

COMMENTARY

Congo awaiting reconstruction, democratic elections

Special to Sentinel-Voice

On June 25 the Secretary General of the United Nations released a report on human rights violations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (ex-Zaire). The report was compiled by a special investigative team sent to the Congo in the summer of 1997, shortly after a liberation movement headed by now-president Laurent Desire Kabila ended the 32 year old dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko. The team was to investigate allegations that Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Zaire (ADFL) committed massacres against the Rwandan Hutu refugee populations who were fleeing ahead of the ADFL troops.

Sending this human rights mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo was viewed by many in the region, as well as by some international observers, as a cynical attempt by the international community

to deflect blame away from its own role in the region's tragedy. For it was the Western powers' complicity with the criminal regimes of Zaire's Mobutu and Rwanda's genocidal "Hutu Power" movement that help set up conditions in which war, death, disease, revenge killings and refugee crises could be the only possible outcome.

During his trip to Africa this spring, President Clinton acknowledged this burden of guilt. Speaking to genocide survivors in Kigali, Rwanda, he said that the international community "must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy ... We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe haven for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide." Indeed, the United Nations not only failed in its obligations to intervene and prevent the 1994

This Way For Black Empowerment

By Lenora Fulani



genocide in Rwanda, but took other steps which had the effect of spreading Rwanda's murderous ethnic conflict to Zaire, and guaranteeing that Zaire's transition to democracy would not be a peaceful one.

For instance, when the genocidal "Hutu Power" regime was on the brink of defeat by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a UN-sanctioned intervention force headed by France and code-named "Operation Turquoise" stepped in and allowed the regime's soldiers, militias and government leaders to escape, with all their weapons, across

the border to Zaire. Along with them came more than one million civilian Hutu refugees, frightened into fleeing by radio broadcasts falsely announcing that all Hutus would be killed in revenge by the new Rwandan government.

The arrival of these refugees in Zaire provoked a humanitarian operation which, despite the good intentions of many heroic aid workers, was a disaster in itself.

The United Nations failed to disarm the refugees, or to separate civilians from combatants. They allowed the camps to be set up close to the border with Rwanda, and the soldiers sheltered there used the camps as staging grounds

for attacks on the new Rwandan government. The extremist "Hutu Power" government-in-exile re-established itself in the camps. Incredibly, the aid agencies related to this regime as a legitimate authority over the refugees, entrusting these criminals with the distribution of food and other survival needs. The leaders sold the donated food on the black market and purchased weapons. The Rwandan "Hutu Power" regime had been allied with the Zairian dictator Mobutu, and when the ADFL's offensive against Mobutu began, the Hutu troops garrisoned in the refugee camps were the only soldiers in the country willing to fight. (The rank and file of Mobutu's own army mostly deserted.)

This situation placed innocent Hutu refugees in mortal danger. Kept from returning home by "their" own soldiers, who used them as human shields or as "bait" to attract supplies from aid agencies, some 200,000 embarked on a forced march across Zaire. Perhaps tens of

thousands of them died. Their fate was the subject of the Secretary General's investigation.

Because the investigative team was perceived as politicized, the new Congolese government did not fully cooperate with it, and little actual forensic work was accomplished.

Although the investigative team assembled ample evidence that many, many people met violent deaths during the Congo's civil war, it did not prove that the ADFL forces deliberately committed violations of humanitarian law, or crimes against humanity. This finding, together with the Congolese government's announced intention to initiate its own investigation, will hopefully put an end to the international community's largely gratuitous exercise. Perhaps at long last, the new Congolese government will be permitted to turn its full attention to the needs of this tragedy, and to the rebuilding of a democratic Congo.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Joining homophobic fray can be contentious issue for Blacks

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I am not surprised that conservatives are now pressing viciously the politics of religion. They do it every election year, thinking that exploitation of "the social issues" will give them power.

But there seems to be a special recklessness, a more venomous on homosexuals and on those seeking abortions, this season. And disturbingly new is the tendency of many supposedly religious black Americans to join in the rabid homophobia of white reactionaries who, if the issue were racial justice, wouldn't give black people the sweat off their toes.

It almost gives me the heebie-jeebies to Green Bay Packer football hero, preacher Reggie White, starring in a right-wing newspaper advertisement urging "hope and healing" for homosexuals. It is an ad that repeats the current homophobic line that homosexuality is just a disease.

