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Minimum age for coming to UK for marriage raised from 18 to 21

UK bans unskilled non-EU migrant workers

Unskilled workers from non-European Union countries will no longer be eligible to work in the UK for the "foreseeable future", the Government has said. In a new reform of the immigration system, the Government has also proposed that foreigners who want to marry a British person and come to the UK should be required to take an English test.

The UK is also introducing the Australian-style Points Based System (PBS) that ensures that only those who meet the needs of the UK will be allowed to enter and work.

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UK's Immigration Minister Liam Byrne

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Soyinka calls for neutral inquiry into unresolved Nigerian political murders

Nobel laureate Prof Wole Soyinka has endorsed Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua's directive that unresolved political murders should be reopened. He, however, cautioned that the police are unfit for the assignment. By involving the police, "we might end up again with boastful murderers being arraigned for attempts to disturb the peace," Prof Wole Soyinka said, adding that "Perhaps, an Independent Commission of inquiry into these killings might be the way to begin laying a foundation on which the police have no choice, but to build their cases."

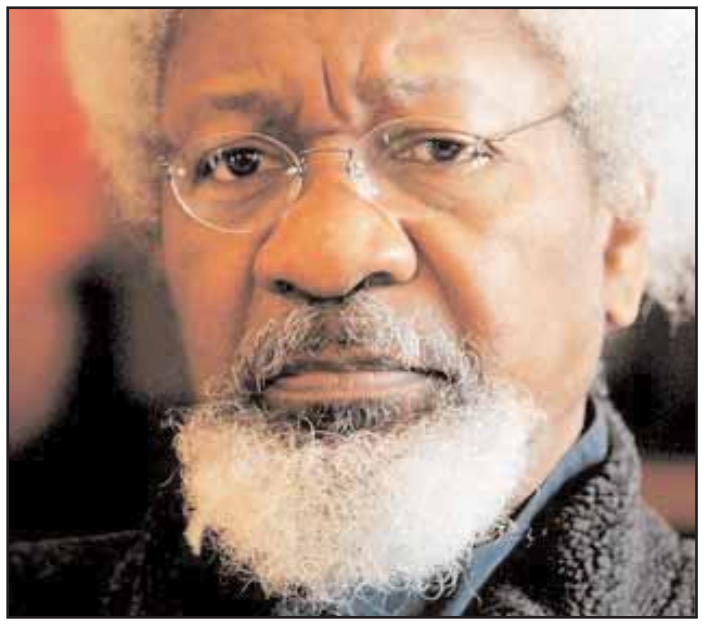
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Nobel laureate Prof Wole Soyinka

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UK's "crisis of violence" against women must be addressed

Swinson: Lack of support for women victims of violence unacceptable

By Stephen Ogongo

Women who are victims of violence in the UK face a "postcode lottery" when accessing support services, a report has revealed.

The report the "Map of Gaps" by the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) campaign and the new Equality and Human Rights Commission, shows that every year, three million women in the UK suffer rape, trafficking, harassment, forced marriage, domestic violence or some other form of gender-based violence.

It also points out that specialised services, such as Rape Crisis Centres and refuges, are essential to help women deal with the immediate crisis, support them through the justice system, and help them move on with their lives. Unfortunately, the report shows that provision of specialised services is patchy in most parts of the UK and in some places there are no services at all. The researchers also reveal that they have already witnessed a tide of closures and many more face closure because of a funding crisis in the sector.

The report the "Map of Gaps" also shows that "A third of local authorities in the UK have no specialised support services; most women in the UK have no access to a Rape Crisis Centre; less than one in ten local authorities have specialist services for ethnic minority women that would address forced marriage, female genital mutilation and crimes in the name of honour amongst other issues."

According to the report, the east of England, London, Northern Ireland, the north west and the south east are particularly underserved. Among the areas with the best provision are Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester and Sheffield.

EVAW and the Commission for Equality and Human Rights are calling for the government and local authorities to take urgent action to stem the tide of closures and ensure that all women have access to these vital services. "It's time to plug the gaps", said Ms. Liz Kelly, Chair of End Violence Against Women, "It is simply too costly to continue with the current situation. Women deserve access to quality support services."

Mr. Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, said there was a "crisis of violence" against women which society needs to address, BBC reported. "The problem is, as a country, we don't appreciate the scale of violence against women," Mr. Phillips said. "These women need a safe environment, somewhere they can go and feel protected, someone to talk to and a place to rebuild their lives.

"At the moment, though, they face the terrifying prospect that they are unlikely to be able to access help in their darkest hour," he said. "We have got into a state where although this is a very big issue, a kind of undeclared war against women, most public authorities seem to think it's not their problem," he said.

Responding to the report on support services for women who have been victims of violence, Liberal Democrat Equality Spokesperson, Jo Swinson MP said: "The postcode lottery of violence support services shows that the Government is failing women across the country. It is simply shocking that most victims of violence cannot access a good range of support services in their local area.

"The Liberal Democrats have been calling for an integrated, cross-departmental strategy on violence against women for years. The Government should learn from the successes in Scotland, where provision of support is more equally spread and has been expanded in recent years."

"The postcode lottery of violence support services shows that the Government is failing women across the country. It is simply shocking that most victims of violence cannot access a good range of support services in their local area. The Liberal Democrats have been calling for an integrated, cross-departmental strategy on violence against women for years. The Government should learn from the successes in Scotland, where provision of support is more equally spread and has been expanded in recent years."

Ms. Jo Swinson MP, Liberal Democrat Equality Spokesperson



FOR CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONTACT

- The 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline on Freephone 0808 2000 247

The Chester-le-Street and City of Durham women's support worker on 07949 511653

- Durham Women's Refuge on 0191 386 5951 during office hours Monday to Friday

Forced Marriages Law comes into effect next autumn



Justice Minister Bridget Prentice

A new law protecting victims and potential victims of forced marriage will come into effect next autumn, Justice Minister Bridget Prentice has said.

Ministry of Justice said in a statement that the new law will enable courts to make orders to prevent forced marriages and to order the behaviour or conduct of those responsible for forcing another into marriage to change or stop or to impose requirements on them. It will also provide recourse for those already forced into marriage. Failure to comply could lead to imprisonment.

In her speech to the Women's Issues Network White Ribbon Conference, Ms Prentice also talked about the Ministry of Justice domestic violence policy for staff experiencing domestic abuse. Ms Prentice outlined the support that staff in the Ministry of Justice have access to. She said support from trained counsellors can be arranged, moves can be facilitated and financial support can be considered.

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 gives the courts a wide discretion to deal flexibly and sensitively with the circumstances of each individual case. It employs civil remedies that offer protection to victims without criminalizing members of their family. The first phase of implementation of the Act will enable people to apply for an order at specified county courts, rather than just the high courts.

Ms Prentice said: "I am pleased that the Forced Marriage Act is to be implemented. The Act protects people from being denied their fundamental right to choose the person they want to marry and gives those in such a situation the power to move away. Victims of forced marriage are often unable to protect themselves and the Act enables others to apply to court for protection on the victim's behalf. We will ask the public how we can adapt our court administration to meet the needs of those who use the Act"

The Minister of Justice further said that "Domestic violence deeply affects victims and transcends gender, race, class, age and sexuality. It accounts for 25 per cent of all violent crime and a third of all homicides." She recalled that Sunday 25th November was white ribbon day. "The ribbon is a symbol of hope and is a personal pledge to challenge the acceptability of domestic violence. "Our policies reinforce that hope and also sends a clear message to victims of domestic violence that the Ministry of Justice is committed to providing support and will encourage victims to come forward to ask for help and warn perpetrators that we will not tolerate violence of any kind."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Stephen Ogongo
Tel: +390687410531 **Fax:** +390687410528
Email: africanews@etnomedia.org

ADVERTISING: Tel/fax +44(0)2072633774
Email: sales@myownmedia.co.uk

DISTRIBUTION:
Tel/fax: +44(0)2072633774
Email: distribution@myownmedia.co.uk

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Via Virgilio Maroso 50, Roma 00142 ITALY
Tel. +390687410531 **Fax** +390687410528
Email: *editore@stranieriinitalia.it*

CONTRIBUTORS: TAYO, Musah Ibrahim Musah, Reggie Tagoe, Pauline Long, Kwaku Boatin, Eric Singh, Stephen Oladipupo, Ekarika Nana 0bot

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UK's borders shut to non-EU unskilled workers

By Stephen Ogongo

Immigration Minister Liam Byrne has revealed that the Government will bar low-skilled workers from outside the EU under the new system.

The aspect of the points-based measures which would have applied to the low-skilled will not be introduced "for the foreseeable future", the minister said. Under the new immigration system, Tier 3, which covers low skilled routes, will only be used if specific shortages are identified that cannot be filled from the UK on domestic or European labour force.

Mr. Byrne holds that banning low skilled workers from outside the EU would not lead to labour shortages in the construction and other industries. "We think Britain's needs for low-skilled workers can be fulfilled from within the EU," he said. Official figures show that 234,000 migrant workers from Eastern European countries such as Poland came to work in the UK in 2006. About 40% of them are thought to be low skilled. In the same year, some 12,000 unskilled migrants from non-EU countries in Africa, America and Asia came to work in the UK.



The statement of intent for Tier 1 shows how the new tier will replace eight existing immigration routes for people who are highly skilled, entrepreneurs, investors or have undertaken studies to a high level and want to stay in the UK to work.

Applicants will earn points for their skills and the potential they show for economic success, competence in English language and ability to support themselves and their dependents. Some of the factors to be taken into consideration while awarding points to people applying to come to the UK as a Highly Skilled Migrant are their qualifications, age, previous salary or the amount of money they are planning to invest in the economy.

Tier 1 is the first of five tiers of the PBS due to be rolled out over the next 18 months. Tier 2, targeting skilled workers with a job offer and Tier 5, for temporary workers such as musicians, actors and sportsmen will both come on line in the third quarter of 2008. Tier 4, for students, will follow at the beginning of 2009.

The UK's new five-tier system would work for highly skilled migrants, which Mr. Byrne defined as those who are "key contributors" to the UK economy. People who work in the financial and public services, education and health, ICT and business, etc are included in this category. "We are not running migration policy in the exclusive interest of Britain's business community but in Britain's national interest," Mr. Byrne said. "This is the biggest change to the immigration system in its history. We doubt that reform will be pain-free.'"

"We think Britain's needs for low-skilled workers can be fulfilled from within the EU"

Immigration Minister Liam Byrne

"For those foreign nationals already living and working in the UK, I also believe that it is right that they play by the rules. That is why I want to strengthen our ability to block the privilege of citizenship to those with a criminal record. After all British citizenship is a privilege, not a right."

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith



© GNN PHOTO

The new reforms do not put restrictions on people from EU countries coming to work in the UK.

The Home Secretary Jacqui Smith acknowledged that migration brings great social and economic benefits to the UK but pointed out that "people expect it to be managed robustly and in support of Britain's national interests."

She said "The Points Based System will build on a package of measures already being introduced to deliver a more secure border. These include: new electronic checks to count people in and out of the UK and clamp down on illegal immigration; fingerprinting of visa applicants around the world before they are allowed to enter Britain; and the introduction of ID cards for foreign nationals."

Ms Smith further said: "I want people coming to live and work in the UK and their families to be able to integrate fully into our society."

As a way of protecting the vulnerable from being pressurised into forced marriage, the Government has proposed raising the minimum age at which people can come to the UK for marriage from 18 to 21. Ms Smith said: "I believe it is right that we protect those at risk."

The new reform will make it even harder for foreigners with criminal convictions to ever become British. Under new guidance, which applies from 1st January 2008, people with an unspent conviction will normally be refused nationality. Anyone subject to a good character test will be refused citizenship if their convictions are unspent. The only people not requiring a good character test are British nationals, those under ten, and the stateless. Good character tests do not just take into account criminality, but also an applicant's financial affairs, and whether they have practiced deceit in their dealings with Government departments.

New immigration reform draws mixed reactions

The UK Government's decision to ban unskilled workers from outside the EU drew different reactions.

Mr. John Philpott, Chief Economist at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) said it is fully justified, onrec.com reported.

Dr Philpott said: "The acid test of any policy for managing migration is that it meets reasonable and legitimate employer need without detriment to the common good."

He said the detail of the forthcoming points based system strikes a sensible balance even though it may frustrate some employers.

"The UK economy is now fully stocked with Eastern European migrants capable of performing unskilled jobs. Blocking entry of unskilled people from outside the EU may sound harsh but will be good news for disadvantaged jobseekers and many in existing ethnic minority communities in the UK, and will ease strain on housing, schools and social services.

"The Government's points based immigration policy is both fair and economically sound."

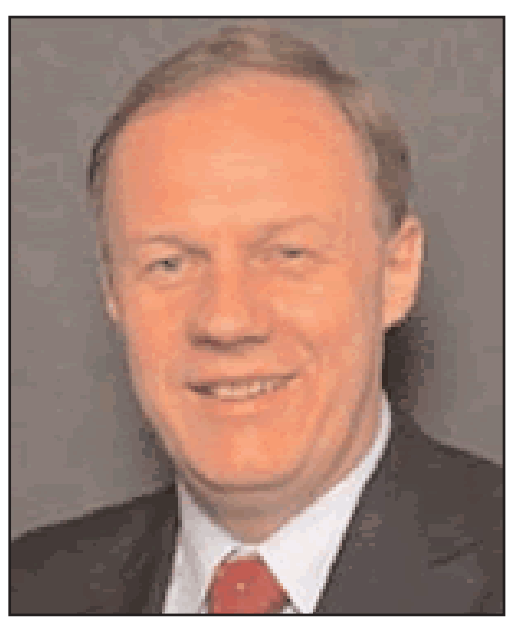
Sir Andrew Green, of pressure group Migration Watch, told the BBC the points system had a fatal weakness. "There's no upper limit," he said.

He cited the Home Office's recently published opinion survey that showed that a majority of the country want to see less than 10,000 immigrants a year.

"At the moment there are 300,000 - so the government is just not within sight of public opinion on this and this scheme is simply not going to produce the limitation that everyone wants to see," Sir Green said.

"The Government is once again copying some of our policies, but failing to take the key step of announcing a limit on the number of people they will allow to come and work in Britain. Without such a limit, the new system will be ineffective in allowing public services to plan for arrivals."

Mr. Damian Green, Conservative spokesman



Similar views were expressed by Mr. Damian Green, the Conservative spokesman who said: "The Government is once again copying some of our policies, but failing to take the key step of announcing a limit on the number of people they will allow to come and work in Britain. Without such a limit, the new system will be ineffective in allowing public services to plan for arrivals."

The Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary, Nick Clegg MP said: "The public is entitled to be sceptical about this latest blast of Home Office announcements on immigration. For the last 10 years the Government's approach to this issue has been disfigured by a combination of tough-talking populism and utter administrative incompetence. Jacqui Smith (the Home Secretary) should concentrate on getting the basics right first: an integrated border force with exit controls so we know who is coming in and out of the country; proper planning and money for local authorities dealing with sharp population changes; and greater promotion of integration."

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Report: New immigrants take accommodation rejected by others

New research shows that rather than taking much-needed housing from local residents, as critics often claim, new immigrants in the UK tend to fill voids in the housing stock left behind or rejected by other households.

The report, "The housing pathways of new immigrants" recently published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, examined the housing experiences of 39 new immigrants in Sheffield.

It was prepared by David Robinson, Kesia Reeve and Rionach Casey from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.

Researchers found that concentrations of new immigrants in particular areas were more often the result of migrants moving into neighbourhoods that other households were leaving or avoiding, rather than any self-segregating tendency. Problems, including harassment and abuse, were more extreme in neighbourhoods with little previous history of accommodating diversity and difference.

New immigrants were also found to have endured poor conditions in temporary accommodation upon first arriving in the UK, sometimes for many months. There were further problems with more permanent accommodation where basic material needs were often not met and people sometimes struggled to maintain, and in some cases lost, their housing and became homeless.

The research conducted in-depth interviews with Liberian, Pakistani, Polish and Somali immigrants and found that arrival experiences were largely determined by immigration status, the legal rights associated with this status and related opportunities. For example, Asylum Seekers were initially reliant on the National Asylum Support Service for accommodation and subsequently moved into social housing, once granted leave to remain. In contrast, Migrant Workers (who have restricted rights to welfare benefits) were reliant on the private rented sector for a place to live.

Mr. Robinson who conducted the research, said: "Little is known about the realities of life for new immigrants or the consequences for housing markets and social cohesion. This gap in understanding has been filled by speculation, much of which is challenged by our research findings. The new immigrants that we talked to were rarely skilled players of the welfare system. They typically had little choice and few options about where they lived and were often making do in poor conditions."



