supreme Court.

Yet in less than a decade, it would be so mangled through



Rivals - Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta: CREDIT: The Star newspaper

amendments that in 1969 it was officially recognised as a different document.

Kenya's current attorney-general, Githu Muigai, noted way back in 1992 that the independence constitution was incompatible with the inherited authoritarian colonial administrative structure.

"Unhappily, instead of the latter being amended to fit the former, the former was altered to fit the latter, with the result that the constitution was effectively downgraded," Muigai wrote.

In short, under the ruling KANU party, the colonial state and its logic of extraction of resources from the many to enrich the few – initially British colonials, but now a similarly tiny African political elite – prevailed and undid the constitution.

What followed was an "eating" binge as politicians and senior officials and their families and friends grabbed whatever they could lay their hands on.

By the late 1980s, the looting and oppression sparked a reaction from citizen groups, media, and churchmen who pushed hard for a new constitution, even in the face of violent government crackdowns as well as state-led attempts to co-opt and

hollow out their demands. The popular agitation came to fruition in August 2010 when the current constitution was finally promulgated.

Yet the colonial state did not just fade away. Its more egregious aspects were simply renamed and allowed to hide in plain sight.

The hated provincial administrators became county commissioners; the police, though nominally independent, still remained "a citizen containment squad", as an official report into police reforms had labelled them.

Under Kenyatta, the state retained its authoritarian character but with a fresh, likable face.

Its violence, however, was never far below the surface, as was witnessed in the aftermath of its bungled responses to extremist attacks such as the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013, when the government scapegoated entire communities to cover up its failures. And, more recently, in the brutal crackdown on people protesting the two elections in which nearly 70 people have died.

#### Where to now?

The Supreme Court annulment of the August poll came as a real shock to a political

and economic elite who had assumed the ballot would be a coronation of their chosen candidate. It was the first real attempt to use the 2010 constitution to challenge their power and status as, effectively, owners of the state.

The response was quick and effective: legislative changes to virtually make it impossible for the court to nullify another election, threats to the judges, and a dubious re-run poll to sanitise what the court had impugned. It has also included Kenyatta's supporters extolling the benefits of a "benevolent dictator".

It is within the context of this historically frustrated effort to bring the colonial state to heel that we must locate the current political impasse. It must not be made out to be about the Luo versus the Kikuyu (although there is an aspect of that), or Kenyatta versus Odinga (although that matters too), or election winners versus election losers (a much less convincing argument).

The real question is whether the wenyenchi (the owners of the nation) will give up their control of the state to the wananchi (the people of the nation); whether they will allow the constitution to dismantle and remake the colo-

onial state into one that works for all Kenyans.

While history may not offer much encouragement, the low turnout (even the highest estimates come in at under 40 percent) for the repeat election suggest there is broad agreement on the need for elections to adhere to constitutional standards of being free, fair, simple, verifiable, transparent, and credible.

The politicians are out of touch with the people. Their brinkmanship demonstrates that they are yet to learn the lessons of the 1960s and that they can't be trusted not to repeat the same mistakes their fathers' made.

Which leads us to the question of what should happen now. There is undoubtedly a need to resolve the immediate political crisis and generate consensus on how to address the longer-term issues. Proposed talks between Kenyatta and Odinga would be critical to this but, as noted above, can't be left solely to them.

The involvement of civil society, the media, and the religious establishment – both as mediators and participants in their own right – would help lay a framework that isn't solely dictated by the interests of the two protagonists. The goal should be to establish a roadmap to a resolution of the crisis, including an agreed forum for a comprehensive national dialogue to address not just the immediate issues but, more importantly, to deal with the unfinished business of reforming the colonial state and addressing its legacy of abuse, marginalisation, and impoverishment.

Kenya faces much more than an electoral crisis. For over half a century, contestation over who controls the state has been allowed to take precedence over the need to reform that state so it works for not just a few, but for all its citizenry. That must now change.

# Plague alert over Madagascar's dance with the dead

by Tsiresena Manjakahery

In Madagascar, ceremonies in which families exhume the remains of dead relatives, rewrap them in fresh cloth and dance with the corpses are a sacred ritual.

But an outbreak of plague sweeping the Indian Ocean island nation has prompted warnings that the macabre spectacle, known as the turning of the bones or body turning, presents a serious risk of contamination.

On a recent baking hot Saturday in Ambohijafy, a village outside the capital Antananarivo, a "turning" procession snaked through the streets in a fevered carnival atmosphere bound for the cemetery. For the community's few hundred residents, the time for "famadihana" -- the local name for the ceremony -- had arrived.

The unique custom, originating among communities that live in Madagascar's high

plateaux, draws crowds every winter to honour the dead and to honour their mortal wishes.

"It's one of Madagascar's most widespread rituals," historian Mahery Andrianahag told AFP.

