

INTERNATIONAL

Delegates to IMF: Cancel African debt

By Askia Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (FCN) — The annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank ended more than two weeks ago without any dramatic effort by the world's finance ministers to resolve either the global financial crisis or to relieve the oppressive debt facing poor nations, especially in Africa.

President Bill Clinton — in his remarks to the meeting Oct. 6 — warned that the recent global march toward democracy and free markets has been endangered by the international financial meltdown. At the same time, activists from non-governmental organizations (from throughout the developing world, demanded that their debts be canceled.

"Decisive action" is necessary said Clinton, without providing details about the new mechanisms he would propose in order to temper the "volatile swings of the international marketplace."

The alternative, he said, is that nations will make a "grave mistake" by turning away from open markets and toward greater protectionism.

Supporters of Jubilee 2000—a worldwide

movement to cancel the crushing international debt of impoverished countries by the new millennium—are also urging decisive measures regarding what they consider to be un-repayable debt owed by the world's poorest countries, most of which are in Africa.

They are also careful to point out that they are insisting on "cancellation" of debts owed by African countries and are not asking for Western governments to "forgive" them.

"Looking at the history of the relationship between Africa and the West, we see that the human and material resources of Africa have been used to develop the West and under-develop Africa," said Kofi Klu, a Jubilee 2000 board member and the head of Uhuru, a human rights organization based in Ghana, during a Jubilee 2000 rally called to coincide with the IMF meeting.

"While there is talk about Africa retaining its so-called debt, there is no talk about the historical debt that is owed us for centuries of pillage, plunder and destruction of African people world wide, Klu said.

He also complained that the IMF and World Bank are known as the armed robbers



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of the people of Africa and the so-called Third World.

Western environmentalists agree with the harsh assessment of the monetary fund.

"Generally speaking, the IMF for its entire history has proposed policies that are harmful to people's well being, but that protect and benefit the biggest speculators and investors," said Dr. Brent Blackwelder, president of Friends of the Earth, in a broadcast interview.

"Their basic formula to impose on countries is to say: 'Increase your exports, decrease your imports, and cut government spending.' But, when it comes down to specifics, what these policies mean is impoverishment for the people, and destruction of the natural resources at an unsustainable rate.

The debt relief movement

also gained important Black American allies during the IMF session. The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition president, both endorsed the call to cancel the African debt, joining the broad coalition of American faith-based environmental and social justice groups.

Last August, the Progressive National Baptist Convention endorsed the Jubilee 2000 campaign. The American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee endorsed the movement just prior to the IMF meetings.

On Oct. 1, the Vatican renewed its appeal for debt relief for developing countries, saying the well-being of millions of poor people cannot be postponed.

"The needs of the poorest countries should not be considered second class," said Archbishop Francois Nguyen Van Thuan, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in a statement quoted by the Catholic News Service.

Africa's "debt burdens are the new economy's chains of slavery," Jackson said after meeting with Jubilee 2000 campaign members.

Africa among eight nations seeking nuclear disarmament

By Thalif Deen

Special to Sentinel-Voice
UNITED NATIONS (IPS) — A coalition of eight U.N. nations — Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden — will jointly sponsor a U.N. resolution, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, later this year urging the 185-member General Assembly to finalize an agenda for the achievement of nuclear disarmament.

It will be the first time that the General Assembly has considered a move to eliminate the world's nuclear arsenals.

The joint declaration states that the international community can no longer remain complacent about the reluctance of the nuclear weapon states and the three nuclear-capable states to take the fundamental and requisite step to "the speedy, final and total elimination of their nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capability."

The proposal is expected

to draw strong opposition from the world's five major nuclear powers: the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia.

Since their underground tests in May of this year, two new countries, India and Pakistan, have joined the nuclear club. But, India announced that it will support the proposal for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Israel is considered "nuclear-capable" but has not admitted to any testing.

South African President Nelson Mandela, whose country abdicated the right to be a nuclear power in July 1991, told the General Assembly that the joint anti-nuclear effort is an "honest attempt" to take systematic and progressive steps to eliminate these weapons, and the threat they pose for the annihilation of mankind.