> ***"Little is known about the realities of life for new immigrants or the consequences for housing markets and social cohesion. This gap in understanding has been filled by speculation, much of which is challenged by our research findings. The new immigrants that we talked to were rarely skilled players of the welfare system. They typically had little choice and few options about where they lived and were often making do in poor conditions."***
>
> **Mr. David Robinson, Co-author of *The housing pathways of new immigrants***

Families face £1,000 bond for relatives to visit UK

Families in the UK whose relatives hail from outside the European Union may be forced to pay a £1,000 guarantee if they want relatives to visit them.

In a new consultation unveiled by the Home Office, there could be a massive shake-up of UK immigration laws.

The document suggests reducing by half the length of tourist visas from six months to three and creating new visas for certain business travellers, such as those involved in the arts.

The ministers believe that the plan will deter visitors from remaining in the country after their permission to stay runs out.



While announcing the consultation, the Government revealed that over one million fingerprints have now been collected from overseas foreign nationals applying to come to the UK as part of its biometrics visas programme. Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said: "Tougher checks abroad mean we keep risky people out. By next spring we'll check everyone's fingerprints when they apply for a visa; now we're proposing a financial guarantee as well - not for everyone, but where we think there's a risk. Our aim is to make the system both more secure, but also to ensure that we maintain the UK's position as a destination of choice for tourists. In 2006, people from overseas spent £15.4 billion in the UK with the tourism industry employing 1.4 million people."

The proposal has been criticised by senior Labour MPs and immigration groups saying the size of bond imposed on non-EU visitors is excessive.

"If you have for example a big wedding in Leicester you are dealing with 20 people coming and therefore if you have to put up a bond of a £1,000 for each, it's a huge amount of money," Keith Vaz, chairman of the home affairs select committee, told BBC Radio 4.

Habib Rahman, chief executive of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants said the charge would be "discriminatory". He said "It will create hardship for families. This means only people with fat wallets will be able to bring their families."

> ***"If you have for example a big wedding in Leicester you are dealing with 20 people coming and therefore if you have to put up a bond of a £1,000 for each, it's a huge amount of money"***
>
> **Mr. Keith Vaz, Chairman of the home affairs select committee**

Employers in education overlook skills and experience of refugees

Schools and colleges in London are missing out on the knowledge, skills and experience of hundreds of potential teachers who have come to the United Kingdom as refugees when they fill job vacancies, the head of a task force has said.

Dr Robert Garnett, co-chair of the Refugee Teachers Task Force, said refugees seeking to work as teaching assistants and in administrative posts also face barriers arising from uncertainty and lack of experience in dealing with the issues among employers.

Dr Garnett said there are similar problems for refugees seeking jobs across the education sector - in higher and further education, and in education organisations. He was speaking at a conference to launch a hub - or information point - to signpost potential employers to expert organisations which can advise on issues including the employment status of refugees. Creation of the hub, which is largely funded by the Department for Children Schools and Families, was among recommendations from the Task Force after a two-year investigation found that the information and support available for refugees is fragmented and uncoordinated. It follows the recent launch of a website for refugees interested in becoming teachers or teaching assistants. The site http://www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk offers a national database and an assessment tool to explore career opportunities in education at all levels by inputting personal experience and qualifications.

Dr Garnett, who is Director of Children's and Young People's Services in Nottinghamshire, said: "Refugees are keen to start a new life in Britain, integrate, find work and contribute to our society. About one in three are highly skilled and knowledgeable with professional qualifications, and could boost the pool of talent available in specialist subjects such as physics and chemistry.

"However, employers may be unaware of them, or overlook them, while refugees are finding it difficult to understand the steps they need to qualify for teaching and other posts, and to identify suitable jobs to apply for. Both are missing out. This initiative is a step towards helping both employers and refugees to find the information and advice they need and open doors to new opportunities." The information hub brings together more than 20 public and voluntary sector organisations in London involved in education, and in assisting refugees. It is managed by Beryl Randall at the Employability Forum.

> ***"Refugees are keen to start a new life in Britain, integrate, find work and contribute to our society. About one in three are highly skilled and knowledgeable with professional qualifications, and could boost the pool of talent available in specialist subjects such as physics and chemistry."***
>
> **Dr Robert Garnett, co-chair of the Refugee Teachers Task Force**

EU ministers: Immigration important for EU's growth

European Union Member States have been urged to target the economic migrants their labour markets need and convince them to integrate.

"Migration has an important role to play to increase growth potential and facilitate adjustment. Immigration, among other factors, has contributed to the strong employment growth in many EU Member States over the last decade and thereby helped to enhancing potential output growth," the EU's Economic and Financial Affairs Council said in Brussels on 4th December 2007.

The Council noted that immigration in a number of countries, has contributed to dealing with bottlenecks in labour markets, helping to contain inflationary pressures and improving competitiveness.

The Council also recognised the importance of migration in EU's population growth saying it "is the most dynamic source of population change." It, however, pointed out that in the long run, migration flows can only partially offset demographic trends on labour supply (declining birth rates and ageing).

The Council said that the economic and fiscal policy dimension of migration is of key importance in the broader analysis of this issue. "The impact of migration on growth potential and employment growth, labour markets, adjustment capacity, productivity, competitiveness and public finances can be significant and should therefore not be neglected. Both highly-skilled and lower-skilled migration can contribute positively to the dynamism of the economy depending on the specific situation and needs of the recipient countries."



The EU's Economic and Financial Affairs Council suggested that "an effective immigration policy should be closely aligned with skills related to labour market requirements."

It said success of integration policies for the immigrant population, and their efforts to integrate are crucial on realising potential gains from immigration.

"Effective and efficient integration policies are needed, in particular in the areas of skills and education, and in ensuring the efficient functioning of the labour market. The benefits of successful integration of migrants, especially in the labour market, should not diminish Member States' efforts in the implementation of reforms. Immigration is no substitute for structural reforms. The potential contribution of migration to growth depends in particular on the continuation of labour market reforms in many Member States, including reforms aimed at improving flexibility, hiring conditions to rapidly fill labour shortages, and incentives to work."

While observing that immigration can contribute to the financing of the public pay-as-you-go pension schemes in the short to medium term, the Commission said the impact of immigration on the long- term sustainability of public finances is at best marginal.

The Commission appealed to the Member States to help reduce the negative effects of "brain drain" in the countries of origin, including further action to facilitate the transfer of remittances more cost effectively. "The temporary or permanent return of migrant workers to their country of origin can be a 'brain gain' as migrants may have acquired additional skills that will enhance growth in the countries of origin, by increasing market knowledge and access, labour productivity and entrepreneurship potential."

Most EU countries delay in adopting common asylum procedures

The European Commission has regretted the delay in transposition of European rules on procedures for granting asylum.

The deadline for transposition of the Asylum Procedures Directive (Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005, on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status) was on 1st December but by then, only six Member States (Bulgaria, Germany, Luxemburg, Austria, Romania and the United Kingdom) had communicated their national measures informing that they transpose fully the Directive. Four other Member States (Belgium, Estonia, France and Lithuania) had notified partial transposition.



Mr. Franco Frattini, Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security

This Directive was the last in a series of legislative instruments adopted in the first stage of harmonisation of asylum laws and policies of Member States. Vice President Franco Frattini, Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, said: "The delay in implementing the Directive sends a worrying message. The obligatory provisions of the Directive have brought to the EU asylum acquis a number of procedural guarantees and rights, which are of paramount importance for genuine refugees seeking protection in Member States. These guarantees shall now be recognised, implemented and, if necessary, enforced by courts within the national asylum systems. This should have already become an every day reality for asylum practitioners in Member States. After the delays in transposition of the Reception Conditions Directive and the Qualification Directive, this delay is indeed disappointing, particularly because it occurs at the time when there is a strong political will to complete the second phase of the Common European Asylum System".

In line with the conclusions of the Tampere European Council, the Directive sets out common minimum standards for asylum procedures in Member States. By bringing into force the Directive, the European Union has undertaken an unprecedented attempt to create a true Common European Procedural Asylum Law aiming at ensuring access to protection for refugees under equivalent conditions across the EU.

While the Directive leaves sufficient space for Member States to preserve their national particularities and to speed up the examination of ill-founded asylum applications, it does contain important safeguards for asylum applicants. These include but are not limited to the opportunity of a personal interview, comprehensive information about the procedure at the start of the process, a motivated decision on the asylum claim, and the Member States' duty to meet special needs of unaccompanied children.

The Directive provides that all asylum decisions in the systems of 26 participating Member States shall be subject to judicial scrutiny. It also enhances the capacity of Member States' asylum authorities to decide quickly on the applications of persons who legitimately seek refugee protection in the EU.

The proper implementation of the obligatory provisions of the Directive is a vital precondition for moving to a common asylum procedure. The Commission plans to take appropriate procedural steps against Member States who have not yet notified their complete implementing measures.

EU "Blue Card" faces opposition

The European Commission's plan to create a "blue card" to attract highly skilled workers from outside the EU is meeting strong resistance from several member states. Germany holds that there is no need for a common EU visa to attract highly skilled workers from outside the EU.

"We have 3.5 million unemployed, which means that companies can find workers within Germany," the German Employment Minister Olaf Scholz said, according to AP.

According to the European Commission, common rules would help solve the shortage of highly-skilled labour across Europe. But Mr. Scholz said that if there was a shortage of skilled workers, then that could be addressed on a national level and according to the job sector concerned.

There was also concern from Spain that a common visa programme could lead to a "brain-drain" from African countries, BBC reported.

Mr Scholz suggested that any EU countries looking to fill gaps should look to member states in Eastern Europe, whose citizens are still barred from working in some member states. Germany is concerned that, if a centralised system goes ahead, Brussels could then dictate the numbers of economic immigrants a country would allow in.

EU home affairs commissioner Franco Frattini has, however, dismissed those concerns by saying "it is not up to Brussels to decide how many engineers Austria or Germany need".

Forum on migration to focus on rights protection

The United Nations-backed meeting titled "Protecting the rights of the world's 200 million migrants - a vital issue for countries of origin, transit and destination" is to be held in October in the Philippines, UN News Service has reported. Briefing reporters at UN Headquarters in New York on the preparations for the second meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Under-Secretary for Migrant Worker Affairs of the Philippines said that discussions would focus on "migrant protection and empowerment for development," issues that are particularly important for countries of origin. "The Manila meeting seeks to discuss practical ways to advance the cause of migrant protection," Esteban B. Conejos Jr. said, adding that the Forum, to be held next October, is not expected to issue recommendations but rather to foster an exchange of ideas on the issue.

Do you need permission to work in the UK?

Your employer will need to know if it is legal for you to work in the UK and whether you need a work permit or visa. You will need to show proof of your right to work.

Who can work in the UK?

If you want to come to the UK to work, whether you can do so depends on who you are. Unless you're a British citizen or a citizen of one of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries, you may need a visa before you travel here. If you have to get a visa, you'll need to be cleared by officials at a British Overseas Mission in your country of origin. Once cleared, the entry clearance certificate, or visa, will be put into your passport or travel document.

Accession state workers

If you're from one of the new European Union member, or 'accession', states you may need to register with the Home Office under the Worker Registration Scheme within one month of starting a job. The countries affected are: Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, The Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania.

Workers from Bulgaria and Romania are restricted in the sorts of work they can do. However, you don't need to register to work in the UK if you're: self-employed and or from Cyprus or Malta. There are a few other circumstances when you wouldn't need to register if you're from one of the accession states. As an agency or temporary worker you'll need to register to work within a month of starting work.

Students

If you're an international student you may not need permission to work here when you're studying. If your home country is in the EEA, or you're a Swiss national, you can work without restrictions on the type or amount of work you do. Otherwise, you should check the visa stamp in your passport. If it says 'prohibited' you can't work in the UK. If it grants you leave to enter or remain in the UK as a student, you can work here provided you:

- don't work more than 20 hours a week during term time, unless the employment is part of your studies or is an internship
- don't engage in business, are not self-employed and don't provide services as a professional sportsperson or entertainer
- don't take a permanent full-time position

Highly skilled migrants

The Highly Skilled Migrant programme is designed to let highly skilled and qualified workers come to the UK to work or become self-employed. If you're allowed to enter the UK this way you don't need a specific job offer. Under this scheme you are issued entry clearance for 12 months, after which you can apply to stay for longer, but must remain in work/self-employment.

What proof an employer will need

If you're from an EEA country, you'll need to show a prospective employer your passport, national identity card or Home Office Residence Permit.

Employers can face unlimited fines if they employ illegal workers, so they need to make sure that no one they employ is working in the UK illegally. However, to protect themselves against discrimination laws they should treat all job applicants equally. So don't be offended if you're asked to prove your nationality, even if it's 'obvious'. Even UK nationals will be asked to provide proof of their nationality. If you don't have a passport or haven't access to it, there are other combinations of documents that you can use as proof of your identification. Please see the website http://www.workingintheuk.gov.uk/working_in_the_uk/en/homepage/your_status.html for a list of those that are accepted.



Work permits

There are a number of schemes and programmes for people who want to work in the UK. If you're not from an EEA country or Switzerland, you're likely to need a work permit to work here.

There are six separate groups for ordinary work permit applications:

- business and commercial
- training and work experience
- sportspeople and entertainers
- student internships
- general agreement on trade in services (GATS)
- hospitality and food processing (sector-based schemes)

How to apply for a permit and how long it lasts for

You can't apply for a permit yourself - you'll need the UK-based employer who wants to employ you to do it for you. How long your permit lasts for will depend on the work you do and the type of permit applied for. For example, business and commercial work permits can be issued for up to five years, but sector-based permits are only issued for up to 12 months.

By Direct.gov.uk

Pre-employment checks

When you start a new job, your employer may wish to carry out a number of checks to see if you're suitable - but you have certain rights during this process.

What your employer will want to see

Identification documents

Before you start working for a new employer they'll probably want proof that you have the right to work in the UK. You'll need to produce either a document or a combination of documents to confirm you're eligible (for example, a passport, a visa or a work permit if you're a non-national). The employer should tell you which documents you need to show them. The documents you need will depend on whether you're a worker, employee or self-employed.

References

A job offer may depend on the employer getting a reference from your current employer, and maybe previous employers too.

Types of checks

The types of checks an employer carries out will depend on the job.

Background checks

Where a job is security-related, an employer may want to carry out background checks. For a few financial services roles, these may also cover your credit history. The employer should treat all job applicants in the same way during the recruitment process.

Equal opportunities monitoring

There's no law against collecting information on race and ethnicity when recruiting. Many organisations choose to in order to monitor the effectiveness of their equal opportunities policy. However, you don't have to give this information if you don't want to. If you think you're being singled out for more detailed background checks because of your ethnicity, you can complain to an Employment Tribunal under race discrimination laws. An employer mustn't treat you differently because you're 'foreign looking' or have a 'foreign-sounding' name. An employer also mustn't treat you differently because of your sex, marital status, sexual orientation or religion. For example, if you're a woman, you shouldn't be asked if you're planning to have children soon, as this could be used to discriminate in favour of a male applicant.

Health checks

You may have to have a health check if it's a legal requirement of the job (for example, having an eye test for a job as a driver). You should be told about any health checks in your offer letter. Your employer may ask for a medical report, but if they want one, they must have policies for keeping it secure. If you're disabled, your disability shouldn't be used as a reason for singling you out for a health test without good reason. If you are, and you don't get the job as a result, you can complain to an Employment Tribunal. It's unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably because of their disability. This doesn't mean that it will always be unlawful for an employer to ask a disabled person to have a health check, even if other candidates are not asked. It will depend on the nature of your disability and the needs of the job.

Checking qualifications

If you need particular qualifications, training or licences for a job, your employer may ask for proof that you have them. They should let you know if they're carrying out these checks and if they intend to keep copies of any relevant documents on file.

Criminal records checks

Some employers will want to check whether you have a criminal record. You will have to disclose any convictions if you're applying for a job:

- as an accountant or barrister
- in the police
- working with children or vulnerable adults
- relating to the administration of justice or financial regulation

Employers must be registered with the Criminal Records Bureau to carry out criminal records checks. Depending on the level of check, the fee is either £31 or £36. The employer can ask you to meet the cost.

Withdrawing a job offer

An employer can withdraw a job offer even after you've accepted it if any check on you has produced unsatisfactory results, so long as you were made aware before you accepted the job that the offer was on conditions.