"It's necessary to assure cosmic harmony... it satisfies our desire to respect and honour the ancestors so that they can be blessed and one day return."

At the head of the procession, 18-year-old Andry Nirina Andriatsitohaina eagerly awaited the big moment as a uniformed band played on loud trumpets.

"I am extremely proud to go to rewrap the bones of my grandmother and all of our ancestors. I will ask them for blessings and success in my school leavers' exams," he said.

### 'Ask for blessings'

In front of the family mausoleum, the assembled men

dug into the earth and opened the tomb's door as women and children looked on.

One by one, the wrapped remains were carried out into the open and carefully placed on a mat where they were rewrapped, or "turned" in the new shrouds.

Oly Ralalarisoa, 45, was overcome with emotion.

"I am so happy to be able to exhume my great-great-great-grandfather. It means that their descendants can ask for blessings for the next nine years."

Relatives invite all their fellow villagers to attend the ceremony and to take part in the procession as well as musical and food festivities, but the wrapping of the body is a purely family affair.

The dead may be "turned" more than once but only every five, seven or nine years, and can be wrapped in several shrouds if different parts of the family or loved ones want to honour them.

### 'Fulfil my duty'

Close by, Isabel Malala Razafindrakoto had tears in her eyes as she held the wrapped body of her son, who died aged just three years old.

"I'm happy to once again see my son and to fulfil my duty," she said.

The customary ritual, rather than a religious rite, can be shocking for some, but for those taking part, it is an intense celebration accompanied by music, dancing and singing, fuelled by alcoholic drinks.

As the gathering in the Ambohijafy cemetery drew to a close, the bodies were carefully returned to their resting places after one last dance.

As soon as the ritual was over, the mats on which the bodies were laid were pulled up.

Veteran participants will store them under their mattresses until the next famadihana.

Looking after the mats is

often seen in Madagascar as bringing good luck.

But some doctors warn that they can also transmit germs and infections.

And, at a time when Madagascar is enduring its most lethal outbreak of the plague in years, the practice of body turning has raised fears among health officials.

Since August, the disease has infected more than 1,100 people, with 124 deaths. Officials this week cautiously welcomed a slowdown in infections.

### Digging up the plague?

Health ministry epidemiologists have long observed that plague season coincides with the period when famadihana ceremonies are held from July to October. "If a person dies of pneumonic plague and is then interred in a tomb that is subsequently opened for a famadihana,

*continued on page 14*

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## Fela Kuti statue unveiled in Lagos to honour his legacy

by Kylie Kiunguyu

A liberation statue to commemorate Nigeria's musical icon Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was unveiled in Lagos on the 20th Anniversary of the legends death. "Fela used his music to challenge government and people to explore development through social and economic activities that are rooted in African values."

Lagos unveiled a statue in honour of Nigeria's music legend and Afrobeat pioneer Fela Anikulapo Kuti on what would have been his 79th birthday. The liberation statue made of fibre glass was created by artist Abolore Sobayo, who used the material to design a golden headless and handless effigy of the legend with its arms raised to the sky. The statue was unveiled by State Governor Akinwunmi Ambode at the popular Allen Roundabout in Ikeja as he eulogized the virtues of the late Afrobeat legend and freedom fighter, describing him as an enigmatic artist who used the platform of his art to agitate for social and human rights. The statue is part of the activities that



marked the 20th anniversary of Fela's demise. "This artwork was created as a form of respect and remembrance to this legend; what he stood for and fought for with his music; his mythology; struggle for freedom; fight for human dignity; social consciousness; courage and Pan-Africanism," the governor said. "Today we celebrate a man who voluntarily turned his back on a life of comfort and privilege, and took up his

saxophone as a weapon to fight for the liberation of our people from neo-colonialism and bad governance," Ambode added.

Fela's daughter Yeni Kuti expressed gratitude to the governor and the artist for respecting the wishes of her father who hated statues by designing a headless and handless effigy and that overall it was a good representation of their late patriarch.

"The artist has said it is a

spirit and when Fela was alive, he hated statues and so I think this effigy is a good representation of what Fela would have wanted because he did not like statues and that is why at the Museum you will notice that there is no statue of Fela," she said. The event was attended by notable members of Fela's family including Yemi Ransome-Kuti (Head of family), Seun Kuti, Kunle Kuti, Yeni Kuti, Motunrayo Kuti, Dotun Olukoye Ransome-

Kuti, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Femi Falana; veteran Nollywood actor, Pa Olu Jacobs and his wife, Joke Silva; Fela's first manager, Chief Benson Idonije, among others.

The ceremony ended at the New Afrika Shrine where the popular annual Felabration festival concluded.

