

INTERNATIONAL

Gambian running for WHO director general

*By Tambayi Nyika
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

HARARE, Zimbabwe — The race is on for the Geneva-based director general of the World Health Organisation to replace Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan who leaves at the end of this month.

Up to six candidates are vying for the post, including Africa's Dr. Ebrahim Malick Samba of Gambia, current WHO Africa regional director.

His nomination by the Organisation of African Unity,

some say, is an indication that Africa views the impending change of leadership as an opportunity to renew its commitment to an organization it believes has lost much authority in recent years.

Other candidates are from Europe, the Caribbean, Middle East, Scandinavia and Asia.

While the race will be a nail biter to the end, Samba's main opponents are Nafis Sadik, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund and Gro Harlem, and Brundtland

the former Norwegian prime minister.

Samba says the job is not about prestige but service to the world, especially in Africa and other developing regions where communicable diseases are making a strong come back despite advances in medical research.

It is also about reforming the 52-year organization that has, until recently, been solely in charge of health to ensure that it responds to the fast changing needs of the globe

now that other players have come in.

"There is need for better coordination to avoid wasting resources," Samba said. "The technical expertise is there but WHO's leadership has been weak. It is an old organization that previously monopolized health issues. We need to be less and less bureaucratic, to reform, to be more pro-active and adaptive to new circumstances. WHO is still needed, but it is too

conservative and rigid."

He prefers to downplay the tough fight ahead.

Samba is aware he must intensify his lobbying efforts, but said he is confident that his leadership track record, since he assumed his first job in Gambia as specialist surgeon, is unparalleled.

The rare unity that the 53-member OAU has shown in unanimously nominating him is also an endorsement.

Besides, he is also credited

with clearing river blindness as a public health threat. The disease, spread over 11 west African countries in the 1980s, had afflicted 30 percent of villages in the region.

Samba says his four-year stay as WHO Africa regional director has been instructive. Working largely on the continent, he said he understands the menace of communicable diseases like tuberculosis, yellow fever, cholera, ebola and AIDS.

Zimbabwe opens Congo embassy to cement economic relations

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HARARE, Zimbabwe — With the new year, Zimbabwe has opened an embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, consolidating diplomatic relations with the government of President Laurent Kabila which came into power in May 1997 after a seven-month war. Zimbabwe's Foreign Affairs Ministry said three of its officers had been sent to open the embassy in Kinshasa, the DRC capital.

Diplomatic relations between Zimbabwe and Congo were established when both countries signed a bilateral trade agreement

in 1997.

Congo was recently admitted to the Southern Africa Development Community, a 14-nation economic grouping of which Zimbabwe is a member. A number of economic links have also been taking shape between the two countries since 1997.

"A consortium of six Zimbabwean banks and finance houses, backed by government, have established a 161-million-Zimbabwe-dollar line of credit to support trade between Zimbabwe and the DRC," the ministry said.

That amount is equivalent to \$9.47 million in U.S. funds.

Rwanda, Tanzania to probe complaints

Special to Sentinel-Voice

KIGALI, Rwanda — Border officials from Rwanda and Tanzania have recommended the establishment of a commission to investigate claims by refugees forcefully repatriated from the north-western Tanzanian region of Kagera to the west of Lake Victoria. The proposal was made in Ngara, Kagera region, at a joint meeting of officials from Kagera region in Tanzania and Kibungo Prefecture in Rwanda.

Late last year, Tanzanian authorities herded thousands

of Rwandan refugees to the common border, including old case refugees who fled ethnic violence in their country between 1950 and 1970.

At the Ngara meeting, the acting Prefecture of Kibungo, Rumanzi Protais told his Tanzanian counterpart, Muhamed Babu, that refugees were also complaining that they were not allowed to pack their belongings or move with their heads of cattle.

The repatriated refugees also claimed that they left behind some of their family members who were not with

them when they were rounded up and forced to the border for repatriation.

At the end of the bilateral border meeting, the two sides agreed that repatriated Rwandans who left their property in Tanzania or were disunited with their family members could return to Kagera to sort out their affairs not later than March 30, 1998.

The Tanzanian side also agreed to revisit cases of Rwandans who had applied for Tanzanian citizenship but were repatriated before they got a reply.

President Clinton to visit nine African countries this year

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LUANDA, Angola — President Bill Clinton is expected to tour nine African states in the first half of 1998, a senior Angolan foreign affairs official has said. Anercio Cadete, a spokesman for the ministry, told the Angolan news agency, Angop, that Clinton will travel to Angola, Congo (Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Clinton's African tour will be preceded by Vice President Al Gore's tours of the same countries in the first quarter of this year. Cadete said these visits are aimed at strengthening relations between the United States and southern African countries. However, Cadete clarified

that Clinton's visit to southern Africa would depend on the improvement of the political situation in the region.

Among the countries to be visited, Angola is still faced with resistance by the former rebel movement, Unita, to fully implement the peace accord signed in late 1994 in Lusaka, Zambia, to end 30 years of civil war.

Congo (Brazzaville) is just emerging from a murderous civil war in which more than 10,000 people were killed.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, President Laurent Desire Kabila is trying to rehabilitate the former Zaire's dilapidated economy, amid simmering signs of unrest in the country's east.

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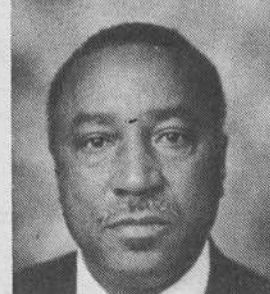
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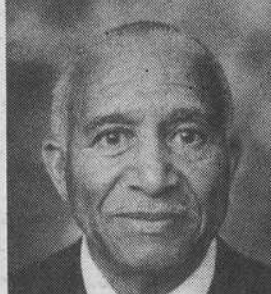
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