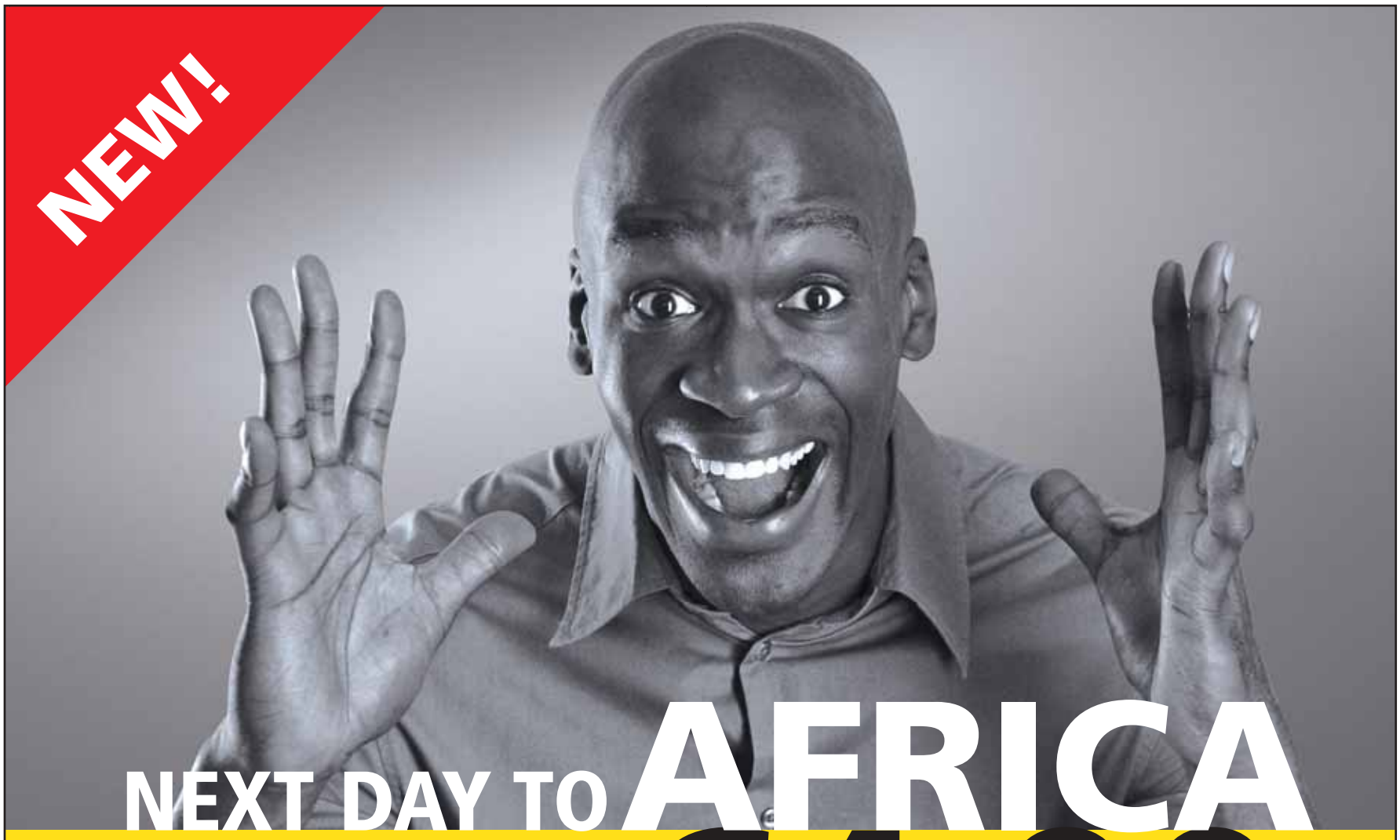
Data protection issues

Your employer should only get information which is necessary and relevant to the check which they want to carry out. Your employer will also have to make sure that any use of personal information about you complies with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Your employment records must be kept secure and, unless retained in accordance with statutory requirements, be securely disposed of when you leave your employer. You have the right to see any information held on you. An employer must let you see this within 40 days of your request and may charge you a fee of up to £10.

Where to get help

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) offers free, confidential and impartial advice on employment rights issues. You can call the Acas help line on 08457 474 747 from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm Monday to Friday. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can provide free and impartial advice. You can find your local CAB office in the phone book or online.If you are a member of a trade union, you can get help, advice and support from them.

By Direct.gov.uk



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news africa & nouvelles

Europe fails to secure trade deal with Africa

Portugal: The objectives proposed for EU-Africa summit were fulfilled



The EU-Africa Summit failed to reach an agreement on the trade deals - known as Economic Partnership Agreements - proposed to replace existing agreements which expired at the end of last year.

"We are not talking any more about EPAs, we've rejected them," said President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal.

According to BBC reports, although some east African nations have already agreed to the deals, many other countries argue that they will damage their fragile economies. The deals - to replace historical agreements which gave former European colonies preferential trade terms - demand that African countries open their markets to European goods in order to keep tariff-free EU access for their own exports. The summit was seen as an EU attempt to regain lost ground in Africa and combat growing Chinese influence in the continent. But President Wade said that "Europe is close to losing the battle of competition in Africa".

Portugal, the hosts of the EU-Africa Summit lauded the summit as heralding a new relationship of equals. "All the objectives proposed for this summit were fulfilled," declared Mr. Luís Amado, minister of state and foreign affairs and president of the Council of Ministers of the EU, at the end of the first day of the EU-Africa Summit work sessions.

Mr. Amado said the sessions were held in an environment of great cordiality and affection, in a scenario that is quite different from the one encountered during the I Summit that took place in Cairo. "It was possible to break the ice that lasted for quite a few years and stop talking in terms of colonisers and colonised people," he said.

He also stressed the fact that it is now possible for Europe and Africa to look into the future and face together common challenges. "The debates were held in a very constructive atmosphere and all the objectives proposed for this summit by the Portuguese presidency of the EU were reached," added Mr. Amado.

> ***"The situation in Zimbabwe damages the image of the new Africa."***
>
> **German Chancellor Angela Merkel**

It was, however, clear that the EU-Africa Summit was overshadowed by the presence of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and trade.

Portugal gave in to African leaders and invited Mr. Mugabe to the summit. His presence made British Prime Minister Gordon Brown boycott the summit.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel attacked President Mugabe saying: "The situation in Zimbabwe damages the image of the new Africa."

But Merkel's harsh words met resistance from African leaders. According to www.chinaview.cn reports, South African President Thabo Mbeki, who spoke immediately after Merkel, reportedly commented that Merkel was out of touch with the situation on the ground. President Mbeki reportedly told the session that African leaders are fully conscious of the importance of good governance and human rights. "I must emphasize that we are doing this of our own accord, driven by the fundamental interests of our peoples, having drawn the necessary lessons from our own experience," he added.

Senegalese President Wade echoed President Mbeki's views. "I listened to the chancellor and I respect her... but she was speaking based on information most of which is inaccurate," www.chinaview.cn quoted President Wade to have said.

President Mugabe castigated Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark as the "gang of four" for speaking on behalf of Britain at the EU-Africa Summit. In his intervention on the debate on peace and security, President Mugabe said Africa had already taken necessary steps to put up the required infrastructure, The Herald reported. "We know what the challenges are, what the strategies should be, and what the solutions should involve. Help in marshalling resources is what we need. Meetings such as this should do less of telling Africa what it already knows, and more of addressing this question of resources," President Mugabe said.

He noted that "Unbiased observers have commented very favourably on the state of democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law in Zimbabwe. Why then the demonisation from Europe? Because Zimbabwe dared to repossess its land, which had been stolen by the colonialists at the point of the gun. Our fight is therefore with the former colonial power in Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom."

President Mugabe said his country has no quarrel with the four European countries that made hostile interventions against Zimbabwe at the EU-Africa summit. "The fiction they parade is either the result of British propaganda or perhaps a misguided sense of racial solidarity with the white farmers in my country," Mr. Mugabe said.



> ***"We know what the challenges are, what the strategies should be, and what the solutions should involve. Help in marshalling resources is what we need. Meetings such as this should do less of telling Africa what it already knows, and more of addressing this question of resources." "Unbiased observers have commented very favourably on the state of democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law in Zimbabwe. Why then the demonisation from Europe? Because Zimbabwe dared to repossess its land, which had been stolen by the colonialists at the point of the gun. Our fight is therefore with the former colonial power in Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom."***
>
> **President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe**

Archbishop Sentamu cuts up his dog collar in live TV protest at Mugabe

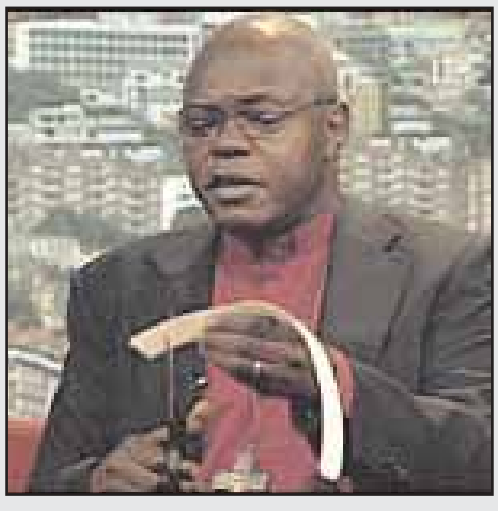
The Archbishop of York Dr. John Sentamu has called upon the people of Britain to unite in their opposition to the Government of Robert Mugabe and to come together to act on Darfur.

In a dramatic interview on BBC One's Andrew Marr Show on 9th December, Dr. Sentamu removed his clerical collar and cut it up into pieces live on air saying that President Mugabe had "taken people's identity and cut it to pieces" prompting the Archbishop to do the same.

> ***"[Mugabe] has actually taken a country really into a sheer chaos and he's been so brutal that in the long run the world has got to say, if the South African people (and leaders) won't do it, something's got to happen"***
>
> **The Archbishop of York Dr. John Sentamu**

The Archbishop said that his clerical collar, also known as a dog collar, "is what I wear to identify myself, that I'm a clergyman".

"You know what Mr Mugabe has done? He's taken people's identity, and literally, if you don't mind, cut it to pieces, and in the end there's nothing."



Speaking as he used a pair of scissors to cut up his collar, the Archbishop declared: "As far as I'm concerned, I'm not going to wear a dog collar, until Mr Mugabe is gone".

The Archbishop criticised African leaders at the Africa-EU summit for their support of Mr. Mugabe whist the people of the country continued to suffer.

Dr. Sentamu called on people to "pray, march and protest" about the situation in Zimbabwe and in Darfur. He criticised South African President Thabo Mbeki for his failure to put pressure on Mr. Mugabe who had turned his country from a "bread basket into a basket case".

"[Mugabe] has actually taken a country really into a sheer chaos and he's been so brutal that in the long run the world has got to say, if the South African people (and leaders) won't do it, something's got to happen," said the Archbishop.

EU, African leaders agree to forge new partnership



African and European Union leaders pose for family photo during the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, Portugal

The second European Union (EU)-Africa Summit which brought together heads of state and government in Lisbon, Portugal endorsed a joint strategy aimed at a new partnership between the two continents. While the European and African leaders signed a pact to promote free trade and democracy, they failed to make a breakthrough on formal trade agreements between the two continents.

The joint strategic partnership has four objectives. One of the objectives is to reinforce and elevate the Africa-EU political partnership to address issues of common concern. This includes strengthening of institutional ties and addressing common challenges, in particular peace and security, migration and development, and a clean environment. To this end, both sides will treat Africa as one and upgrade the Africa-EU political dialogue to enable a strong and sustainable continent-to-continent partnership, with the AU and the EU at the centre. The strategy also aims at strengthening and promoting peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialisation, and regional and continental integration in Africa, and ensuring that all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are met in all African countries by the year of 2015.

Another objective of this partnership is to jointly promote and sustain a system of effective multilateralism, with strong, representative and legitimate institutions. This includes the reform of the United Nations (UN) system and of other key international institutions, and to address global challenges and common concerns. The partnership is to help address issues such as human rights, including children's rights and gender equality, fair trade, migration, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other pandemics, climate change, energy security and sustainability, terrorism, the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons, and knowledge-based society issues such as ICT, science, technology and innovation.

Africa and the EU agreed to empower non-state actors and create conditions to enable them to play an active role in development, democracy building, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

EU and the African countries agreed that in order to achieve the four objectives, they'll have to move away from a traditional relationship and forge a real partnership characterized by equality and the pursuit of common objectives. The joint strategy requires Europeans and Africans to promote more accurate images of each other and encourage mutual understanding between the peoples and cultures of the continents. The African and EU leaders noted that one of the main priorities of their partnership is "to help Africa improve its productive capacities, move up the value-added scale and become less dependent on raw materials and simple processed products" terming this "the best way to avoid a deterioration of the terms of trade and participate in, and benefit from, the global economy."

Africa and the EU agreed to work together with other international partners to promote fair trade. They agreed that migration and mobility "should be treated as largely positive phenomena" and said they'll "pursue and implement policies and programmes that address all relevant dimensions of migration, including circular migration. These efforts will aim to promote and better manage legal migration and mobility with a view to supporting the socioeconomic development of both countries of origin and countries of destination."

The leaders agreed to work together to deepen their frank and constructive dialogue in taking forward the implementation of the Declaration adopted in November 2006 at the Tripoli EU-Africa Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development, and ongoing regional processes, which provide a comprehensive agenda for common action in the area of migration and development. "Partners will foster the linkages between migration and development, maximise the development impact of remittances, facilitate the involvement of diasporas/migrant communities in development processes, promote the protection of the human rights of migrants, assist and protect asylum seekers and refugees and help countries of origin, transit and destination in Africa build capacity to better manage migration," they said in the joint Africa-EU Strategy.

They also agreed to jointly fight illegal migration and human trafficking. "Africa and the EU will pay particular attention to brain drain in sensitive sectors like health and education," they said.

Unicef: More must be done to make the world fit for children

There has been a dramatic improvement in reducing the mortality rate for children under the age of five, the UN children's agency, Unicef, has said.

In a new report "Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children Statistical Review", Unicef notes that mortality rate for children under the age of five dropped below 10 million in 2006 for the first time on record.

And there were "major improvements" in measles immunisation, malaria prevention, supplements of vitamin A, which can help prevent common illnesses. It also noted that exclusive breastfeeding rose markedly in sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade - in some countries by more than 20 per cent. Unicef has, however, said more work is needed to make the world fit for children by 2015. It said that beyond the encouraging news on child survival, "Progress for Children" finds less improvement on the goal of expanding treatment coverage for major childhood diseases such as pneumonia and malaria.

More work is also needed to combat HIV/AIDS, as the number of people living with HIV continues to rise globally. In particular, only 11 per cent of pregnant women living with HIV in low and middle-income countries receive treatment to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to their infants.

The report shows that the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting has declined slowly but steadily during the past 15 years, and older girls and younger women are less likely to have undergone any form of this harmful traditional practice than older women. It also shows that child marriage is becoming less common in some countries, but the pace of change is often slow. Unicef estimates that 158 million children between ages 5 and 14 are engaged in child labour.

"Overall, [the report's] findings reinforce Unicef's conviction that the combined efforts of governments, international organisations, civil society, local communities and the private sector are making a difference and delivering results for children," Ann M Veneman, Unicef's Executive Director, said.

"Yet it also reveals that much more must be done. The 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals is fast approaching. We need to accelerate progress towards these goals and approach them with a common sense of urgency."

> ***"Overall, [the report's] findings reinforce Unicef's conviction that the combined efforts of governments, international organisations, civil society, local communities and the private sector are making a difference and delivering results for children. Yet it also reveals that much more must be done. The 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals is fast approaching. We need to accelerate progress towards these goals and approach them with a common sense of urgency."***
>
> ***Ms. Ann M Veneman, Unicef's Executive Director***

Global Corruption Barometer 2007

Poor families hit hardest by bribery

By Stephen Ogongo

Demand for bribes continues to affect poor families in developed and developing countries. In Africa, 42% of people paid a bribe to obtain a service, the Transparency international's Global Corruption Barometer 2007 report shows.

Africa features as the region most affected by bribery, though the continent registered a slight decrease from 47 per cent in 2006 to 42 per cent in 2007. The public opinion survey also found that citizens in countries across the globe continue to see political parties and parliaments as the institutions most compromised by corruption.

The 2007 Global Corruption Barometer "made it clear that too often, people must part with their hard-earned money to pay for services that should be free", said Transparency International Chair Huguette Labelle. "And they do not see enough commitment when they look to their governments and leaders. We are heartened though, that the public is increasingly demanding the accountability of the very institutions that most affect their lives, as this is a powerful driver of change."

