

INTERNATIONAL

Nigeria trip more than just food and fun

By William Reaves
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A recent article in the Washington Post, "Officials Defend Conference," initially appeared to be a rebuttal of earlier criticisms against the delegation of Black U.S. mayors, other elected officials and media representatives who attended The World Conference of Mayors' (WCM) annual meeting in Nigeria.

But it soon became clear that this was another attempt to vilify a group of Black people who dared to define themselves and their associations.

The article specifically pointed out that not only did D.C. mayor Marion Barry attend the conference, which was "largely subsidized by Nigeria's military government," but two other Black mayors and three city council members from suburban D.C. municipalities, including myself, also got a free trip "home."

The apparent intent of much of the article was to focus on how the Nigerian government duped us, the ignorant and naive sons and daughters of the African Diaspora, into a trip to the motherland in an effort to "lend tacit support for the dictatorial regime."

But by hosting the WCM 1997 conference in Abuja, the Nigerian government did afford us the opportunity to rid ourselves of the ignorance and naiveté many Americans have about Africa, and more specifically Nigeria.

Aside from the welcomed surprise of lavish resort hotels, fine restaurants and superb African entertainment, it was indeed very clear that others have discovered Nigeria. There were many White and other

"If the regime were White (people), oppressing a majority Black population, none of those Black mayors would have gone to Nigeria."

— Washington Post

non-White people, from all over the globe, vacationing, exploring, and most importantly, conducting business in Nigeria.

However, ignorance and naiveté engenders knowledge and understanding. And that is exactly what the majority of the conference's nearly 500 participants from 12 African nations, Asia, the Caribbean and the United States achieved. We got to know and understand each other.

Founded in 1984 by then Tuskegee, Ala. mayor Johnny Ford, the WCM, is primarily patronized by non-White mayors worldwide. The WCM has the objective of stimulating constructive relationships between mayors internationally by using the six Ts: trust, trade, tourism, twinning of cities, technology transfer and treasury.

Several very insightful exchanges took place during the scheduled workshops which covered such topics such as: Women in Government, Mayors and the Press and Mayor/Council Relations.

Technology Transfer was one of the most interesting sessions. The committee was composed of representatives from four African countries and the United States after a very informative exchange,

we penned a resolution calling for the WCM to solicit from each national government represented at the conference, support for a Technology Transfer Communication Network (TTCN). The network will promote information sharing between cities, towns and villages, via electronic media facilitated by the respective mayors.

The WCM Technology Transfer Communication Network is a novel idea that caters to the technological needs of small to medium-sized municipalities because it will provide quick turnaround on technology-related requests for information. These will presumably lead to the identification of, and contact with, foreign entities who can fulfill the needs of the requester. Larger or more industrialized municipalities can gain private/public investment opportunities, while smaller communities may be its economic beneficiaries. All that many villages/towns/cities need is the injection of small amounts of technology and/or capital to help develop their natural resources.

After the WCM Technology Committee meeting, a mayor from a rural Nigerian village and U.S. officials calculated that for less than the average cost of an automobile in America, an investor could fund his village's 500 acre agricultural development project.

Another proposal outlined a joint venture for the development of a concrete and brick plant which would supply the region's construction industry.

One creative business plan, proposed (See Nigeria, Page 15)

Pledge to assist Kabila's government

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HARARE, Zimbabwe — The United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has pledged to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its reconstruction program, following the recent overthrow of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko by Laurent Kabila.

In an address to a meeting of the OAU council of ministers in Harare, Mohamed Sahnoun, the special envoy of the secretary-generals of the UN and OAU, said the two organizations would help mobilize donor funds.

"The United Nations and the OAU will do everything in their power to assist the Democratic Republic of Congo to mobilize international efforts in its reconstruction program and (will) urge all multilateral and bilateral donors to make their contribution to its development," said Sahnoun.

He urged African countries to recognize the newly independent regime in the former Zaire.

"We have to admit that the outgoing regime was clearly unpopular and that there was

little opposition to the ... swift progression in the country. The UN/OAU peace plan was an important leverage in the process."

"It enabled us to maintain dialogue between all sides

while allowing the African and international communities to increase pressure on all concerned to avoid total confrontation and bloodshed," said Sahnoun.


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WORLD NEWS

ZIMBABWEANS SEEKING LEGALIZED ABORTION FOR HIV MOTHERS

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Pregnant mothers who have been diagnosed as HIV positive should have a choice of abortion or giving birth, says the Women and AIDS Support Network. The network has prepared a document about the abortion issue and expects to gather the signature of 30,000 Zimbabwean women. Director Priscillah Misihairambi, the network's director, says her organization is not taking sides but realizes that pregnant women who are HIV positive have no clear choice under the current health legislation. Abortion is illegal in Zimbabwe except in cases of rape, incest and when pregnancy endangers the life of the mother and the fetus. "We know that abortion is taking place in Zimbabwe," Misihairambi said. In 1993, local news reports revealed that several abortions were conducted on HIV-infected women by medical doctors who misinterpreted the law. Official statistics say that Zimbabwe has the second highest HIV infection rate in Africa after Zambia, with one person per 1,000. "All we are saying is that as far as the Act is concerned it must explicitly mention HIV and that women who want to carry out an abortion should have the choice to do so."

NAMIBIAN EX-FIGHTERS CONTINUE TO PRESS GOVERNMENT FOR JOBS

WINDHOEK, Namibia — Demonstrations by ex-fighters of the ruling South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) are demanding jobs from the government and becoming a pressing political problem for the governing party. Despite government statements that the former fighters have to wait until the job market strengthens, they continue to agitate. Since gaining independence in 1990, most ex-fighters have been unemployed. "We are not against our government. We just want to be given jobs. We are now tired. Seven years without a job is too much," says Petrus Josef, leader of about 700 SWAPO ex-fighters who have been camping at Parliament Gardens, a few meters from the residency of President Sam Nujoma. They marched to the gardens on Oct. 23 and vowed not to leave until they were provided with jobs. Nathaniel Mazuilili, a SWAPO member of parliament, said the government is "trying its best to identify jobs and training opportunities." President Nujoma has repeatedly said jobs will be found and that the ex-fighters are being recruited for renovating schools, building of canals and doing road work. He said jobs will be assigned to those whose names have been compiled by the Social Integration Program of Ex-combatants.

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