

INTERNATIONAL

Ted Turner gives United Nations \$1 billion gift

By Farhan Haq
Special to Sentinel-Voice

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) — Maverick U.S. businessman Ted Turner stunned U.N. diplomats when he announced that he would donate \$1 billion to the world body, sending analysts into a frenzy of speculation over the precedent his gift poses.

Turner wants his billion-dollar donation to be used to create a U.N. foundation which will provide money for de-mining, environmental protection, children's causes and other worthy activities. But some analysts worry that his gift could usher in an era in which the world's richest individuals and corporations can push their own causes onto the U.N. agenda.

"The long-run concern is that the United Nations, like everything else in the modern world, will become increasingly privatized as a result of (relying on) private funding," said Adamantia Pollis, professor of political science at New York's New School for Social Research.

"It's a good thing if it doesn't become widespread, and you don't have private institutions and corporations beginning to substitute for governments in funding the United Nations," she added.

The billion dollar offer equals one year of the U.N.'s regular budget and is several times larger than the yearly contribution of the entire developing world.

But for the United Nations, which has

endured a financial crisis largely caused by the nonpayment of some \$1.5 billion in U.S. dues, Turner's announcement came as a happy surprise.

"It's a billion-dollar day at the United Nations," U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said, smiling.

Balanced against the good cheer, however, is the sobering work ahead of ensuring that Turner's promised contribution of \$100 million annually for the next 10 years meets U.N. regulations.

Last week, officials from the billionaire's charitable Turner Foundation met with U.N. legal experts to hammer out ways in which the offer could be accepted.

U.N. officials noted that the world body is not allowed to use private donations to pay its costs. As a result, Eckhard said, Turner's offer cannot offset the \$1.5 billion that Washington owes the U.N. regular and peacekeeping budgets. "No one is off the hook," he said.

The donation puts immense pressure on Washington, the chief U.N. debtor, to pay its arrears, which the U.S. Senate has only been willing to do partially and with strings attached.

"I think it (Turner's offer) is a wonderful gesture, and I hope it is a sign of things to

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— Ted Turner

come," U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan said. "It shows his belief in the organization and in international cooperation, and I hope it will inspire governments to pay what they owe."

That message was driven home more bluntly by Turner

when he announced his offer, decided on at the spur of the moment, as he received a leadership award by the non-profit United Nations Association-USA.

"I've been thinking about the United States not paying, and it's been bothering me for a long time," Turner told the audience, which included Annan and other top U.N. officials. "I even thought about buying the U.S. debt at a discount, and then going to (Republican Senate Foreign Relations Chairman and U.N. opponent) Jesse Helms and saying, 'Pay me or I'll sue you'."

Instead, the founder of the Cable News Network (CNN) said he would donate \$1 billion to help fund U.N. activities and encourage other wealthy businessmen such as Microsoft founder and chairman Bill Gates and investor Warren Buffett to do the same. "If you're rich, you can expect a letter or a call from me," he said.

Turner founded his network in 1970 with a single television station, building it up over the

years until he merged it earlier this year with the Times-Warner Corporation in one of the largest corporate mergers ever. Turner said that as a result of the merger he earned \$1 billion in the first nine months of this year.

"I'll be as poor as I was nine months ago," he said.

The announcement did put President Bill Clinton, who spoke at the United Nations on Sept. 22, in a tight spot. After months of lobbying Congress, the best deal he has obtained to repay U.S. arrears is one that will free up only some \$819 million, money that Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia this week dismissed as "half a loaf."

And even that amount is conditioned upon the world body's pursuing greater budget cuts and allowing U.S. monitoring of its accounts, a demand U.N. officials are unlikely to accept.

Clinton faced the humiliation of appearing before his fellow world leaders unable to offer as much in the dues which his government is required by treaty to pay in full as a private U.S. citizen was able to put up in one night.

"I don't think (Clinton was) easily embarrassed, but I think he should be," Pollis said. In any case, she said, Turner's move could prod Congress to free up greater money for the United Nations, although she cautioned that right-wing senators could just as easily use it as an excuse to avoid committing government funds.

First Nigeria-made car hits market

Special to Sentinel-Voice

OWERRI, Nigeria (PANA) — The first made-in-Nigeria saloon car known as "Z-600" has been launched in the eastern city of Owerri.

Nigerian engineer and chief executive of Izuogu Motors, Ezekiel Izuogu, said he conceived, designed and manufactured the car, which has been tested by the country's vehicle inspectors and found road-worthy.

"The entire body work and chassis frame is our design from first principles. We also made the mold from which the body can be stamped out to produce hundreds of thousands of cars," Izuogu said at an elaborate presentation ceremony.

The Z-600, built on 4-stroke 1800 cc engine, Izuogu said, could cover some 30 kilometers on one gallon of petrol. The engine could also be mass produced and put to other uses like agricultural mechanization, standby electricity generator and tricycles, among others, he said.

The unit price of the new car is between 150,000 and 180,000 naira (between \$1,800 and \$2,000 in U.S. dollars).

Nigeria has several vehicle assembly plants, but new cars have been priced beyond the reach of the average salary earner, forcing many to patronize the booming market of imported used vehicles mainly from Europe.

Izuogu said it would require some 200 million naira or \$2.4 million U.S. dollars to set up a factory that would be able to produce about 30 Z-600 saloon cars a year.

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