According to the report, the countries with the highest level of petty bribery are Albania, Cambodia, Cameroon, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania and Senegal, where at least 30 per cent of respondents reported having paid bribes.

It also shows that "the police and the judiciary in many countries around the world are part of a cycle of corruption, demanding bribes from citizens," said Transparency International Managing Director, Cobus de Swardt. "This troubling finding means that corruption is interfering with the basic right to equal treatment before the law."

> ***"Turning promises into action is essential if anti-corruption efforts are to have an impact on the lives of ordinary people. Governments are key to making good on commitments to fighting corruption. But governments are not alone in their responsibility. We need to see concerted action from civil society and the private sector too"***
>
> **Transparency International Chair Huguette Labelle**



Africans, especially Ghanaians and Nigerians, were decidedly optimistic, believing that future levels of corruption will fall.

"Turning promises into action is essential if anti-corruption efforts are to have an impact on the lives of ordinary people. Governments are key to making good on commitments to fighting corruption. But governments are not alone in their responsibility. We need to see concerted action from civil society and the private sector too," concluded TI Chair Labelle. "People are punished by bribery and disgruntled by the corruption they believe plagues key public institutions and services. They deserve a future without corruption. The Global Corruption Barometer 2007 is a wake-up call - a reminder that people around the world are increasingly demanding an end to corruption and its terrible cost."

Violence against women undermines democracy

Violence and abuse against women are a betrayal to the struggle for freedom and democracy, South Africa's Social Development Deputy Minister Dr Jean Swanson-Jacobs has said. "We did not fight for equality so that women can become society's punching bags," she said.

Ms Swanson-Jacobs said South Africa's government seeks to uphold the rights and restore the dignity of the most vulnerable in our society, BuaNews reported.

The deputy minister expressed concern about the increasing number of incidences of violence directed at women and children.

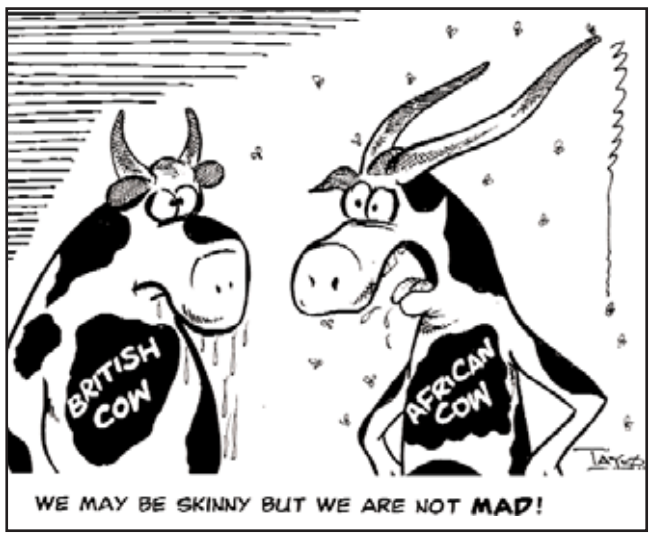


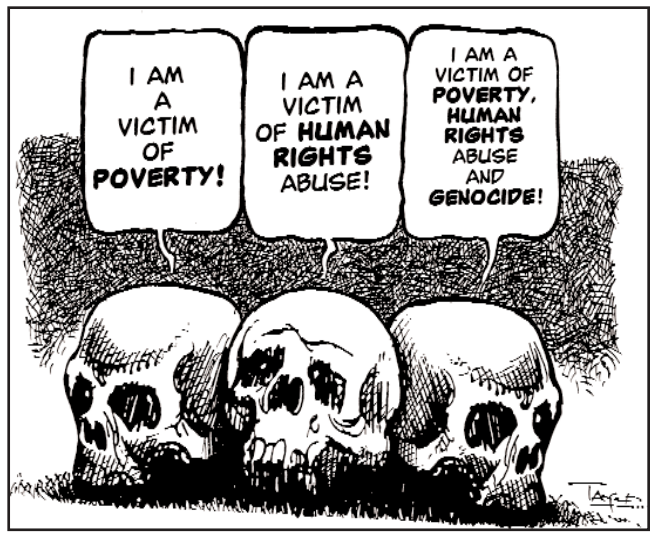
She said the incidences of violence perpetrated against women and children have reached unprecedented levels. "Our view in government is that there is a clear link between violence against women and HIV infection," the deputy minister said. She added that socio-economic factors, unequal gender and sexual relations, unprotected sex, and alcohol and drug abuse are among the factors that have increased the negative impact of HIV and AIDS.

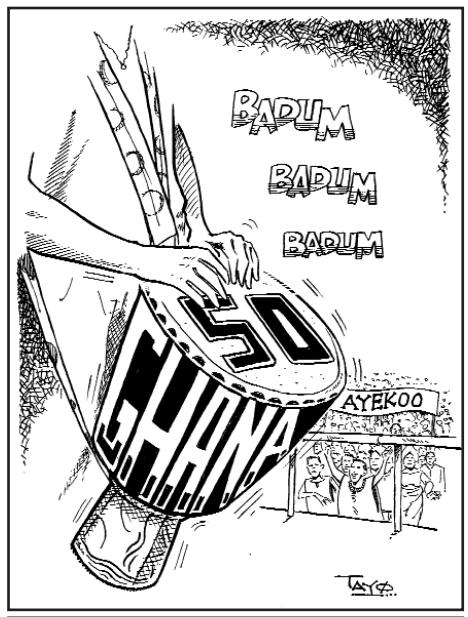
"We as a nation will be engaging in various activities, events and programmes aimed at raising awareness around the scourge of violence and abuse of our women and children," she said.

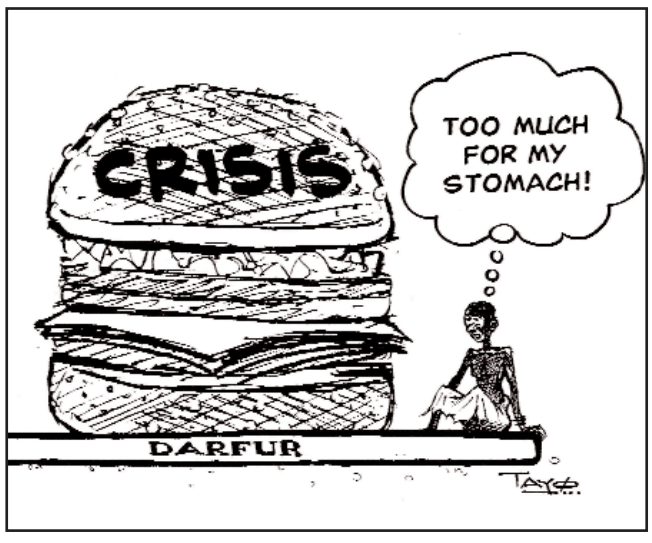
AFRICA IN 2007 by TAYO Fatunla

www.tayofatunla.com













Women asked to play leading role against Aids

Women have been asked to play a leading role in curbing further spread of HIV and AIDS t in Africa.

Ghana's Deputy Health Minister, Abraham Dwumah Odoom said through expanded education and empowerment in women's lives, women can halt the soaring rate of the disease, BuaNews reported.

"We need to put the power to prevent HIV in the hands of women by putting in place tools that will allow women to protect themselves, since they are the most vulnerable group with a high infection rate," he said.

In her speech to the International African HIV and AIDS conference in Accra in early December, Mr Dwumah said women needed to be empowered to be capable of negotiating safe sex, regardless of their socio-economic, religious or cultural status.

"This is true, whether the woman is faithful and a married mother, a sex worker, no matter where she lives, who she is or what she does, a woman should never need her partner's permission to save her own life," he stressed.

The theme of the conference was "Strengthening Interventions Towards the Elimination of HIV and AIDS in Africa". It was attended by about 150 representatives of National AIDS



Commissions, non-governmental organisations working to fight HIV and AIDS, researchers, Persons Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHAs) and media advocates from all over Africa.

Mr. Dwumah Odoom noted that the current preventive strategy of Abstinence, Being faithful and Condom usage (ABC) has not yielded much impact on behavioural changes. He said women must be empowered to manage their own sex lives and seen as a major option towards prevention of HIV and AIDS.

Ghana's Deputy Health Minister said Africa must take drastic steps to halt the pandemic, as current statistics on HIV and AIDS should send great shivers down the spine of all, especially African leaders, to push for stronger leadership roles and commitment towards the challenges ahead.

He said Ghana currently had a national prevalence rate of 2.2 percent, which might seem low compared with percentages of other West African countries, yet those countries started with the same trend.

He said the governments cannot bear alone the burden of putting in place programmes to stem the tide of HIV and AIDS and called for involvement of civil society organisations.

Mr. Dwumah Odoom noted that while play should play a crucial role on HIV/AIDS prevention, the provision, care and treatment through a reliable supply of anti-retroviral and other medically essential medicines with guaranteed long-term affordability should also be a crucial step to ensure successful treatment.

This would include encouraging local production through voluntary licensing and technology transfer in countries with domestic drug manufacturing capacity and the purchase of medicines from lowest cost suppliers, including generic companies, to maximise the use of the available financial resources.

"It is critical that long-term sustainable solution to the crisis of lack of access to medicine be developed," he said.

"We need to put the power to prevent HIV in the hands of women by putting in place tools that will allow women to protect themselves, since they are the most vulnerable group with a high infection rate"

Ghana's Deputy Health Minister, Abraham Dwumah Odoom

Wayo: Ghana needs visionary & radical leadership

The leader of the United Renaissance Party (URP), Mr. Charles Kofi Wayo, has asked Ghanaians to vote out the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in this year's general elections and pave way for a visionary and radical leadership of the country, Ghanaian Chronicle reported.

He advised Ghanaians to develop psychological orientation and revolutionarise their minds to have a radical change if they don't want to continue to live in the quagmire of problems, including abject poverty and unemployment.

Mr. Kofi Wayo who is aspiring to lead the nation on the ticket of the URP, told Ghanaian Chronicle that both the NPP and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) have exploited the masses to their advantage.

"We have the most "educated illiterates" ruling the country without practical knowledge, and unless we change our minds and have radical leaders, they would continue to rule and exploit us."

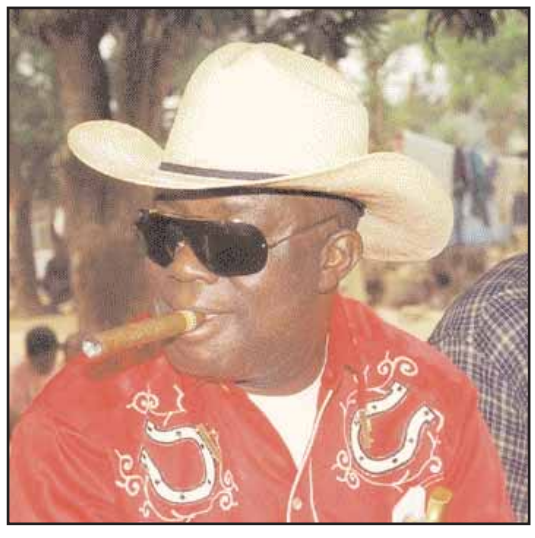
Mr. Kofi Wayo holds that none of the two political parties have the practical abilities to deliver the nation from its economic doldrums, and the capacity to distance itself from international dependency.

"The URP is going to be the only party that would not depend on international donors. We have the brains to use the nation's natural resources," he said.

Mr. Kofi Wayo doesn't see the importance of having many party structures across the nation. "Both NPP and NDC claim to have offices in the country but they were not able to deliver. The lives of Ghanaians are still worse under them. There is no portable water, people cannot afford three square meals a day, and they cannot pay their medical bill and school fees. What is needed now, are practical ideas," he stressed.

"How can you say that the economy is improving when you don't have light for almost a year, to process raw materials?"

United Renaissance Party (URP), Mr. Charles Kofi Wayo



© GHP PHOTO

Commenting on the extravagant campaign of some NPP presidential aspirants, he said it proved that government officials robbed the nation to satisfy their interests.

"It shows that the black man cannot think. You don't have light and water, yet you can have money to be splashing like that. It tells you that these people are not concerned about the citizens."

Mr. Wayo told the Ghanaian Chronicle that it was unbelievable that the NPP, which could not raise money in the 1992 and 1996 elections, could now raise money to engage in such extravagant campaigns.

He said Ghana needed a leader with robust and practical ideas like him to save the country from its current situation. "How can you say that the economy is improving when you don't have light for almost a year, to process raw materials," he queried.

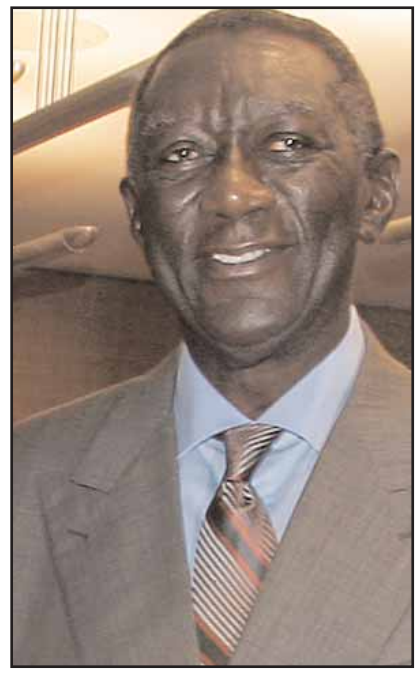
Kufuor asks local authorities to ensure decentralization and democracy

President John Agyekum Kufuor has urged local government authorities to develop appropriate and adequate capacity in the enforcement of bye-laws, environmental management, solid and liquid waste, land use and revenue mobilization to enable the country to achieve real decentralization, GNA reported.

President Kufuor said the increase in the District Assemblies Common Fund from 5 to 7 percent should provide assemblies and other local government authorities with additional resources for tackling the problems.

He praised the steps already taken by his government to promote good governance, community participation in decision-making and improve services within the community. He pointed out that efficiency in public administration had always been the cherished goal of government and said government would be pleased if the citizenry were able to access services at little or no trouble at all.

"An effective Local Government Service is critical to the realization of this goal. It must coordinate its activities that nobody has to travel outside the community for a service that, with imagination, can be provided at everybody's doorstep," President Kufuor said.



President John Kufuor

The President noted that government expected very much from the Local Government Service and urged the Ministry of Local Government to ensure that District Assemblies adhered to the newly introduced financial procedures and practices for addressing real and perceived financial weaknesses.

He said important reforms were already in progress to enhance decentralization, which established comprehensive decentralization policy framework, fiscal decentralization design, reform of the local government law and the composite budget.

Fear of violence blocks access to HIV/AIDS services in Zambia

By PlusNews

The high level of gender-based violence in Zambia is preventing many women from accessing HIV/AIDS services, according to a new report by global watchdog Human Rights Watch.

The researchers warned that the ability of Zambian women to get HIV/AIDS counselling, testing and information has been "seriously impaired by the perceived and real control of men [particularly intimate partners] over their lives".

In the report, "Hidden In The Mealie Meal: Gender-Based Abuses and Women's HIV Treatment in Zambia", the New-York based lobby group found that many women were taking life-prolonging antiretroviral (ARV) medication without informing their husbands, and were forced to resort to extreme measures to hide their medication.

"Some of the women testified that they dug holes in the ground or in flowerpots to hide ARVs. These women then retrieved the medicine - which they must take for the rest of their lives - twice every day and then hid it again," said the report, which documented various abuses that obstruct Zambian women's ability to start, and adhere to, HIV treatment regimens.

According to UNAIDS, about 1.6 million of the 11.7 million population are HIV positive, 57 percent of them women, but only 100,000 people are receiving ARVs from the government's free treatment programme.

Zambia, which has one of the world's highest HIV infection rates, has set ambitious targets for rapidly scaling up HIV/AIDS treatment as part of its commitment to ensuring universal access to AIDS treatment by 2010, but researchers say women's unequal status will greatly undermine the success of the programmes.

Nada Ali, author of "Hidden In The Mealie Meal", told IRIN/PlusNews: "Government is paying little attention to the gender dimension of treatment, especially the impact of entrenched discrimination and gender-based violence and abuse. This must change if HIV treatment is to be provided equitably."

Hiding the medicine

A woman identified only as Maria T is quoted as saying in the report: "I fear to tell my husband [about my HIV status] because I fear that he can shout [at me] and divorce me. He uses bad language with me.

