

INTERNATIONAL

Jackson brokers Sierra Leone cease-fire

Askia Muhammad

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ACCRA, Ghana (NNPA)— The Rev. Jesse Jackson, fresh from a diplomatic victory in which he won the release of three captured American soldiers from Yugoslavian custody, helped broker another stunning breakthrough for peace during the fifth African-African American Summit.

Residents in Sierra Leone's war-weary capital, Freetown, were cautiously optimistic when their President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and rebel leader Foday Sankoh announced a cease-fire accord, with peace talks. This allows for vital food and medical aid to reach areas of the country previously cut off by eight years of fighting.

"I look at the war in Kosovo," Jackson told Summit delegates May 21, "and the war in Sierra Leone. We want to look at an African-European policy, where two countries are in income crisis. In Yugoslavia-dash-Kosovo, there's internal crisis, folks driven out to the borders and beyond into Albania and Macedonia.

"In Sierra Leone, folks [are] driven out across the border. More [are] driven out of Sierra Leone than Kosovo. More dead in Sierra Leone than Kosovo, but Kosovo has the world defending it and trying to protect its interests, and that's not happening in Sierra Leone. We want one set of rules."

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— Rev. Jesse Jackson

The agreement was signed May 19 and set to take effect May 24 following talks in Lome, the capital of Togo which were arranged by that country's President Nyasingbe Eyadema and the Rev. Jackson, President Clinton's Special Envoy to Africa for Democracy. Representatives from the U.N. and the Organization of African Unity were also present.

The accord calls for the immediate release of non-combatants and prisoners of war held in the bush behind rebel lines, and the deployment of an U.N. observer force to ensure that the truce is respected according to published reports.

Sankoh's 40,000 member Revolutionary United Front claims to control two-thirds of the country, including its diamond-rich eastern region.

"Today, we make a commitment, once the bombing is over, to rebuild the infrastructure of Yugoslavia, but not Sierra Leone," Jackson told delegates after he held extensive bi-lateral meetings with African heads of state attending the Summit. "We just want one set of rules. Stop the war. Choose hope

and healing over hate and hurt. When the war is over there will be tens of billions going to Yugoslavia to rebuild bridges, schools, houses and hospitals. Let those same rules with our tax dollars apply to Africa as well."

Presidents Kabbah and Sankoh signed another cease-fire accord in Abidjan, Gabon in November 1996. That deal did little to halt the fighting, and in May 1998, Kabbah was ousted by junior army officers who were quickly supported by the RUF. That coup d'etat was quickly put down and Kabbah's democratically elected government was restored nine months later by a Nigerian-led West African intervention force, ECOMOG. Recently ECOMOG forces have made gains on the ground in rebel-controlled towns.

"We see every night on TV, Kosovarians marching, and our hearts hang heavy, because it is wrong to drive them out. We've not seen Sierra Leoneans marching, or the camps in Ethiopia and Eritrea, or the Congo and the Sudan. And yet, all we really want is one set of rules," Jackson said.

In January, the rebels launched a bloody invasion

of the capital, unleashing more than two weeks of fighting that left more than 6,300 dead and vast areas of the city torched.

Despite the fact that he was imprisoned two years ago and sentenced to death last October for treason, Sankoh has been on temporary leave from prison while he met with senior rebel commanders to fashion their bargaining strategy ahead of peace talks.

The RUF is expected to renew its call for Sankoh's unconditional release and a transitional government with rebel input for four years before the country holds another round of presidential elections.

Like neighboring Liberia, which was also crippled by a bloody civil war and ended with elections in mid-1997, Sierra Leone was originally a colony of freed slaves from North America.

While freed slaves from the U.S. founded Liberia in 1822, Sierra Leone was founded by a colony of 1,100 slaves from Nova Scotia in 1792.