*thisisafrika.me*

## David Adjaye to Design Holocaust Memorial by UK Parliament—But Critics Take Issue With Site

by Naomi Rea

David Adjaye, the architect of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, and Nobel Peace Center in Oslo will design the new, more than £50 million (\$65 million) Holocaust Memorial in the UK, the location of which is controversial.

Critics contend that the compact site at Victoria Tower Gardens, next to the Houses of Parliament, is unsuitable, as it already contain several memorials.

Meanwhile, the director of the Imperial War Museum, which is less than a mile away, has urged reconsideration of the project because its award-winning Holocaust Exhibition is getting a £35.5 million (\$46 million) up-

grade.

Adjaye will collaborate with the Israeli-born architect and designer Ron Arad. On their design team is writer Jonathan Safran Foer, whose maternal grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. Among the strong shortlist of 10 designs—selected from 92 entries to the international design competition—were proposals by Norman Foster, Caruso St John, Zaha Hadid Architects, and Daniel Libeskind. Artists and writers on their teams included Rachel Whiteread, Anish Kapoor, and Simon Schama, and professor of History at Columbia University in New York.

"The complexity of the Holocaust story, including the British context, is a series of layers that have become hidden by time," Adjaye said in

a statement announcing the winner on Tuesday October 24. "We wanted to create a living place, not just a monument to something of the past. We wanted to orchestrate an experience that reminds us of the fragility and constant strife for a more equitable world."

Adjaye's design will be partly underground, and will feature 23 bronze fins, the spaces in between which are meant to commemorate the Jewish communities devastated by the Holocaust in 22 countries. Stairways between the bronze panels will lead to displays including recorded testimonies, and space for remembrance of the six million Jewish people murdered in the Holocaust and all other victims of Nazi persecution, including Roma, gay, and dis-

abled people.

The choice of Adjaye was made unanimously by the jury, which included first and second generation Holocaust survivors, the UK Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, as well as the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, and Alice Greenwald, director of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York.

"[The memorial] will ensure the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten and will stand as a powerful reminder to future generations about the fragility of peace," said Mayor Sadiq Khan.

The learning center will also aim to address antisemitism, extremism, Islamophobia, racism, homophobia and other forms of hatred and prejudice in society today.

"This timely memorial will encourage and inspire peaceful coexistence and tolerance and will lead to a better appreciation of what can happen when hatred is allowed to develop unchecked," said Rabbi Mirvis.

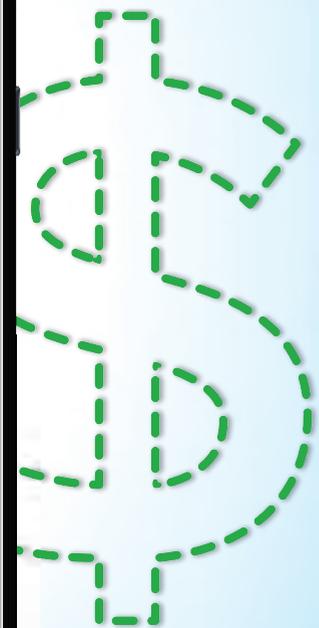
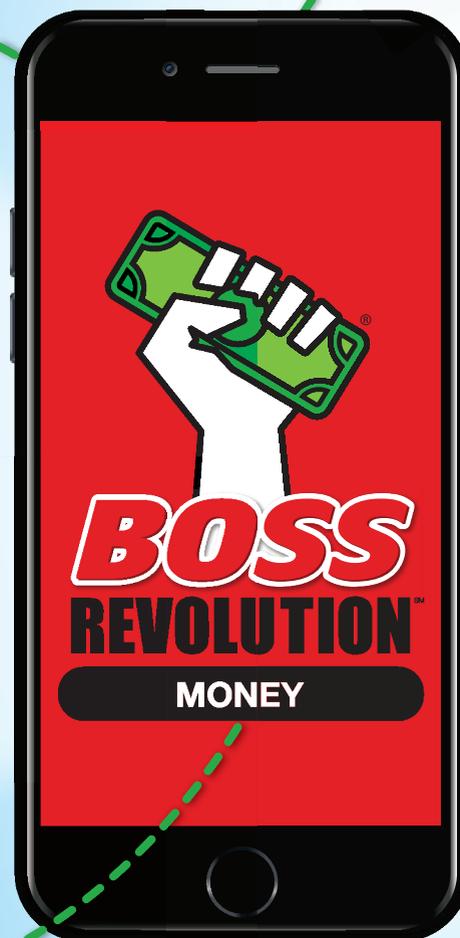
Rabbi Mirvis was speaking days before an alleged plot to murder a Member of Parliament emerged. The plot against Rosie Cooper, who is the Labour MP for West Lancashire emerged on Friday October 27. A member of the banned far-right group, National Action, has been charged with the intention of committing acts of terrorism and threats to kill.

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