"I hide the medicine, I put it on a plate, add mealie meal [maizemeal], so when he takes the lid off he does not find it [the medication]. When I take the medicine I have to make sure that he is outside. That is why I forgot to take medicine four times since I started treatment. Last year he hit me around the back with his fist."

Elizabeth Mataka, a UN special envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, called for concerted efforts in addressing domestic violence, and stressed that women needed socio-economic empowerment to overcome the problem.

"It is indisputable that domestic violence is one of the serious drivers of the spread of HIV/AIDS in this country, and at its bedrock is the issue of poor empowerment and economic status of women," Mataka told IRIN/PlusNews.

Women are often the victims of unequal property distribution in divorces, and suffer property-grabbing by in-laws on the death of a spouse, which analysts say impedes their ability to lead decent lives or adhere to AIDS treatment.

Under the customary law of most of Zambia's 72 ethnic groups, women have lesser property rights than men, and the fear of losing homes, land and other property usually keeps women in abusive marriages.

"Time has come for concrete actions that will directly impact the lives of the women on the ground. There are no two ways about it: we just have to give our women enough resources for them to become independent of all abusive men," Mataka said.

Nelson Mwape, of the Zambian Chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA], pointed out that of the 874 cases of domestic violence recorded by the YWCA since 2006, 427 have tested HIV positive. About 75 percent of all cases of abuse involve husbands and relatives, which is why we are now saying, 'no home is safe anymore for both women and children'."

Not enough legal protection

Women's groups have charged that the Zambian government has not done enough to guarantee the rights of women: the country has no specific law criminalising gender-based violence, and the penal code does not cover marital rape or abuse.

Elizabeth Simwanda, national coordinator of women entrepreneurship at the International Labour Organisation offices in Zambia, called for legislation that would reduce cases of domestic violence.

"We are very much interested to see government enact a specific law on gender violence, so that all culprits can face the wrath of the law. The lack of specific legislation on gender-based violence has contributed to high numbers of cases of women being abused; it's easier to deal with these cases when you have the law in place," Simwanda said.

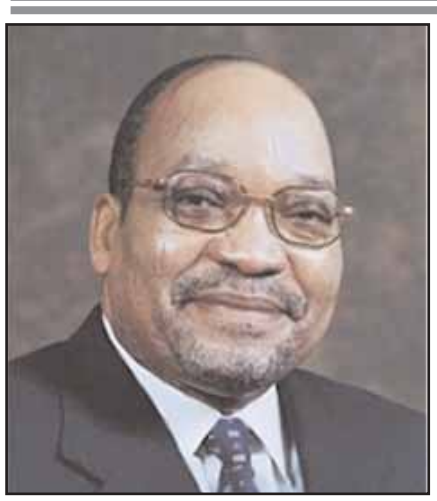


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Women's unequal status will greatly undermine the success of the HIV/AIDS programme

The permanent secretary in the ministry of gender, Matondo Yeta, admitted that "our socio-cultural set-up does not favour reporting of cases of domestic violence. Victims are usually made to fear that by reporting, the situation might become worse for them; that they might lose their marriages or that their children might suffer."

The government has begun a process of incorporating all international human rights instruments to which Zambia is party into domestic legislation. "Government is also working on formulating specific legislation on gender-based violence and we hope it would be completed by the end of next year [2008]," Yeta told IRIN/PlusNews. "This will protect women against violence from men."



Mr. Zacob Zuma, the new ANC leader

Zuma replaces Mbeki as ANC leader

Mr. Zacob Zuma has been elected the new African National Congress (ANC) president. He defeated South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki by receiving more than 60% of the delegates' votes at the leadership conference in December.

By becoming the leader of ANC, Mr Zuma will now become the frontrunner to take over as president when Mr Mbeki stands down in 2009.

Mr. Zuma said the new National Executive Committee will do its best to build on the legacy of all past ANC presidents.

The new ANC president said he had been elected to succeed Mr. Mbeki whom he described as "a comrade, friend and brother." He said they have known and worked together for over 30 years. "I must confess I never thought that the two of us would one day compete for the same position in the ANC! However, contesting positions does not make us enemies."

He urged the party members to put the conference behind them and continue to work together to unite and build a stronger ANC. "There is likely to be anxiety regarding the existence of two Presidents' one of state and the other of the party. There is no reason for uncertainty or fear in any quarter," he assured.

Mr. Zuma said the ANC leaders will be guided by the party's policies and resolutions made at the conference. "ANC policies, including economic policies that have been adopted at this conference do not indicate a fundamental shift from the policies that the ANC has adopted since it has come into power."

He asked the domestic and international business community and other sectors not be worried of the change in party leadership.

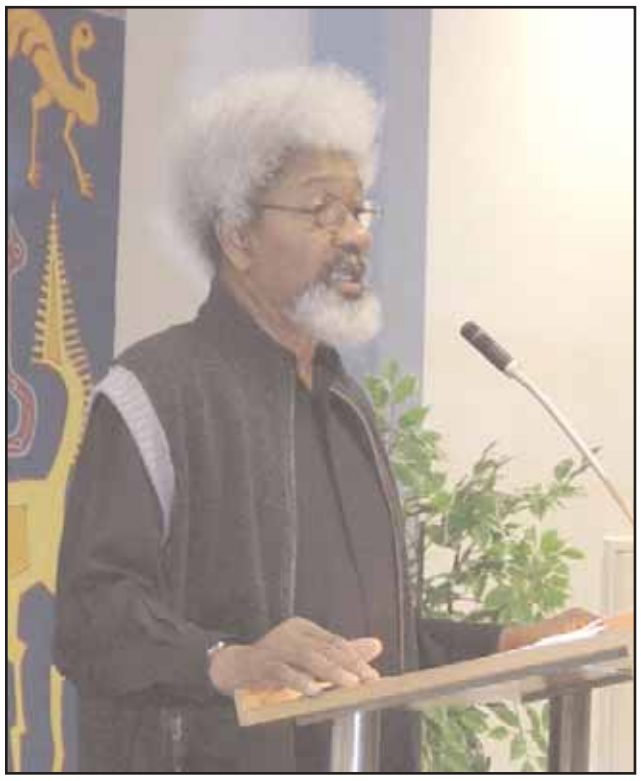
"We have made it clear that we need more foreign and domestic investment. We also encourage our domestic business community to invest in the local economy to encourage the international counterparts to do the same. We also remain fully committed to broad based black economic empowerment, to increase participation in our economy," Mr. Zuma said.

Soyinka calls for neutral inquiry into unresolved political murders

Nobel laureate Prof Wole Soyinka has endorsed President Umaru Yar'Adua's directive that unresolved political murders should be reopened. He, however, cautioned that the police are unfit for the assignment.

The Action Congress (AC) also applauded the directive as it emerged that the police may have killed as many as 10,000 Nigerians extra-judicially in the past eight years, Independentngonline.com reported.

In a letter read on his behalf at an event commemorating the Human Rights Day and the 49th birthday anniversary of Ralph Uwazuruike, leader of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Prof Soyinka called for an independent commission of inquiry to probe the killings. He said that by involving the police, "we might end up again with boastful murderers being arraigned for attempts to disturb the peace," adding that "Perhaps, an Independent Commission of inquiry into these killings might be the way to begin laying a foundation on which the police have no choice, but to build their cases."



Nigerian government recently ordered a fresh police inquiry into unresolved murder cases since 1999. They include murders of former federal Attorney General and Justice Minister, Bola Ige; former Anambra State Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Barnabas Igwe; and many other politicians and government critics.

> ***"Need one reiterate the truism that the prime member of all fundamental human rights is the right to life? Even the most unsavoury politician is entitled to that basic right, yet in the years of the prior incumbency, this nation witnessed an unprecedented level of violation of that right, carried out with impunity, with prime suspects treated like royalty and even catapulted straight into the exalted space of lawgivers, right from prison."***
>
> **Nobel laureate Prof Wole Soyinka**

Prof Soyinka frowned at the prevailing system in Nigeria which shields human rights violators from facing the law.

He condemned gross human rights abuse in Nigeria saying "Need one reiterate the truism that the prime member of all fundamental human rights is the right to life? Even the most unsavoury politician is entitled to that basic right, yet in the years of the prior incumbency, this nation witnessed an unprecedented level of violation of that right, carried out with impunity, with prime suspects treated like royalty and even catapulted straight into the exalted space of lawgivers, right from prison."

In an apparent reference to the Ibadan Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, Prof Soyinka said: "The mockery of the law continues in cynical forms. Impunity mounts impunity as a notorious barbarian, long overdue for arraignment on multiple crimes, is escorted far from the scenes of his crimes and accused of nothing more alarming than attempting to disturb the peace? Sacking a legislative house in broad day light? Attacking lawyers even within court premises? Kidnapping political opponents and stripping them naked in public? Unleashing violence on a place of worship for the sole purpose of hijacking a motor vehicle? Destabilising a state agency set up as a protective umbrella against fake, killer drugs? Attempting to disturb the peace? Someone should please wake me up when this excruciating charade is over."

Bush praises Yar'Adua's commitment to reform Nigeria

US President George W. Bush has praised Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua saying he is impressed by his commitment to reform the country. During their meeting in White House last month, President Bush said President Yar'Adua is "committed to democracy and rule of law."

He said President Yar'Adua was very articulate in his desire to make sure that the people of Nigeria understand that their government will be fair and transparent, and will be a government of the people. "I am impressed by your commitment to reform, your adherence to the concept of rule of law, and your belief in transparency. And I congratulate you for being a strong leader," Mr. Bush told his guest Mr. Yar'Adua. The US president appreciated Mr. Yar'Adua's commitment to provide compulsory education throughout Nigeria and said the US would like to help.

Mr. Bush said he would ask the US Congress to double their commitment in helping Nigeria's HIV/AIDS and malaria programs. "It's in our interests from a security perspective; it's in our interests from a moral perspective," to help Nigeria, he said.

He also said the US would assist Nigeria to ensure that it continues to uphold democracy, the rule of law, zero tolerance for corruption, and the development of a free market economy through economic reforms.



Nigeria's President Umaru Yar'Adua and President George Bush at the White House, 13th Dec 2007

President Yar'Adua briefed President Bush on the situation in Nigeria, his efforts to anchor democracy on the rule of law; to help a credible electoral process; and to ensure that the principles of justice, equity will guide the conduct of affairs in Nigeria -- transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption. "This will set the principles upon which we'll build and develop a free society capable of growing an economy that will cater for the development and needs of the people of Nigeria," President Yar'Adua said. He thanked the US for accepting to help Nigeria deal with problems of HIV/AIDS, the problem of malaria, challenges in education. "I think this is an excellent humanitarian gesture for which I, personally, and the people and government of Nigeria are extremely grateful," he said.

President Yar'Adua said that Nigeria would partner the US/AFRICA Command (AFRICOM) on security on the continent. The Nigerian leader said the command will assist not only Nigeria, but also the African continent to actualize its peace and security initiative. President Yar'Adua said this is "an initiative to help standby forces of brigade-size in each of the regional economic groupings within the African continent."

The new position of President Yar'Adua is totally different from the previously held one. The Council of States which President Yar'Adua chairs recently voiced opposition to the command. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, had reportedly stated that Nigeria would not support the presence of US troops on African soil under the auspices of AFRICOM, This Day reported.

Report: Nigerian policemen increasingly raping women

There is an increase in the cases of rape of female citizens by policemen, a new research conducted by a coalition of non-governmental associations has shown.

The report by the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) claims that police killing, torture, extortion and rape had become routine in Nigeria because the authorities shield their personnel from legal consequences from unlawful conduct, This Day reported.

The report states that "the [police force] is now a danger to public safety and security and the conduct of its personnel could be the cause of a major public health and mortality emergency on a national scale". The report reveals that every year, thousands of detainees are killed in encounters with the police while hundreds of detainees die outside police custody from injuries sustained during police torture. It also shows that custodial conditions in police cells cause and spread infectious diseases; while a growing incidence of allegations of rape by police personnel raise the risk of trauma injuries to the victims as well as the spread of HIV-AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Dr. Lydia Umar, NOPRIN's chairperson, said: "Police abuses here have become a public health problem. Any infection that kills and disables people in the numbers or at the rate that our police kill and disable will be declared a public health emergency." NOPRIN co-ordinator, Emeka Nwanevu, said: "President Yar'Adua's commitment to the rule of law rings hollow as long as his administration takes no steps to bring an end to the epidemic of police killings and other abuses in Nigeria. What use is the rule of law if it cannot guarantee the right to life? A Police Force that kills this number of people cannot guarantee public safety."

Watch out!

Counterfeit Durex condoms are being sold in London



Those in London should check packs of Durex condoms before using them.

The advice has been given by Consumer Direct London and Durex following a series of seizures of counterfeit condoms in eight boroughs across London. The fakes, initially discovered in corner shops in Hackney, are unlikely to provide proper protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

Fake condoms have been seized by Trading Standards Officers in Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Croydon, Camden, Brent, Harrow, Haringey and Richmond as the result of complaints from the public. Testing by Durex has confirmed they are counterfeit.

Seven different types of fake three-packs have been identified. The brands and serial numbers are as follows: Durex Extra Safe - serial numbers 20604354; Arouser - 20906043; Ribbed - 20905271/ 20904142/ 2991118; Performa - TGL 4142; Gossamer - 21405074; Select - P4379 and Fetherlite - 21405074.

Martyn Ward, Managing Director of Durex said: "Durex is the world's leading condom brand with a reputation for trust, reliability and safety. We are completely committed to quality and maintaining the health and safety of our customers. As an international company with a high quality brand, Durex, like many other global businesses, is targeted by counterfeiters. We take incidents like this very seriously indeed and adopt a proactive and robust approach towards combating counterfeiters anywhere in the world. We are currently investigating these issues further.

"Durex stresses that there are small numbers of counterfeit condoms on the market and you are unlikely to be affected. As a precaution, the brand is urging users to check batch numbers on the packaging of affected varieties.

"If any of the above codes appear on packaging, it is highly likely that these are not genuine Durex condoms and we advise consumers not to use them, as we cannot be sure of their safety."

Robert Gardner of London Trading Standards Authorities said "This is yet another example of a criminal attempt to counterfeit a household brand that has been discovered by Trading Standards. It is astonishing that independent shopkeepers will buy this type of merchandise from street hawkers and put it on their shelves for sale and eventual profit, without a thought for the possible repercussions.

"Trading Standards will continue to remove these counterfeits from sale and take legal action against those found to be selling them. But as we cannot be everywhere at once, the public must remain on their guard and be sure that they only buy condoms from reputable sources."

Consumers with any queries are being advised to contact the Durex Careline on 0800 338 739 or Consumer Direct London on 08454 040506.

THESE ARE NOT GENUINE DUREX CONDOMS

Durex Extra Safe - 20604354
Arouser - 20906043
Ribbed - 20905271/ 20904142/ 2991118
Performa - TGL 4142
Gossamer - 21405074
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Kenyans celebrate Independence Day in London



The Kenya High Commissioner to UK H.E. Mr Joseph Muchemi led Kenyans in celebrating Kenya's 44th Independence Day at the London Hilton Hotel.

Rt. Hon. Lord Malloch-Brown, Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN was one of the main guests. Mr Muchemi praised good relations between Kenya and the UK. "The UK is our most important economic partner in the West. This is demonstrated through the trade and investment between our two countries," he said.

He said there are many investment opportunities in many sectors and pointed out that Kenya will continue to pursue investor friendly policies into the future.

Mr Muchemi invited all friends of Kenya at the celebration to visit Kenya "to enjoy and experience the beautiful scenery of mountains, valleys, savannah and tropical beaches. And make sure you visit the 7th 'Wonder of the World' - the scenic and natural wonder of the Maasai Mara Game Reserve and witness the world's famous movement of wild-life as they emigrate across the plains."

The Kenya High Commissioner to UK thanked all Kenyans in the UK for supporting staff at the Mission.

Competitiveness Minister Timms calls for community action against HIV/AIDS

Newham African community marks World Aids Day, appeals for resources to curb spread of HIV

The Newham African Forum and the HIV/AIDS Prevention Partnership hosted a public meeting in East London to mark World Aids Day in advance and to highlight the huge challenge HIV/AIDS presents to the world.

Mr. Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham joined members of the Newham African community and local Councillors Cllr. Joy Laguda and Cllr. Neil Wilson at Durning Hall, Forest Gate, during the event held on 24th November 2007.

It has been estimated that 33 million people worldwide are living with HIV. Out of this, 2.5 million are children. There were 2.5 million new infections last year and 2.1 million HIV-related deaths. Mr. Timms compared this to three Twin Tower disasters daily or one tsunami a month.