It is disquieting to see another black preacher in Atlanta gaining national notoriety by decrying the movement into his neighborhood of white homosexuals. In displays of both black racism and homophobia, he declares white homosexuals to be a threat to black children, and he assails and threatens them as hostilely as does any white supremacist trying to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods.

I am galled to see the TV networks building up a black candidate for Congress in Madison, Wis., whose campaign is based on his rancorous opposition to giving lesbians and



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gays key public service jobs.

There is always a dangerous arrogance involved when one person tries to impose his religion, his professed knowledge of what God wants, on others. It is especially menacing when the victims of one kind of bigotry curry favor with their tormentors by joining them in preying upon less-favored groups that are "different."

I recently wrote a column deploring the fact that Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R.-Miss., and a few other powerful congressmen had declared homosexuality to be a sin, according to their reading of the Bible. I asked whether they really live by the Bible, as per God's admonitions to Moses in Leviticus.

A reader in Albany, N.Y., has written to inform me that "Jesus nailed the Old Testament to the cross," so that part of the Bible is not to be considered or obeyed by Christians.

That argument explains to me precisely why our forefathers wrote a constitution that separates church from state and precludes making official policy on the basis of any man's or group's religion or dictates of what the Bible tells us to do.

Without their circumscribing the religious fanatics, we would all be buffeted by the passions of those who are unwilling to live and let live.

I don't pretend to converse with God or know what He thinks. But I can imagine that it does not please Him that so many truly terrible things are done in the name of religion.

Jones latest Clinton nominee ramrodded by spiteful GOP

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Lani Guinier. Bill Lann Lee. Henry Foster. Ron Brown. Hazel O'Leary. Jocelyn Elders. Alexis M. Herman. Now Daryl Jones.

The Senate Armed Services Committee's rejection of Jones as Air Force secretary follows a pattern that is now disgracefully familiar.

President Clinton appoints an African-American or minority candidate to a cabinet post, and if he or she lucky enough to get confirmed, Republican vigilantes immediately start in on them.

They dig up all the dirt they can find on the appointee, magnify it into a major crime, try to enlist the media in the smear campaign, and hope that the pressure will force the hapless official to resign, or Clinton to fire them.

If the nominee has not been confirmed they do everything humanly possible to torpedo the appointment in Senate Committee hearings, or better yet get Clinton to withdraw the nomination. The relentless attacks on Clinton's minority appointees combine the time-tested blend of sneaky racial and blatant political mean-spiritedness.

The Jones appointment was certainly a classic example of this. In the past, appointments such as Air Force secretary generated no controversy and were routinely approved. In the case of Jones, his military experience and education were never an issue.

He is an Air Force Academy graduate, attorney and former Air National Guard pilot who flew F-4 Phantoms and A-7D Corsairs.

The allegations against him were that he was a lousy flyer, collected extra pay for flight time he didn't earn or deserve, sold Amway products to enlisted Air Force personnel, and improperly lobbied on behalf of a financial company seeking a bond deal on the Miami Airport.

There was no tangible proof offered that Jones knowingly abused his authority to sell Amway products. The charge that he was an incompetent pilot hinged mostly on the word of a former squadron leader. And the Security and Exchange Commission which opened an investigation on the Miami bond sale has not accused Jones of criminal wrongdoing.

The post of Air Force secretary does not explicitly require the candidate to be an experienced pilot. It is primarily an administrative job that requires the overseeing of budgets, training, and recruitment, but not military combat operations. While California Congresswoman Jane Harman, who is now being mentioned as a possible nominee for Air Force secretary, is knowledgeable about military budgets, there is no mention of how much, if any, flight experience she has had, or if this could be an issue.

However, none of this really matters. The Republicans, by flunking Jones for Air Force secretary, intended once more to send the message that if any Clinton nominee or appointee is a minority, especially African-American, their education, competence, integrity, and dedication to public service won't mean much.

They will become instant hostages to the political and racial whims of the Republicans. Their aim is to make Clinton and Gore, if he captures the White House in 2000, think twice before they appoint other minorities to cabinet posts.

Yes, it's shameful and disgusting to make race and politics the sole yardstick for measuring the qualifications of a political appointee. But sadly it has become more and more the American political way.

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