WORLD BRIEFS

SUDAN OPPOSITION WANTS EX-PRESIDENT TRIED FOR CRIMES

KHARTOUM (IPS) — The Sudanese government on May 21 halted the return of former president Jafaar Muhammad Nimeri amid calls by opposition leaders for mass protests against Nimeri's return from Egypt. Opposition leaders are stepping up efforts to persuade Egypt, where he has been living, to hand over the former Sudanese leader to an international court to stand trial for alleged mass killings and human rights abuses. Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mustafa Osman Ismail, was expected to visit Egypt to discuss possibilities of improving ties with Egypt and Nimeri's return to Sudan. Nimeri, who was considered an ally of Western powers, ruled the country from 1969 to 1985. On April 6, 1985, while he was in the United States, Nimeri was ousted in a bloodless military coup.

TRAFFICKING OF YOUNG GIRLS BIG BUSINESS IN NIGERIA

BENIN, Nigeria (IPS) — Forty-seven Nigerian girls between 15 and 20 years old were recently deported from Italy at the direction of Omonoba Erediewa, the traditional ruler of Benin Kingdom. Most of them were from Benin in the midwestern Edo State. Many of these young girls are used in prostitution and drug trafficking rings. Often from poor homes, the girls are lured by the prospects of earning huge sums of money. "The syndicates issue them with forged travelling documents on the pretext that they will offer them lucrative jobs. The girls are subsequently forced into various illicit activities, such as slavery, sex-hawking, advance fee fraud and the drug business," said Italian ambassador to Nigeria, Giovanni Germano. "The lure to them has been 98 naira to the dollar. This is what makes them travel abroad to constitute a nuisance to themselves and the country," said Alhaji Ilavbare, chairman of Oredo Local Government in Edo. He called on the government to improve the economy to discourage young Nigerians from running abroad, and also appealed to parents to educate their children.

Educational gifts presented at international conference

Askia Muhammad

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ACCRA, Ghana — In addition to major initiatives aimed at debt relief, more investment and more favorable trade between Africa and the United States, hundreds of delegates attending the Fifth African-African American Summit turned their attention to education.

Dr. Leonor Boulton Johnson, director of African American Studies at Arizona State University, organized a campaign collecting more than 600 scientific calculators which were presented to Ghanaian Education Minister Ekwow Spio-Garbrah May

19.

Dr. Mildred Fitzgerald Johnson, executive director of the National Technical Association of Scientists and Engineers in Philadelphia, brought money, pencils, notebooks, rulers and dictionaries.

She also led a delegation of 55 Black U.S. educators on a day-long visit to the Education Ministry and to several schools.

Teachers and elected officials from around the country, as well as members of conference convener the Rev. Leon Sullivan's home-church in Philadelphia organized among themselves well in advance of the Summit

to collect gifts for African schools.

"We presented more than 7.2 million cedis (Ghanaian currency) to Education Minister Garbrah, to be divided equally among the elementary, secondary, and technical schools we visited," Johnson told the NNPA.

In addition, members of Rev. Sullivan's Zion Baptist Church gave another \$1,000, members of Philadelphia's Wesley AME Zion Church gave another \$1,000 and Danville, Va. City Council member and teacher Joyce Glaise presented \$200 collected from her chapter of The Links.

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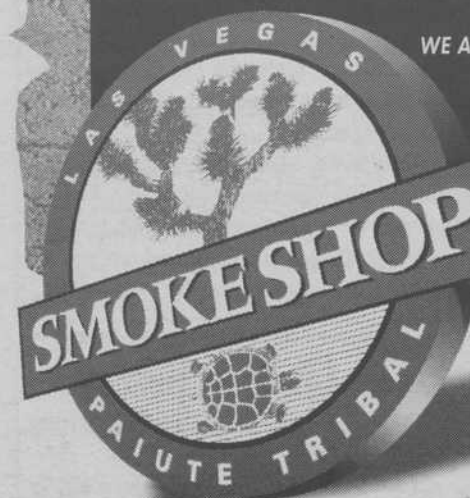
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