In the UK more than 73,000 people are now living with HIV/AIDS. In the year 2006 more than 8,000 new infections were reordered.

Mr Timms noted the bold initiatives the Government has taken to help contain and reverse the spread of this horrific disease around the world. He remarked that "for this Labour Government, with our belief in social justice and equality for all, AIDS is a priority." He also spoke of what still needs to be done. He said "To maintain progress, we need two things: a drive to make the global effort more strategic; and an end to stigma and prejudice."

Mr. Timms encouraged the Newham community to tackle prejudice in all its forms to ensure that efforts to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, both internationally and domestically, are successful. Much remains to be done in the UK as well as overseas, he said.



Guests with candles from left to right: Miss Zambia UK, Hon. Stephen Timms, MP, Cllr. Joy Laguda, Cllr Neil Wilson and Cllr. Akbar Chaudhary



"We all have to counter the threat from HIV to human development. We can all help stand up against prejudice. Tackling discrimination and promoting equality requires political and moral leadership from politicians, but challenges each of us on how we choose to behave," the MP said. The African communities called for better support with resources to reduce further infections.

> ***"Although some countries and communities have made great strides in fighting HIV/AIDS, further action is needed to mitigate the impact of the Pandemic on our communities. Posterity will judge our generation harshly if we do not reverse the HIV/AIDS Pandemic."***
>
> **Miss Zambia UK, Flavia Mbazima**

In a speech during the event, Miss Zambia UK, Flavia Mbazima said it is important for all to pay attention to the alarming HIV/AIDS situation in Africa and the rest of world, and to assist reverse the Pandemic and its impacts on our lives.

"The HIV/AIDS epidemic has pruned the intellectual and professional resource that the continent should be boasting of. HIV/AIDS has claimed the lives of educated African men and women in their prime who would have made positive contribution to the development of the continent. This has in turn retarded or rather reversed the continent's rate of development and has put a strain on the limited finances of the continent by having to train replacement managers to take up the positions of those whose lives have been claimed by the epidemic. Up to this day the myths and stigma surrounding the epidemic makes it very hard to halt the spread and to stop the continued erosion of the intellectual and professional resource of the continent," Miss Zambia UK said.

Flavia said that with the advancements made in the 21st century, she believes the world has the capacity to turn this scourge around and warned that "Unless a cure or effective vaccine is found, the HIV/AIDS pandemic will continue into the next generation of Africans."

She made a passionate appeal to all to do something to reverse the impact of HIV/AIDS. "The solution to reversing the impact of HIV/AIDS lies in the hands of each and every one of us, hence the need for everyone to participate and come up with a solution. We all need to speak with one voice if the Pandemic is to be reversed. HIV/AIDS has become one of Africa's deadliest enemy hence the importance for all of us to work together and fight the scourge.

"We have lost too many valuable people and our families have been pruned due to this Pandemic. We must all make conceited efforts to eradicate the Pandemic. We need to build a strong global voice against HIV/AIDS and consider seriously what role each one of us can play in reversing the disease in order to win the fight," Miss Zambia UK said.

Abeingo Community Network launches website on Luhya history

Abeingo Community Network, a London-based community organisation has launched an interactive online portal for the Luhya community of East Africa.

The website http://www.abeingo.org aims at linking Luhya villages to the world community. It is packed with information about the history, culture, economics, hopes and aspirations of the Luhya people who are scattered across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and possibly beyond. It has a directory of all Luhya professionals and profiles of prominent personalities. It also has sections on weddings, obituaries, birthdays, new borns, business tips, education, careers etc.

Abeingo Community Network seeks to empower the Luhya people to take control of their own destiny. Luhya as a tribe is populous, but very little is actually written about it with the only authoritative source of information being a book written in 1967 by Prof Gideon Were and John Osogo in 1965. By being interactive, the website aims at soliciting views, comments and suggestions on all aspects of Luhya endeavours in order to document the history and achievements of Luhya people.

In the case of Prof Were for instance, most of the information he derived through extensive research and interviews by elders or spokesmen of the various clans and sub tribes. Clearly a lot of this information needs to be checked and corroborated. The website hopes to provide a focal point to engage the minds of intellectuals and the ordinary people. Although the website is now commissioned and uploaded, Abeingo Community Network realises that work is on going and welcomes contributions and constructive criticisms in order to improve and make it a true gateway linking Luhya villages to the global online community.

news africa & nouvelles

Hunt for new generation of black role models begins

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears has launched a national role modelling programme aimed at boosting the number of positive Black role models for young Black men to aspire to.

The programme is part of a package of measures aimed at countering a culture of low aspirations and low attainment amongst some Black boys and young Black men. The actions are in response to the independent REACH report published in August last year that highlighted the barriers that are preventing some Black boys from fulfilling their full potential. The group said that if more Black boys and men overcame these barriers, it could benefit the economy by £24billion over the next 50 years.

The rsaid that too often the only images of successful Black men were those of rap artists - who can glamorise crime, guns and gangs - or sportsmen. Black boys and young Black men needed a greater diversity of images and portrayals, showing that Black men can be, and are, successful in a wide range of fields. Ms. Blears said: "Young Black men want and need to see role models from everyday life who have been successful in business, in retail, as doctors and accountants - and to be reassured that these paths are open to them too. It is these men who will provide the most powerful antidote to a culture of low aspiration that is seeing too many of our young Black men fail.



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We have listened to the Black community and the recommendations of the REACH report, and we are determined to do everything we can in helping to turn things around. There will always be the rap stars and the bling, but I think you can cut through it."

She noted that the Black pupils made the biggest improvement in last year's GCSE results and the attainment gap is closing. "We must continue to boost the attainment of our young Black men if we are going to see improvements in other areas too. A concerted focus on what is happening for Black pupils both in schools and outside is a vital part of getting this right," Mrs. Blears said. As a way of boosting the number of positive Black role models, the Government has decided to create the first ever Black Boys' National Role Model programme. An independent panel comprising Ghanaian born fashion designer and businessman Ozwald Boateng, entrepreneur Tim Campbell, founder and Director of Operation Black Vote Simon Woolley and Metropolitan Police Superintendent Leroy Logan plus four young Black men will spend the coming months identifying and recruiting twenty national Black role models who will work to help raise aspirations of Black boys.

> ***"Young Black men want and need to see role models from everyday life who have been successful in business, in retail, as doctors and accountants - and to be reassured that these paths are open to them too. It is these men who will provide the most powerful antidote to a culture of low aspiration that is seeing too many of our young Black men fail."***
>
> **Communities Secretary Hazel Blears**

Once recruited the twenty national role models will tour the country speaking to Black communities. This might include schools, youth clubs and young offender institutes. They will also use other mechanisms such as podcasts and webchats to reach a wider audience and boost the visibility of positive images of Black male achievement and the journey to success. The Government has also launched a renewed focus in education to better engage Black parents. This is based on the idea that schools have to be the starting point for any changes in attainment and aspiration.

A Ministerial Board to be chaired by Ms. Blears has been established to oversee all efforts in raising the aspirations of Black boys. It will bring together ministers from across government in order to focus attention on this vital issue. The Government is also encouraging Black-led organisations and/or organisations working with Black boys, to engage in the current discussion on improving the engagement of the third sector with local partnerships. Ms. Blears said: "There are many examples up and down the country of successful Black men - businessmen, politicians, lawyers and doctors - and we need to make sure that it is their stories that young Black men are hearing and that it is those people in whose footsteps they are aspiring to follow."

Govt: Be vigilant to help fight child trafficking

The Government has called on professionals and the public to be vigilant to help fight child trafficking- including UK born children.

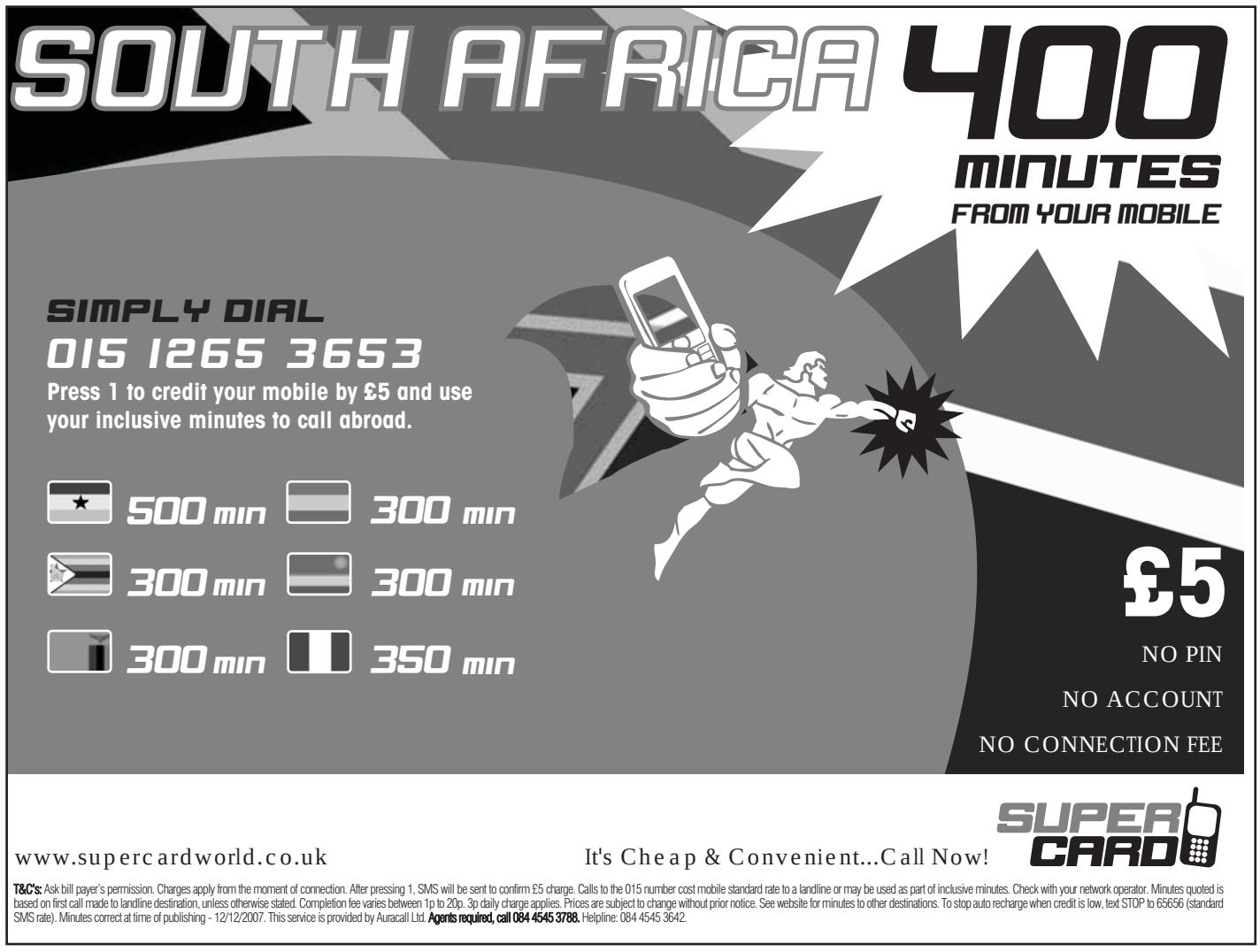
It asked all the people working with children, community groups and faith groups to help stamp out child trafficking by being extra vigilant and alerting the authorities to their concerns. In the guidance, "Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked" issued jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and Home Office, local agencies have been asked to raise awareness in their communities of ways to identify a child or young person who may have been trafficked and places where these children can get help.

The guidance reminds all that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and suggests that practitioners and members of the public who are worried that a child in their area may have been trafficked into and within the country should be encouraged to contact the police or the NSPCC helplines. Signs that indicate that a child may have been trafficked include: receiving unexplained/unidentified phone calls whilst in placement/temporary accommodation; having a history with missing links and unexplained moves; begging for money or being required to earn a minimum amount of money every day.

Children's Minister Kevin Brennan said: "Child trafficking is completely abhorrent. Many trafficked children are too frightened to come forward, so it's vital that both professionals and the public are aware of this issue and know how they can raise the alarm."

He urged all professionals working with children to recognise the above signs, identify the trafficked children and get them help. "We want to keep these vulnerable children safe from harm, and help stamp out child trafficking in this country," he said.

Policing, Security and Community Safety Minister Vernon Coaker said: "Child trafficking is an appalling crime. We are committed to ensuring the victims of this crime are identified at the earliest opportunity and given the help and support they need to overcome their ordeal."



The ADLER Entrepreneurship Awards 2007 in Germany

Cameroonian author wins prize for defending immigrant's rights

By Grace Maba

Cameroonian author Andre Ekama has won the Best African Author award at the ADLER Entrepreneurship Awards 2007 in Germany. Mr. Ekama has written more than 60 poems. His poems mainly tell the experience of immigrants in Germany, depicting everyday life situations and the recurring attempts to adjust to this foreign country.

He sometimes approaches the issue humorously, sometimes cynically, sometimes severely.

As an African writer, member of the Migration Advisory Board, a committed organiser of cultural events, and a mathematician, Mr. Ekama has put all his efforts into the cultural scene to help readers open their minds as he challenges racist attitudes. He has devoted himself to vitalising African culture and thus providing a basis for more tolerance and international understanding.

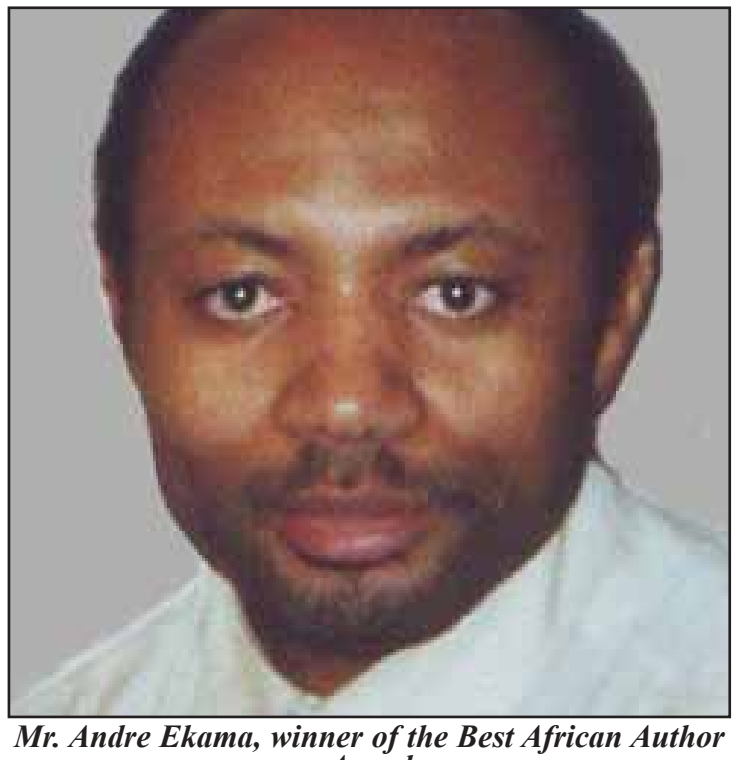
In 2007 he published two books, namely the "Being black in the White Skies" and "In the web of privileges". The later is a dedication to the well-meaning moral of the state to recognise the needs of the citizen and draws attention to the so called corruption viewed as an epidemic, first infiltrating societies and later bursting out like a volcano.

This book tells of manipulations and people being victims deprived of their rights, simply suffering their exploitation by unscrupulous characters who, while the people are still paralysed, take advantage of the situation to improve their own living conditions.

For so many years, the contributions and achievements of Africans in Diaspora have only been considered as statistics than acknowledgement. We Africans have also contributed to looking elsewhere for solutions to our problems rather than appreciating our own efforts.

These achievements and contributions from Africans in the Diaspora can no longer go unappreciated. It is in this context that the African Youth Foundation (AYF) has taken up the challenge, to award Africans in Diaspora for their contributions to their countries of origin as well as the success of the different European economies they find themselves in.

There is time for everything, and this is the time for appreciating the good work done by Africans in the Diaspora. Join us congratulate our brothers and sisters who have steered the boats of self doubts and self confidence to integrity. Let's give credit where credit is due! Most importantly, we shouldn't forget that, a pat on the shoulder of those who have earned it, is a pat on our own shoulders too, for supporting them.



