

WORLD BRIEFS

AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETS IN TRIPOLI

TRIPOLI, Libya (PANA) - The African Commission for Human and People's Rights recently started its 29th ordinary session during which, among other things, it will deliberate on reports on the human rights situation in four countries. The commission is holding the session in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, from April 23 to May 7 at the invitation of the Libyan national human rights committee. According to a statement issued by the commission, delegates from state parties to the African Charter of Human and People's Rights as well as representatives of U.N. agencies and various inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations are taking part in the session. It said the commission will examine periodic reports from Namibia, Ghana, Algeria and Congo (Brazzaville). It will also consider reports of its special rapporteur on prisons and conditions of detention and a report on women's rights in Africa. Complaints regarding human rights violations, the situation of refugees and the elderly in Africa, handicapped people, indigenous populations, and the forthcoming world conference on racism are among items on the agenda of the session. The session was preceded by a three-day forum of African non-governmental organizations, jointly organized by the African Human Rights Center and the Libyan Human Rights Center. Participants of the forum discussed the issue of human rights in Africa in view of the Treaty on establishment of the African Union which will replace the Organization of African Unity. The African Commission of Human and People's Rights was established by the OAU for the protection and promotion of human and people's rights in Africa.

SUDANESE JOURNALIST WINS AWARD FOR COURAGEOUS REPORTING

KHARTOUM, Sudan (PANA) - Amal Abbas, editor-in-chief of Sudan's daily newspaper, Arrai el Akhar ("Another Perspective"), has won the International Women's Media Frontier (IWMF) 2001 award, for courageous reporting. "I am writing to let you know you that the IWMF has selected you as a winner of the award of courage in journalism in 2001," IWMF program director Amy Johnson said in a letter to Amal, recently published by Khartoum dailies. IWMF is a Washington-based organization. Johnson said the award is presented each year to three women journalists for courage in reporting the news. Amal will in addition, get a cash prize and the IWMF crystal sculpture. The three winners are to be officially declared at a press conference in Washington May 3, the World Press Freedom Day. Since its inception five years ago, Arrai el Akhar has continued to enjoy a wide readership mainly because of its daring reporting on Sudanese events, which has earned the daily suspension several times, by the National Council for the Press and Publications, the country's press watchdog. Amal has herself faced defamation charges and jailed at least twice.

MALAWI GOVERNMENT TO HANDS-OFF LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

BLANTYRE, Malawi (PANA) - Government is planning to pull out of Malawi's declining livestock industry to give the private sector a chance to revive it. Animal Health director in the ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Danny Chinombo, said government plans to privatize its remaining livestock breeding and production farms across the country. Government used to control at least 13 livestock institutions, but almost all of them have been under-performing. "Breeding and production of animals should not be in the hands of government," Chinombo conceded, adding that Malawi "is the only country where livestock production is still in the hands of government." However, he said due to an increase in demand for poultry government, through the National Livestock Development Program, would move into mass production of chicks and eggs because the private sector cannot meet the demand. Malawi currently has a demand of at least 15 million eggs per month but produces 11 million eggs. To cover the shortfall dealers import eggs from Zimbabwe and South Africa. However, the egg imports are threatening to choke local production as egg imports per month were already reaching 33 million.

INTERNATIONAL

African women want female OAU chief

LUSAKA, Zambia (PANA) - The Nairobi-based African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), has decided to rally behind Zambia's Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika in her bid to become the OAU's next Secretary General.

To this end, FEMNET has circulated letters of solidarity and fact sheets containing Mbikusita-Lewanika's profile to African organizations, Heads of State, MPs, government Ministers and United Nations Secretary General.

The Network is also soliciting the support of former African leaders including South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Ketumile Masire of Botswana, and African women leaders such as Graca Machel, Queen Mamohato Seciso of Lesotho and the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development.

In an appeal letter also

made available to PANA in Lusaka Monday, FEMNET Executive Director Muthoni Wanyeki urged the Zambian government to support Mbikusita-Lewanika's bid to become the first woman to head the Addis Ababa-based continental Organization.