"We must face the fact that after countless initiatives and resolutions, we still do not have concrete and generally accepted proposals supported by a clear commitment by the nuclear-

weapons states to the speedy, final and total elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capabilities," he told delegates.

Swedish Foreign Minister Lene Hjelm-Wallen told the assembly that her country will not only co-sponsor the anti-nuclear resolution, but it will also support increased efforts "to rid the world of all other weapons of mass destruction."

"The possession of nuclear weapons by any state could not be indefinitely accepted as legitimate," she added.

Hjelm-Walle also pointed out that the nuclear ambitions of India and Pakistan have endangered peace, security and stability in the region, and threaten all international non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told the General Assembly that his country is prepared to sign the CTBT — but conditionally.

"Pakistan's adherence to the treaty will take place only in conditions free from

coercion or pressure," he told delegates.

Far from abandoning his country's nuclear options, Sharif said, "It must also be well understood that if India were to resume nuclear testing, Pakistan will review its position as provided under Article Nine of the treaty," he said.

Sharif also said he expects the "arbitrary restrictions" imposed on Pakistan — both by the United States and by multilateral institutions — to be speedily removed in exchange for his signature on the CTBT. "We also expect that discriminatory sanctions against Pakistan will be lifted. And, we count on the full support of the world community for a just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute," he said.

Responding to Pakistan's test explosions, the U.S. imposed economic sanctions on Islamabad and said it would also block all concessional loans and funding both by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

WORLD BRIEFS

REPUBLIC OF CONGO PRESIDENT
USES VISIT TO SWAY OPINION

President Pascal Lissouba of the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), who was forced into exile by an alleged coup d'état in October 1997, visited Washington, D.C. Oct. 5-9. He made several appearances and met privately with members of Congress and Executive Branch officials including Congressional Black Caucus members Donald Payne, D-N.J., William Jefferson, D-La., Cynthia McKinney, D-Ga., Harold Ford Jr., D-Tenn., and Earl Hilliard, D-Ala., to discuss the Congo's current political situation. He hopes the caucus will take the lead in applying pressure on the State Department to officially declare that a coup d'état did take place in the Congo and that it was not a "civil war" that ended constitutional government there. He believes the U.S. government's involvement will encourage other Western governments — such as the United Kingdom and Canada — to show their support.

NAMIBIAN WOMEN FIGHTING
FOR RIGHT TO CHILD SUPPORT

WINDHOEK (AIA/GIN) — The Legal Assistance Centre in Namibia is fighting to change child support laws to force delinquent fathers to provide for their offspring. According to LAC, 47 percent of fathers forced to provide assistance stop supporting the child within a month of birth. The LAC says the country's Maintenance Act is weak and contributes to the high numbers of men who do not meet their financial obligations. The court cannot order someone who is unemployed — but has substantial assets — to pay. Automatic adjustments to maintenance payments cannot be made according to inflation. And, payments are made to the court instead of directly to the recipient or into a bank account. From January to September, 900 child support cases were reported in Windhoek. Nationally, last year's total was 1,170.

TANZANIA'S CROWDED PRISONS
BREEDING GROUNDS FOR DISEASES

DAR ES SALAAM (IPS) — Tanzania's badly overcrowded prisons have become a breeding ground for diseases: tuberculosis, meningitis, cholera, malaria, diarrhea and AIDS. "Overcrowding is the major source of the outbreak of communicable diseases in prison," said Ornel Malisa, head of Tanzania's prisons. Prison authorities, reluctant to provide figures, said that "thousands" have perished in Tanzania's jails in the past few years. Overcrowding has taken on disastrous proportions in recent years. In the capital Dar es Salaam, for example, up to 30 prisoners may be crammed into a single room meant for one inmate, a top prison official said. Tanzania's 170 prisons, built to accommodate 21,537 inmates, now hold more than 42,000 prisoners, 40 percent of them remand prisoners.

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