Mr. Andre Ekama, winner of the Best African Author Award

South African woman threatened with deportation after 16 years in UK



Nokuzola Zola Gidi needs your help

A South African woman who has been living and working in the UK for 16 years is appealing for your help to stop her being deported from the UK. Nokuzola Zola Gidi, 53, has been resident in Swansea since she arrived in the UK. She left South Africa with her (now ex) husband who was an African National Congress (ANC) activist. Throughout virtually all her time here, Zola has supported herself by working a variety of cleaning jobs, often three at a time, and on minimum wage, despite severe and chronic back problems. Zola also suffers from depression and anxiety and these conditions are so severe that she has been hospitalised several times.

According to a statement issued by Asylum Justice (Friends of Zola), Zola relies on the psychiatric services and medication available to her in the UK that she has earned the right to by working legally and paying national insurance for many years. She is terrified of the harsh life that persists in Johannesburg, especially for a middle-aged, single, working class woman with mental health problems.

In 1993 the couple became estranged after her husband, an ANC activist, accused Zola of being an informer for the white government in South Africa. In 1994, when Zola's visa came due for renewal, her husband refused to sign the application. Fearing what might happen to her if she was returned to South Africa, Zola applied for political asylum.

In 1995, having completed his degree, Zola's husband returned to South Africa alone. Zola's application for asylum was eventually refused in 1998. Her friends immediately started a campaign to allow her to remain in the UK and a large number of them petitioned the Home Office on her behalf. In 1999 Zola received a letter from her local MP, Alan Williams confirming that the Home Office were considering her situation and asking her to be patient and await their response. No response was ever received.

In 2005 Zola applied for residence in the UK under the '14 year rule'. This application was refused in 2007 with the Home Office claiming that the previous refusal in 1998 debarred Zola from qualifying under the '14 year rule'.

Asylum Justice (Friends of Zola) holds that "using this technicality to deport a vulnerable woman who is law-abiding, kind, and loved by all who know her is cruel beyond belief. Swansea is Zola's home now. All her friends are here; her job is here; her flat is here; and her church is here. She is described as 'a wonderful neighbour', 'a loyal friend', 'an extremely hard worker' and 'generally a good member of the community'. Exactly the kind of person we want in our city."

Asylum Justice is kindly requesting that you send a petition to the Rt Hon Jacqui Smith, MP Secretary of State for the Home Office to grant Nokuzola Zola Gidi the right to remain in the UK on compassionate grounds.

You can download a model letter to use from the link http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/11/385144.html

You can as well copy/amend/write your own version (if you do so, please remember to include the Nokuzola Yvonne Gidi - Home Office Reference: M604145). The petitions should be sent to The Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith, MP, Home Secretary, Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, LONDON, SW1P 4DF. Fax: 020 7035 3262 (00 44 20 7035 3262 if you are faxing from outside UK). Please notify the campaign of any faxes sent: Asylum Justice (Friends of Zola) C/o YMCA, St Helen's Road, Swansea, SA1 5JQ. Email: friendsofzola@ntlworld.com

Nigerian woman arrested hiding cocaine in bra worth 2.5 million euros



A Nigerian woman has been arrested in Rome, Italy with 3 kilograms of cocaine worth 2.5 million euros in her bra. The police monitoring the area near Termini railway station suspected the movements of W.O.O., a 51 year old Nigerian woman.

Holding only a hand luggage, the woman kept on looking behind her as if someone was tracing her movements. This made the police officers stop her to check her documents. She became so nervous that the police officers suspected she was hiding something. They took her to a nearby station where a thorough search revealed that W.O.O had carefully hid packets of cocaine in her bra.

By the time we went to press she was being held at the Rebibbia prison waiting for her case to be heard. The police are still doing investigations to find out other people suspected to be involved in the affair.

Meanwhile police in Genova have arrested two Nigerians with more than a kilogram of pure heroine. According to the police, this type of pure heroine would fetch about a million euros in the market.

The two Nigerians aged 32 and 45 were travelling along Genova Ovest highway when the police signalled them to stop. The police found the heroine hidden in a rucksack kept under one of the seats of the car.

SEND US YOUR STORIES

Do you have a story to share with our readers? Are you planning for a community function (wedding, naming ceremony, graduation, cultural festival, independence celebration, seminar, demo, etc)?
Please send us reports and announcements of these activities and we will publish them in *Africa News*.
Address your reports to: The Editor, *Africa News*, Via Maroso, 50, CAP 00142 Rome, Italy.
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The judiciary and democracy in Nigeria

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has clearly and explicitly set out the scope and extent of powers of the three organs of government i.e. the legislature, the executive and the judiciary at the Federal and State levels. Under this arrangement each organ of government acts independent of the other. The framers of the Constitution never contemplated a situation where the executive may perform the function of the judiciary or the legislature exercising the powers of the executive or for that matter the judiciary wielding law making functions. They also never envisaged a situation where all government

powers will be concentrated in one arm of the government, be it the executive, the legislature or the judiciary. There is wisdom in this arrangement, which is called the doctrine of separation of powers, since concentrating all powers in one hand can lead to arbitrariness and tyranny. Unfortunately, however, since Nigeria returned to civilian rule and started operating the 1999 Constitution, this time the honoured doctrine of separation of powers has come under consistent attack by the executive arm of government, especially at the federal level. The Federal Government of Nigeria from 1999 - 2007 behaved with impunity and utter disregard to the provisions of the Constitution and to the concept of division of powers. The government in the process created the impression that the legislature and the judiciary were no more than mere appendages of the executive. In this affront on the doctrine of separation of powers by the executive, it is the judiciary that has borne the greatest brunt.

There are several instances where the executive has interfered with the functions of the judiciary and prevented it from acting independently or impartially. In addition the executives were selective in obeying court orders; ignoring those that were not favourable to them. Although it should be admitted that sometimes this interference and usurpation of judicial powers and brazen disregard of court orders by the executives have been with the active connivance of some (corrupt) judicial officers. It is gratifying to note however that of late the judiciary has started asserting its independence and acting impartially in the dispensation of justice.

"The judiciary in Nigeria should always be guided by what one of the framers of the US Constitution said: That it is true that the judiciary neither has the power of the purse nor of the sword; that although it could neither field an army or the police to enforce its decrees nor could it withhold the budgets of the other branches of government it could yet show itself to be so politically independent, so protective of the peoples' rights, that both politicians and citizens would feel constrained to obey its decisions."

They have also shown that they are ready to weed out the bad eggs among them. This new posture of the courts started manifesting itself during the tail end of the tenure of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The courts, especially at the Federal level, played prominent roles in checking the undemocratic and overbearing style of governance of the President, General Olusegun Obasanjo and contributed in checkmating his blind ambition to continue in office and rule for a third term. On several occasions they ruled against his government and pronounced against his policies. All these judicial victories were possible because some of the judges chose the path of honour and stood by the oaths they took to dispense justice without fear or favour. In this regard, the decision of the Supreme Court to lead by example and to do away with unnecessary technicalities in dispensing justice has also contributed in emboldening some of the judges of the lower courts to deliver well-considered decisions that are balanced, impartial and devoid of technicalities.

As a result of all these, we at the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria (FGGN), would like to believe that the country now has a judiciary that is ever ready to assert its independence and adjudicate impartially without taking directives from any quarters. The judiciary has shown exemplary courage in some of the judgments that they have passed recently especially those associated with election petitions. It has demonstrated that it is ready to upturn the results of some of the patently fraudulent elections that took place in April/ May 2007. Some of these decisions by the courts have sent shivers down the spines of all those impostors who stole the mandates of the electorates during the last general elections with the connivance of the INEC.

These electoral thieves are now uneasy on their seats because they fully well know that it is just a matter of time before the courts restore to the rightful people their mandates. So far the courts have proved that they are capable of protecting the democratic processes by ensuring that the choices of the electorates at the polls are respected and the result of this is that all of a sudden the common man is looking up to the judiciary for salvation. However, it is still too early to pass a clean bill of health on the judiciary and on all the judges operating in our courts - from the State High Courts up to the Supreme Court. The judiciary has still in its midst some judges who are willing to be used to pervert the course of justice for a mess of pottage. This category of judges should not be allowed to continue as judicial officers for they have compromised their judicial oaths. The National Judicial Council should identify such judges and flush them out immediately. Nigeria's judiciary requires only men and women of integrity as judges who are prepared to rescue the country from the clutches of sit-tight tyrants in the name of leaders. The country needs only judges who are ready to sacrifice everything in order to prevent the country from drifting into anarchy.

We at the FGGN also hope that what has happened so far is not done to appease the international community by showing that some semblance of justice is being done, therefore buying respect and acceptance to the major beneficiaries of the April 2007 fraud, but that this is a judiciary that has come of age. In this regard the nation is keenly watching how the various judicial challenges before the Election Petition Tribunals across the country are being played out. So far some of these Election Tribunals have discharged their functions admirably; although the greatest challenge for the judiciary is how it handles the presidential election petitions challenging the election of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as President of Nigeria.

The whole world is watching and following events at the Presidential Election Tribunal handling the election petitions of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar, the Presidential candidates of ANPP and AC respectively. The question on the lips of Nigerians is - will the Presidential Election Tribunal use the opportunity presented by these petitions and arrive at a decision that is fair, impartial, supported by facts and acceptable in law; a judgment that will be respected not only by the parties to the disputes but by all Nigerians? All that Nigerians expect from the Presidential Election Tribunal members is a decision that must convince all the litigants and indeed all Nigerians that in arriving at their decision no extraneous factors were taken into consideration. Their decision must satisfy this old judicial adage: justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. It is in view of the foregoing that we at the Foundation believe that these elections petitions offer the judiciary the opportunity of writing its name in gold, these petitions afford the courts an avenue of showing to the whole world that Nigeria's judiciary has come of age; that ours is a judiciary that understands the doctrine of the separation of powers, respects it and protects it and is prepared to do all that is legally possible to assert its independence and uphold the supremacy of the Constitution. The judiciary must seize this opportunity with both hands to redress all the electoral wrongs perpetrated by the ruling government and INEC during the last general elections. This is what we and other Nigerians expect from the judiciary and it is only by doing that they can convince the citizens of Nigeria that the judiciary is indeed the last hope of the poor, the weak and the downtrodden.

The judiciary in Nigeria should always be guided by what one of the framers of the US Constitution said: That it is true that the judiciary neither has the power of the purse nor of the sword; that although it could neither field an army or the police to enforce its decrees nor could it withhold the budgets of the other branches of government it could yet show itself to be so politically independent, so protective of the peoples' rights, that both politicians and citizens would feel constrained to obey its decisions.

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria! Long Live the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria!!

By Dr. Arabo Bayo & Dr. Ibrahim Hassan
For and on behalf of the Foundation for Good Governance & Development in Nigeria



Justice Joseph Warioba, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (right), speaks to voters during the 2007 elections in Nigeria

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome letters on topical issues, your experiences, and or comments on any article you have read in the *Africa News*. We will only consider letters sent to us for publication if they carry the writer's name and address, not necessarily for publication, but as a sign of good faith. Address your letters to: The Editor, *Africa News*, Via Maroso, 50, CAP 00142 Rome, Italy, or e-mail: africanews@etnomedia.org or fax +39-06-87410528.

THE VOICE OF WIWA'S GHOST*

By Adogiye Opubo Ayerite

Now Bari is my witness
Witnessing this silent wickedness
Men crucified their conscience
As selfish rights overtake human rights

When shall slavery stop impersonating liberty?
When shall there be harmony in humanity?
What could be the solution to this pollution?
As we plead through pains for emancipation.

When will our soil
stop sucking sweats of vain toil?
When will this community
Receive morning sun vitality?

I left my footprints on your breast
My land, must you never seek rest
Never fall for Lucifer's tempting bread
Then our land cursed shall be blest.

**** In remembrance of the Ogoni struggle, as well as the Niger-Delta region. The word Bari means God in Ogoni language, where Ken Saro-Wiwa comes from. The author says he gave a copy of this piece to Ken Saro-Wiwa's father when he went to visit him some years back in Bani the village where Ken comes from.***

news africa & nouvelles

Actress Rachel Oniga: "I blame juju for my crashed marriage"

By Adeola Balogun

Actress Rachel Oniga, known for playing matronly roles in movies, talks about her life as a single mother and how her separation from her husband turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Here's an excerpt of the interview with ADEOLA BALOGUN.

You surprised everyone during the Nollywood Nite at the Coliseum when you jumped onto the stage and danced heartily to Olu Maintain's Yahooze...

Dancing is one of my passions. As a child, I loved dancing; and all my kids love dancing. They even teach me the latest dance steps, we all love dancing in our house. You shouldn't be surprised I dance to any latest music.

Even hip-hop?

Anything: R&B, hip-hop, in fact, any stuff. I am into it, any music.

Some people thought Rachel Oniga was a very shy person…

I am not a shy person; I am just like a mother. I am just like any other woman. I have my reservations and, sometimes, I can be moody. Some other times, I will just be by myself. It depends on the situation.

When did your acting career start?

It started in 1993 when I got separated from my late husband. He died last year but we got separated over 14 years ago.

Probably, he prevented you from acting while you were together…

No. You know, while in school, I knew I had flair for showbiz and stuff like that. But I got married, I started having children, I went into computer programming and other things. But it was after we got separated that I had the opportunity to really go into what I think I was destined to become.

But some of your married colleagues act...

Well, maybe it is destiny. Maybe, the time I started in 1993 was God's appropriate time to do it, and maybe without the separation, I wouldn't have got into acting. God has a way of doing things.

Are you saying you never attempted to act while you were married?

No, I was occupied with other things.

What led to your separation?

Well, the Nigerian factor; the African factor.

Or, are you one of those ladies who, because of their popularity, believe no man should control them?

I do not belong to that school of thought. If a person is the loose type and she cannot keep her home, her profession should not be blamed. It is your personality, not your job, that should be blamed. Acting is an honourable profession, it is just that people see us more than others. But how many broken marriages do we have among those who are not actors and actresses? It is just because our profession exposes us to the public. The press writes about anything that we do. That is why people tend to see us as people who cannot maintain their homes. I don't believe in that.

So you would have loved to keep your own?

Exactly.

But you left…

I have told you it's the "Nigerian factor," and I want to leave it at that.

Since then, you have not considered remarrying?

Yes. My children are there for me and I have my profession to keep me going. My children are my husbands; in the Yoruba context, they are and I thank God for it.

How has acting been?

It's been beautiful. It's been fun, although you have your ups and downs; you have happy and unpleasant moments. Nothing good comes easy; there is no profession where everything is rosy throughout. But generally speaking, I think I'm happy doing what I am doing and I have every cause to thank God.

You cry so easily in movies, how do you do it?

It is part of my job. I have to psyche myself in situations like that. The scripts help most of the time.

You often play matronly roles; do you seek these roles?

I am a homely person; I love children, I love the home. I believe that African traditions support that.

How was your growing up like?

I was a tomboy, but as I grew older, I shed some of these tomboyish things. I was a terrible tomboy as a young girl. I would fight, I would climb trees, I never saw myself as a girl then. I had so much fun as a kid. If you had fun as a child, you've seen it all. So there is nothing more, so, you just settle down to a happy home and keep your home.

You had the dream of keeping your home, but…

But I still give glory to God because now I sit back and say if it never happened then, I wouldn't be in this profession. I am happy because I have been able to make a lot of people happy. Although along the line, you still see some people who are not happy about your progress, it s not out of place, it's natural. You just overlook it and count your blessings and give glory to God.

How do you respond to scandals?

I have never had any terrible scandals that should bother me except one, which was not really a scandal. Some years back, it was written that my husband left me for a woman who had seven children. That's the only thing that has been written that I consider negative.



Actress Rachel Oniga

Was it not true that he left you for a woman with seven kids?

No. Although he really married another lady, the way some papers reported it was something else. It was a front-page story; I just said they wanted to sell their papers.

But why would a man leave a beautiful lady like you?

That is the "African factor" I told you about.

You never regretted it anyway?

No.

How did you feel when the man died last year?

Well, for fourteen years, we were separated. So it was like, what a waste of life.

Can you recall how you met and what really led to your marriage?

It's all about party and dancing, that is how it all started.

How would you describe him?

Before the whole trouble started, he was most loving; a perfect husband that any woman would wish to have. We never quarrelled, but all of a sudden, within a month, I was out of the house with my three kids. He didn't even want to see them at all.

Did you suspect African remote control, juju?

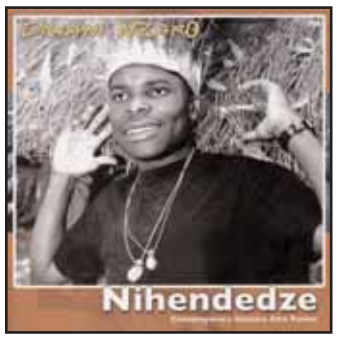
That was it.