Wanyeki claimed that Namibia, another member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), has replaced the name of another female candidate, with that of a male, allegedly supported by Zambia.

The Secretary General's position falls vacant when the incumbent, Salim Ahmed Salim of Tanzania, serves out his three five-year terms in July.

African leaders are expected at a Summit in the Zambian capital that month, to take a decision on who heads the planned African Union, which would replace the OAU formed in May 1963.

"Zambian male intellectuals have been circulating literature on the internet and in the media opposing Dr. Mbikusita-Lewanika's candidature," Wanyeki charged.

FEMNET noted the posts of OAU Secretary-General and the five assistants had always been monopolised by men.

"The fact that only four out of Africa's 52 countries have female Ministers of Foreign Affairs means that women are virtually absent from the two most powerful organs of the OAU, the Assembly of the Heads of State and governments and the Council of Ministers," the Network observed.

Despite some achievements in gender issues by the OAU, FEMNET claimed that male dominance remains a major concern.

"It is for this reason that African women believe that it is in their interest to support the quest of Dr. Mbikusita-Lewanika, the first

woman to ever run for office as Secretary General of OAU," Wanyeki said.

She said the position of OAU Secretary-General is important to the African women's agenda to promote gender-responsive and sensitive leadership at all levels within regional and sub-regional institutions.

"It is time for African governments to walk the talk by ensuring participation of women in decision-making as encapsulated in international treaties, policy documents and Conventions they have signed and ratified such as the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the Beijing Platform for Action," she added.

Mbikusita-Lewanika is credited with an impressive career at national, regional and international levels.

She holds a Ph.D. in Early Childhood and Primary Education and a Masters in Education and Psychology.

Minister highlights importance of health research

DAKAR, Senegal (PANA) - Senegalese Health Minister Abdou Fall stressed the importance of research in accelerating health sector reforms in Africa.

Opening the 20th session in Dakar, of the African Consultative Committee for Health Development Research and an inter-country workshop on anti-malaria operational research, he said African countries and the World Health Organization had recognized the importance of health research by adopting a resolution on strategies for its promotion during their 48th Regional conference.

The resolution urges countries to develop research policies and strategies, create suitable research environments, develop national research and training capacities, allocate adequate resources for enhancing institutions and develop plans of action for consensual health research.

Fall cited Senegal as an example, saying the ninth strategic orientation of its five-year national health development plan focuses on the development of operational research.

Through research, he said, the plan seeks "to create dynamic process involving political decision makers, researchers and communities"

in ensuring that research findings are efficiently used in health programs and at various levels of the country's health system.

However, the Minister acknowledged the dearth of resources on research in most African countries and the Third World in general.

On the Dakar workshop organized under the WHO's "Roll Back Malaria," program, Fall said the outcome of the forum was being awaited in Africa where the mosquito-transmitted disease remains a major health problem.

Delegates from Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia are attending the four-day session.

Participants were chosen on the basis of their individual professional capacities.

Asked by PANA to comment on the constraints faced by health researchers in Africa, a Tanzanian researcher, Fajiri Mntango, deplored the low level of funds allocated to the sector and the lack of recognition of experts in the field compared to other professionals.

"You don't hear of health researchers being decorated as much as what happens

among the politicians and the military. In addition, researchers are overworked because they have other tasks like teaching or treating patients," he said.

Mntango said the current dependence on foreign donations for research was self-defeating as those who provide funds might have priorities different from the needs of African countries.

"There is also the danger of manipulation or possibilities of research findings by Africans being stolen by those who finance them," he said.

The consultative committee meeting is taking place outside the WHO Africa Regional Office for the first time, marking the beginning of a rotation system.

Committee members are to examine the implementation of the 19th session and discuss measures for further strengthening of national health research institutions.

They are also expected to study the Senegalese health research methods, discuss health research ethics and examine constraints to the applications.

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