

INTERNATIONAL

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

The end of Mobutu

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Eight years after the end of the Cold War, people in the so-called Third World—where the superpowers fought most of their battles by proxy—are still digging themselves out of the rubble. In most of these “hot spots” the precarious path to peace, rule of law, and democracy has been made bitterly difficult by these countries’ devastated infrastructures, fractured societies, and by the failure of the U.S. government to support democracy with the same enthusiasm (and money) with which it “fought communism”. But lately there have been signs that the ordinary people in these countries have had enough of the transition to democracy. They want democracy now. Last week’s electoral victory in El Salvador by a democratic coalition opposing the fascist-leaning ARENA Party is one hopeful example. The imminent demise of the Mobutu dictatorship in Zaire is another.

With Laurent Desire Kabila’s rebel forces in control of eastern Zaire—and extending their control over new territory each day—the end of president Mobutu Sese Seko’s 31 year reign of terror is no longer in question. The question being discussed in Zaire’s nervous capital city, Kinshasa, these days is this: will the cancer-stricken President-for-Life die first, or live long enough to see himself overthrown by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL)? Many Kinshasa residents are holding out for the latter scenario, and make no effort to hide their pro-Kabila sentiment, even as Mobutu’s security forces take down their names.

Making a virtue of necessity, many in the U.S. foreign policy establishment are beginning to say that the ADFL’s blitz against Mobutu’s thuggish and sorry excuse for an army is a “welcome” development. Not the whole foreign policy establishment, by any means. Those still ensconced in the State Department must stifle themselves and hang tough with Mobutu, since that agency’s Africa policy runs on automatic and hasn’t been adjusted since the 1960’s “Congo Crisis.” But many influential organizations and individuals are now releasing eloquent statements about “Mobutuist tyranny.”



DR. LENORA FULANI

This month of April marks seven years since the beginning of Zaire’s “democratic transition”, when Mobutu was scared enough by the collapse of the Berlin Wall to permit some limited political freedoms to his people. Zairians rushed into this narrow opening and enlarged it. Two years after Mobutu’s 1990 announcement that he would “permit” two additional parties to exist in addition to his ruling party, Zairians had forced the convening of a 2800 delegate Sovereign National Conference, the goal of which was none other than the drafting of a new constitution, the formation of a new transitional government, and the election of a new transitional parliament, all with the mandate of guiding the country to free elections by 1994.

But this astonishing display of national unity and common purpose as systematically undermined by first the Bush, and the Clinton Administration’s refusal to back the democratic opposition. Instead, the U.S. government made clear its intentions to go on supporting Mobutu, and strong-armed the unarmed and poverty-stricken democrats into “power-sharing negotiations” with the armed and fabulously wealthy Mobutu regime.

While their leaders were being dragged to the negotiating table, the rank and file militants were being dragged to prisons and torture chambers by Mobutu’s fearsome civil guard.

The “war” in Zaire did not start with Kabila’s uprising last fall, rivers of blood have been shed for years by Zaire’s brave democratic opposition. “We haven’t chosen armed struggle,” said opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi to Radio France International in 1994, “we’ve chosen non-violence, and we are paying a price for that.”

The ADLF’s victories are changing the terms of the situation, but the cost of democracy is still being denominated in the lives of the Zairian people.

With the movements led by Etienne Tshisekedi and Laurent Desire Kabila poised to meet each other in a liberated Kinshasa, we can hope that the Zairian people, weary and bloodied by the interminable transition to democracy, will finally prevail.

South Africa: Exporting peace not war

By Gumisai Mutume
Special to Sentinel-Voice

For the first time ever, the South African Defense Force (SADF) will join other armies in the sub-region in a peacekeeping initiative.

The SADF, together with troops from Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe will participate in “Operation Blue Hungwe,” believed to be the first peacekeeping exercise of its type in Africa.

It will be held in Nyanga, Eastern Zimbabwe, from April 10-17. Botswana will send observers to the exercise.

The exercise battalion group, to be known as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Battalion, will undergo three weeks of training facilitated by the British Military Advisory Training Team (BMATT).

Pretoria had long balked at playing a leading role in policing the Southern African sub-region but mounting pressure from the international community appears to have had some effect on South Africa’s decision-makers.

SADF’s Colonel Kobus Loubser, who announced South Africa’s participation, said the aim of Operation Blue

Hungwe is “to enhance regional Southern African liaison, co-operation, military skills and inter-operability by means of a multinational, joint field training exercise in the tactics of international peacekeeping.”

Traditionally, South Africa has been viewed as an aggressor in the region. Its massive armed machinery during the apartheid era was used to destabilize neighboring countries. In Angola, for example, South Africa’s legacy in that country consists of some 10 million land-mines.

When the new democratic government came to power in 1994, South Africa continued to brush off attempts to draw it into peacekeeping. In the region, only Botswana and Zimbabwe have peacekeeping experience. But with foreign powers’ declining interest in Africa’s internal conflicts—following the United States’ debacle in Somalia—and the upsurge in conflicts and peacekeeping missions, South Africa can no longer stand on the sidelines.

Last year, at one of its summits held in the Botswana capital of Gaborone, SADC leaders sanctioned the creation of an organization to facilitate a peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation,

mediation and arbitration. “We shall develop a collective security capacity and conclude a mutual defense pact for responding to external threats, and (for) a regional peacekeeping capacity within national armies that could be called upon within the region or elsewhere on the continent,” said SADC executive secretary Kaire Mbuende.

Operation Blue Hungwe will also involve civil society as part of a new trend in international peacekeeping known as the New Peacekeeping Partnership, which seeks a better synergy between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local populations in peace building.

NGOs are in touch with people on the ground, speak the same language, understand local culture and have a participatory approach which could prove indispensable to sustainable peace.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the U.N. Children’s Fund, the World Food Program, the World Health Organization, and MS-Zimbabwe (formerly Danish People’s Aid) also will attend the exercise.

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