

INTERNATIONAL

Problems persist for Organization of African Unity

Special to Sentinel-Voice

A record 43 ministers attended the 65th ministerial council meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Tripoli. This was the first session to be held outside the body's Addis Ababa-based headquarters.

For Libyans, the presence of an estimated 2,000 people in their capital, was a comforting relief from the international isolation arising from United Nations sanctions since April 1992.

Beyond the impressive attendance and their expression of solidarity with Libya, it is arguable whether or not the meeting managed to scratch, even superficially, Africa's many daunting political and socio-economic problems, critics note.

While previous sessions were devoted to the continental body's budgetary and administrative issues, the Tripoli meeting was from the onset bogged down by political crises, especially the grave situation in eastern Zaire.

Parties to the dispute, mainly Zaire and its neighbors Rwanda and Uganda, came prepared, yielding no ground to pleas from other delegates for caution.

To address the conflict, which continues to produce refugees and other related humanitarian and security problems, the council agreed to convene an extraordinary summit of the O.A.U.'s Central Organ on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. That will summit take place in Lome, Togo, March 25-26.

This meeting again exposed the division among members when it comes to presenting a common front. In elections at international organizations, such as the International Civil Aviation Association, where Africa was expected to present a common candidate, several countries chose to forward individual candidates with the likelihood that none would get the post.

The financial crisis of the Pan African News Agency (PANA) also came up for

discussion. O.A.U. Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim informed council that the Dakar-based news agency could fold anytime due to non-payment of contributions, with arrears totaling some \$30 million. The meeting ended after fixing its next session in May, ahead of the O.A.U.'s 33rd summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, June 2-4.

Forms of slavery emerge in Africa

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Slavery in Africa should have ended when Mauritania officially proscribed the trade in humans around 1981. But there is evidence that suggests the practice continues. "Classical slavery of people in chains has ended but new forms of servitude have emerged, mostly affecting children," says Cleophas Mally, the director of Wao-Afrique in Lome, Togo.

According to Mally, the new forms of slavery in Africa manifest themselves in early and forced marriages, exploitation of child labor, the

Caribbean region's talk of ties and blocs

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Amid concern about the future of preferential markets for its main primary commodity exports, the Caribbean Community is attracting the interest of neighbors apparently keen to forge trade ties.

The most significant of this is the approach from Mercosur, the growing South American trade bloc, which wants an agreement with the regional grouping.

The Caricom leaders will add this request to that of Cuba,

which is in search of a free trade agreement. Both proposals were noted at the recent Caricom summit in Antigua, and will be discussed when the regional leaders hold their main summit in Jamaica in July.

By all indications, Caricom will accept Mercosur's invitation, and will give the green light for the start of negotiations with Cuba.

An agreement between Mercosur and Caricom would offer a large market for Caricom's exports as Mercosur

has a market of 200 million people in member countries Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Caricom is made up of 14 Caribbean countries and has a market of six million people. Its members are: Antigua, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, St. Vincent, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Like Mercosur, it has created a custom's union and also plans a common market by 1999. Caricom's insistence that Cuba should be integrated into the region's economy is expected to lead to the group's acceptance of the island's request for a free trade treaty, officials said. A free trade pact with Cuba would open a market of nine million people to Caricom exporters. The volume of trade between Cuba and its neighbors last year was valued at \$300 million.

Caricom countries have joined others in recent years in persistently condemning the U.S. economic embargo on Cuba, saying that the economic and political reforms which Washington wants in the Spanish-speaking country cannot be achieved if the island is isolated.

mortgaging of children by their indebted parents and the genital mutilation of young girls. "Although Africans now refuse to admit the existence of the problem, we in Togo have witnessed the illegal repatriation of young girls to middle revenue countries such as Gabon and Cameroon," Mally told African media members.

He said the brokers are usually Togolese women living in Gabon who promise the girls' parents a better life for their children when they are employed as maids. But Mally suggests, "employers flagrantly violate their rights

and some of them even transform the girls into prostitutes."

Others, he said, tell parents that they are taking their daughters to neighboring Benin as maids. "Then, unknown to the parents, some of the girls end up as slaves in Lebanon," he said. Mally says Wao-Afrique will begin to pressure legislators for them to pass legislation protecting children's rights. The agency also wants the speedy ratification of the 1989 convention of child labor by countries where it has chapters: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

Unity

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deliberately has never issued so much as a press release, nor has Dillon spoken to the media about it, apparently not wanting it to be seen as a publicity ploy.

I learned of it because a colleague had seen an article on the donation in the current issue of Sky Magazine, the flight publication of Delta Airlines.

In it the author, Timothy Harper, who described the expressions of wonder and gratitude church congregations have expressed toward the company, said that he had become aware of it only by hearing about it from a minister who has a friend at the National Council of Churches.

However, Dillon did explain the donation in a memo to the company's 88,000-person workforce around the globe.

Reminding them that many of the company's mills and local branches are in small towns across the South, he said, that "Beyond the instant tragedy associated with this wanton destruction, these events strike at the essence of what makes small-town communities so special. The spirit of unity, dedication to purpose and pride in performing well that are so fundamental to these communities have also been indispensable to our company's success. This link,

together with the premium we place on corporate citizenship, requires that International Paper respond in this time of need."

That memo prompted an outpouring of donations for the Burned Churches Fund from employees themselves — a total of \$37,787 — which the company then matched dollar for dollar.

The people of International Paper and the many others in the church-rebuilding movement understand what is at stake here. It is, as John Dillon wrote, the *spirit of unity*, the sense of respect and tolerance and common purpose that knits together a rural community or

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