Who did you suspect could be behind it, a rival?

There was a woman in my husband's house. You know, some women they will see a man, he has money, he has a fine home, his wife is beautiful and comfortable and they think they have to put their head there. Not even going there, they want the person there to move out for them. But today I give glory to God, I don't feel bitter about it.

NEW RELEASES











Senegal bans reggae star Tiken Jah Fakoly for criticising Wade

Reggae star Tiken Jah Fakoly has been banned from performing in Senegal after he criticized President Abdoulaye Wade, Agence France-Presse reported.

The Ivorian reggae musician asked President Wade to relinquish power to avoid conflict. He also reportedly accused the president and his government of creating rising corruption.

Afrol News reported that during a concert in Dakar, Fakoly asked Wade to leave power if he truly loved Senegal. He also asked the Senegalese leader not to involve his son, Karim in running the affairs of the state if he would not want him [Karim] to be probed by the parliament.

Fakoly told AFP that he never regretted being barred from entering Senegal following criticism of President Wade. "I gave my opinion as an African citizen," he said, adding that "I have always said what I think about the news and I told myself that I can do the same thing in Senegal."

Fakoly said "There are no regrets; I don't regret it at all because I said what all Senegalese say every day. Opposition members say it every day, young rappers say it, everybody says it."

Fakoly's remarks on the president and government of Senegal made Senegal's interior ministry say that the musician was a "persona non grata in Senegal" and would be barred from entering the country.

In an attempt to justify the government's decision to ban Fakoly from the country, Senegal's interior minister Ousmane Ngom said "Someone cannot come to a country and give orders to a president," Senegal's APS news agency quoted him to have said. "We could have taken draconian measures, but we did not do that," he added.

"I gave my opinion as an African citizen. I have always said what I think about the news and I told myself that I can do the same thing in Senegal.
"There are no regrets; I don't regret it at all because I said what all Senegalese say every day. Opposition members say it every day, young rappers say it, everybody says it."

Reggae Star Tiken Jah Fakoly

The reggae star who learned about the government's decision to bar him from the radio said he was both "surprised" and "disappointed" at the move.

"I think that President Wade is maybe not necessarily up to date on it and that the interior minister took the decision," he said. He said that in Africa, "there are many ministers who seek to please the president".

"I hope that President Wade will again show proof of wisdom so that the interior minister reverses the decision," AFP quoted the singer to have said.

Reacting to Senegal's decision to ban Fakoly, Freedom Newspaper Dakar political commentator Soleyman



Mboup said" It's unfortunate that the Government of President Wade is reacting in such a negative way. Senegal which used to be Africa's bastion of hope in terms of democracy and good governance has betrayed its citizens. The government overreacted. Senegal is no longer a pride as far as democracy is concerned."

He said President Wade has been manipulating the regime and harassing the press. "His image has been tarnished locally and internationally. He has been linked to so many financial scandals."

Mboup says he supports the musician call for Wade to step down. He says Wade betrayed Senegalese and it was about time for him to consider leaving office. "The Government's move to deport the reggae star is undemocratic. He has not committed any crime that should warrant such heavy-handedness," he said.



Songstress releases new CD entitled *Jidka*

Saba, a young musician and actress is releasing this month her musical debut *Jidka* (The Line). Born in Mogadishu to an Italian father and Ethiopian mother, Saba has come to represent the meeting of African and European cultures. On *Jidka*, Saba explores the divide between Somalia and Italy with a rare sensitivity and gentle humour; mixing acoustic guitars and koras with traditional African beats and contemporary percussion. The result reflects both one woman's search for her identity and what it means to be alive in the 21st century, when so many people live in more than one culture.

As an actress, Saba starred in a long-running TV drama, playing the role of a policewoman fighting against the prejudice of her colleagues, while dealing with issues such as illegal immigration from Africa.

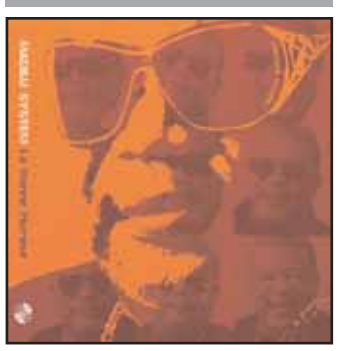
Saba left Somalia when she was 5 years old. As the product of a mixed marriage and because her father was Italian (Italy being the colonial ruler of Somalia), the family was viewed with some suspicion. They were given 48 hours to leave, forcing them to migrate to Italy. From this point on Saba was determined to hold on to her Somali roots, to learn the language and to mend the broken thread with her homeland through music.

Jidka is Saba's way of telling her story. The word 'Jidka', which is the title track, means line - the line that runs on her belly and divides it into two parts - a darker side and a lighter one. This for her represents the union of diversities and the harmony that her parents found when they fell in love. Her story focuses on her identity as multilayered and with many different influences. She sings in her mother tongue - a type of Somali that is spoken in Reer Xamar, a quarter of Mogadishu, and has real expression and rhythm in itself. The result is an album which is a real mix of contemporary and traditional.

Many of the songs on the album describe the struggles of life in Somalia. 'I Sogni' is the story of a woman who leaves her village for the big city in search of a better life; 'Melissa', sung partly in English, is about the plight of many women who escaped the civil war and crossed the desert in search of freedom. 'Je Suis Petite' is dedicated to Africa - a continent full of suffering ('The world is cruel, and I am so little'). Other songs are more romantic, describing love and the importance of living in the moment ('Manta'). 'Hanfarkaan' describes how the wind is linked to the spirit - when it blows strongly it brings us into contact with the spirit of someone we have lost.

Saba is joined on djembe, guitar and percussion by long-term friend and collaborator, Taté Nsongan, from Cameroon, on kora Senegalese Lao Kouyate and on vocals Felix Moungara. The album is produced by well-known musician/composer Fabio Barovero, founder of Mau Mau and the Banda Ionica project. As Saba says, 'we worked to realise a sound which combines past and present, tradition and modernity, with our minds open to a future of increasing cultural mixes.'

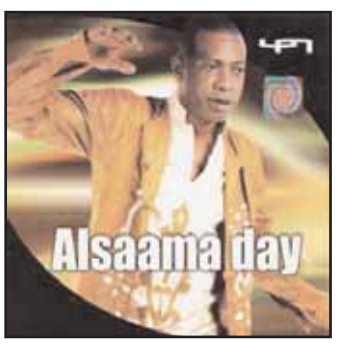
TOP CHARTS











news africa & nouvelles

Diouf: This year's Nations Cup will be the toughest



Senegal's El Hadji Diouf feels his country can win their first ever African Cup of Nations title.

The Bolton Wanderers' star told the BBC that victory in Ghana would be even sweeter because he believes this month's Nations Cup will be the toughest yet.

"We have so many good teams in this year's tournament," he said.

"I think this is the hardest African Nations Cup ever to win because every team has good players."

Diouf said he thinks Senegal is capable of lifting the trophy on 10th February.

"This time, I think that if we play the way we did during the qualifiers, we have a chance. We have been to a final, semi-final and hopefully this year we can go all the way."

The Teranga Lions were beaten in the 2002 final on penalties by Cameroon and have reached the semi-finals on four other occasions.

Diouf threatened to retire from international football last October after criticising the way the Senegal Football Association is run. His differences with the local football authorities have since been resolved however.

He said: "Well it's impossible to say that all the other players in Senegal are of any less importance, but it is fair to say that I am a rather symbolic player for the country.

"I set out the problems that I had, all those problems have now been resolved.

"I could say that I was a little hot-headed in my approach to those problems but I'm not in a position, nor will I ever be in a position, where I could leave my countrymen to get on without me.

"I want to be there, as the captain it is not an option not to be there."

Diouf has appealed once for more for a change in the dates of the Nations Cup.

"Players like me, Didier Drogba, Samuel Eto'o and a lot of other African players want to play this tournament in June," he said.

"If we did that then we wouldn't get problems from anybody.

"But don't forget that I'm an African. I'm very proud of my country.

"The clubs need to understand that we are only away for a month and wish us all the best and we in turn will wish them the same."



26TH AFRICAN NATIONS CUP

FIXTURES AND GROUPS: GHANA 2008

Group A

20/01/08: Ghana v Guinea, Accra
21/01/08: Namibia v Morocco, Accra
24/01/08: Guinea v Morocco, Accra
24/01/08: Ghana v Namibia, Accra
28/01/08: Ghana v Morocco, Accra
28/01/08: Guinea v Namibia, Sekondi

Group B

21/01/08: Nigeria v Ivory Coast, Sekondi
21/01/08: Mali v Benin, Sekondi
25/01/08: Ivory Coast v Benin, Sekondi
25/01/08: Nigeria v Mali, Sekondi
29/01/08: Nigeria v Benin, Sekondi
29/01/08: vory Coast v Mali, Accra

Group C

22/01/08: Egypt v Cameroon, Kumasi
22/01/08: Sudan v Zambia, Kumasi
26/01/08: Cameroon v Zambia, Kumasi
26/01/08: Egypt v Sudan, Kumasi
30/01/08: Egypt v Zambia, Kumasi
30/01/08: Cameroon v Sudan, Tamale

Group D

23/01/08: Tunisia v Senegal, Tamale
23/01/08: South Africa v Angola, Tamale
27/01/08: Senegal v Angola, Tamale
27/01/08: Tunisia v South Africa, Tamale
31/01/08: Tunisia v Angola, Tamale
31/01/08: Senegal v South Africa, Kumasi

Quarter-finals:

03/02/08: 1. Group A winners v Group B runners-up, Accra
03/02/08: 2. Group B winners v Group A runners-up, Sekondi
04/02/08: 3.Group C winners v Group D runners-up, Kumasi
04/02/08: 4. Group D winners v Group C runners-up, Tamale

Semi-finals

07/02/08: Winner quarter-final 1 v Winner quarter-final 4, Accra
07/02/08: Winner quarter-final 2 v Winner quarter-final 3, Kumasi
09/02/08: Third place play-off

Final

10/02/08

Nigeria's injured player seeks NFA help for treatment

"I've been waiting since September to sort out this injury but nothing has happened. The injury is threatening my career and I can only plead with the NFA to help me get my career back on track."

Vera Okolo



Nigerian pint-sized striker Vera Okolo is seeking the Nigeria Football Association's support in her battle to save her career as a Super Falcon. Okolo picked up a knee injury in Nigeria's 2008 Olympic qualifier against Ghana in August last year.

In an interview with BBC Sport, she claimed to have been abandoned by the NFA, hence her cry for help.

"I've been waiting since September to sort out this injury but nothing has happened," Okolo said.

"The injury is threatening my career and I can only plead with the NFA to help me get my career back on track."

The medical expert who assessed Okolo said she needs to undergo a major operation in Germany as soon as possible.

BBC Sport reported that the NFA has apparently been given all the information about the extent of Okolo's injury, including details of how her career might just be saved at a clinic in Germany.

The NFA has, however, insisted that it is doing all it can to help. "We are trying hard to obtain a visa for her to travel to Germany," NFA spokesman Ademola Olajire told BBC Sport.

But Okolo, who plays for FC Indiana in Finland, is unimpressed. "My club is very disappointed because I got injured on national duty. I just hope the help comes before it's too late. I don't regret playing for Nigeria but I also need people to be aware that I must continue my career."

Okolo was nominated for the 2004 African Footballer of the Year but lost out to her compatriot, Perpetua Nkwocha.

2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa

South Africans confident they'll host successful World Cup

By SAinfo reporter

South Africans' confidence in the country's ability to host a successful 2010 Fifa World Cup is on the increase, with 76% of South Africans believing the country will be ready - up 6% from the last reading - according to market research company African Response.

The results of the African Response 2010 Barometer for November 2007 - the quarterly survey has been running since March 2006 - reflect the views of 1 199 respondents, representative of the South African population, who were interviewed in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban between July and September.

According to the survey, 67% of South Africans are confident that the public transport system will be ready by 2010 - up from 59% in the previous quarter - with Johannesburg residents the most confident at 78%, possibly due to visible progress with the Gautrain rapid rail link construction.

Seventy percent of South Africans feel that the country's roads will be ready for the demands of the world's biggest sporting event - a 16% increase over the previous survey - while confidence in South Africa's airports being ready for 2010 increased from 71% to 77%.

Confidence in SA's ability to meet the World Cup electricity demands increased slightly, from 52% to 57%, while confidence in policing and security for 2010 rose from 55% to 62%.

Will Bafana Bafana be ready?

According to the survey, South Africans' confidence in their national soccer team's readiness for the tournament increased by 4% to 56% in the third quarter - with Johannesburg residents again leading the way at 69%, and Capetonians the most sceptical at 46%.

At the same time, African Response reported increases in the number of South Africans who:

- Have attended a sports event over the last two years - 46% (+1%)
- Are likely to attend a 2010 World Cup match - 57% (+4%)
- Are likely to watch some 2010 matches on television - 86% (+0.5%)

The survey also found that the public are growing to like the 2010 Fifa World Cup logo, with 64% of South Africans indicating their approval compared to the previous quarter's rating of 55%.

Are border formalities a concern?

In its latest survey, African Response asked South Africans to express their opinion on the relaxation of border formalities in preparation for World Cup.



This derived from the news that Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique are hoping to play a role in 2010 by offering "border free" tourism packages to World Cup visitors.

Fifty-one percent of South Africans disagreed that border formalities should be relaxed to ensure that the passage of travellers through border posts would be swift and trouble-free, while 37% believed that border formalities should be relaxed.

Desailly still keen on coaching Ghana



"Ghana has a good generation of players. We have Claude LeRoy, who is doing a great job. Me, I'm still young. I feel like I need to cross the world. I'm an ambassador of Unicef. I work with the orphanage. For the moment I need to dedicate myself on the ground to the kids. In the future, I will come back into coaching. My target for sure (is Ghana). After LeRoy, my time will come."

Marcel Desailly

Marcel Desailly, the former France international and World Cup winner has said he would like to return to football as coach of Ghana.

The 39-year-old said he would be interested in taking up the post once current manager Claude LeRoy has finished his "great job", BBC Sport reported.

Desailly arrived in France as a 4-year-old after being adopted by a French diplomat and his wife, and began his career in FC Nantes, turning professional in 1986. In 1992, he moved to Olympique de Marseille, and won the European Cup the following year. In 1994, while a member of A.C. Milan, he again won the Cup, being the first player to win the Cup in consecutive seasons with different clubs. (Desailly's team had defeated Milan in the 1993 Champions League final, also making him the first player to transfer to the Final's opposing side.) During his time in Milan he won two Italian league titles, in 1994 and 1996. Although he prefers to be a defender, he also played midfield for some time.

Desailly then moved to the English club Chelsea, where he played centre-back until the end of the 2003-04 season. After Euro 2004, he retired from international football as the all-time leader in appearances for France (116). Desailly's record has since been surpassed by fellow defender Lilian Thuram.

Desailly is considered one of the most accomplished players of the game and one of the best players of the past two decades, having won virtually every major team award.

He ruled himself out of the Black Stars job when it went to LeRoy lin 2006 but next time he will be keen to apply.

"My time will come," said Desailly, who helped France win the World Cup in 1998 and the European Championship in 2000.

"Ghana has a good generation of players. We have Claude LeRoy, who is doing a great job. "Me, I'm still young. I feel like I need to cross the world. I'm an ambassador of Unicef. I work with the orphanage. For the moment I need to dedicate myself on the ground to the kids.

"In the future, I will come back into coaching. My target for sure (is Ghana). After LeRoy, my time will come."

Footballer Al Bangura saved from deportation

UK's Immigration minister Liam Byrne has ordered an independent panel to consider Watford midfielder Al Bangura's case for a work permit. Bangura, who had previously been refused permission to stay in Britain, fears his life would be in danger if he were deported to his native Sierra Leone.

After a meeting between club officials and Mr. Byrne, Bangura was told he can now apply for a work permit to stay in the country.

Pressure from 4,000 signatures to a petition including football fans from across the UK as well as local Labour MP Claire Ward persuaded Byrne to offer Bangura another chance, Personnel Today reported.

MP Ward said: "We've won a concession from the Home Office that Watford Football Club will apply for a work permit as an exceptional case, without Al having to leave the UK.

"This work permit process will be subject to an independent panel because Al currently doesn't qualify for a work permit through conventional channels. Byrne has offered us this exceptional opportunity, which has created another avenue for Al to remain here with us."

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