

## INTERNATIONAL

## Muslims mark Islam's two centuries in Africa

SOKOTO, Nigeria (AP) - Saluted by sword-waving Muslim warriors on horses and camels, African presidents and emirs on Sunday celebrated the 200th anniversary of a holy war that launched the sub-Saharan's greatest Islamic empire and urged an end to rising Christian-Muslim violence that has killed thousands here.

Appeals for peace — evoking six years of fiery religious rampages by machete-waving mobs in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation — overlaid a day of musket-blasting pageantry in Sokoto, capital of the 19th-century Sokoto caliphate, or kingdom.

President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from the south, condemned culprits of both faiths for the rising bloodshed in the nation's modern day holy wars.

"Anyone who burns houses or places of worship, either mosques or churches" is an "infidel," said Obasanjo, who wore the brown embroidered caftan and towering white headdress of northern Muslims in a gesture of Muslim-Christian conciliation.

Obasanjo's 1999 election, ending 15 years of repressive junta rule, unleashed religious, ethnic and political turmoil that since has claimed

more than 10,000 lives in Nigeria.

Explosions of Muslim-Christian violence have killed hundreds this year alone — most recently last month in Adamawa state, where dozens died in clashes over the height of a mosque's minarets next to the palace of a Christian tribal chief.

In May, religious slaughter led Obasanjo to declare emergency rule in one state for the first time in his six-year effort to cement civilian rule.

On Sunday, Obasanjo recalled the successes of the long-ago African empire, before the advent of the West.

"Contrary to the misrepresentations of some ... we were already a highly organized people before the arrival of the adventurers of colonization," the Nigerian leader added.

Sokoto, in Nigeria's north, stood until British colonial rule as the center of a Muslim kingdom that spanned parts of six modern African nations - Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso.

Itinerant preacher Shehu Usman dan Fodio had catapulted the kingdom into being with a 1804-1808 holy war launched against infidels and wayward Muslims.

The June 19, 1804, battle

of Tarkin Kwatto, a village about 60 miles from Sokoto, was widely seen as the war's turning point.

The victory of what some historians term West Africa's "French Revolution" sparked copycat jihads across the arid savannah plains of Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, Chad, Central African Republic and Sudan.

In Sokoto's central square on Sunday, Muslim Hausa and Fulani fighters in flowing robes and medieval battle garb paid fierce homage to that history.

Riding tasseled horses and camels, hundreds of warriors clutching swords, spears and battle axes saluted Obasanjo, three former Nigerian presidents, and the leaders of Ghana, Chad and Niger.

In rare public comments, the current sultan of Sokoto declared that the 19th-century jihad fighter's cause had nothing to do with the rampages of today.

"I wish our own leaders would hold these values close to our hearts and entrench unity and peaceful coexistence," Sultan Mohammed Maccido told the crowd and the warriors.

He mourned "the loss of intolerable numbers of lives, and destruction and loss in property" in Nigeria's religion.

(See *Empire*, Page 15)

## Zimbabwe reneges on land plan

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) - President Robert Mugabe's government said it would honor ownership rights to land bought on the property market, backtracking on previous announcements it would nationalize all farmland, according to a state newspaper report.

Citing a letter by Foreign Ministry official Joe Bimha to Zimbabwe embassies abroad, the Sunday Mail reported that the government would be nationalizing only the land it had seized under its land reform program.

"The correct position is that all land acquired under the current phase of the land reform program now reposes to the state," Bimha was quoted as saying.

The report clarifies a June 8 statement by Land Reform Minister John Nkomo that title deeds to all productive land were being abolished and replaced with 99-year state-issued leases.

Nkomo's statement raised fears of massive new seizures of farms, industrial holdings, private properties and even homes.

"In the end, there shall be no such thing as private land," Nkomo had said.

But Bimha said only land seized by the state, including more than 5,000 farms confiscated from former White owners for redistribution to new Black farmers, was being

nationalized.

"With respect to land falling outside this category, the applicable constitutional provisions (of ownership) remain valid," he was quoted as saying.

The often violent land seizures, combined with erratic rains, have crippled the country's agriculture-based economy and sparked political clashes.

Zimbabwe, once a regional breadbasket, now suffers acute shortages of food, hard currency and gasoline. United Nations crop forecasters predict the country will produce only half its food needs this year.

Mugabe argues redistribution is needed to redress British colonial injustices, when much of the best farmland was settled by Whites.

About 200,000 Black families have been allocated land under the government program, most for small-scale farming. Scores of others have bought commercial farms.

Critics of the redistribution program say much of the best farmland has been allocated to Mugabe's supporters and is currently underutilized or lying fallow.

Production on many other farms has dropped sharply as new owners lack financial resources, seed, fertilizer, fuel and farm machinery.



### HANDS OF FIDELITY

Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo, right, greets members of the UN Security Council mission at the presidency palace in Abidjan.

## African church brass make pledge to fight AIDS stigma

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Church leaders from 39 African countries, holding an AIDS summit, pledged on Friday to make available in church-supported health facilities and medication and to become more involved in fighting the stigmatization of those living with the virus.

"We will make treatment available at church-supported mission hospitals, clinics, dispensaries and health posts," the Right Rev Nyansanko Ni-Nku, the president of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), told a news conference in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, following a three-day meeting of 200 Protestant church leaders from across Africa.

The meeting discussed how Africa's Christian congregations — estimated to include about 120 million people — can respond more effectively to the AIDS pandemic in the continent. Ni-Nku said that the church would help people with HIV get Anti-Retroviral (ARVs) treatment.

"Most of the people in Africa are among the poorest of the poor (and) live on about a dollar a day, so, however cheap the ARVs become, for some people they will still remain very difficult to access," he said. "Our goal would be, if we really want to save the population of Africa, that they (ARVs) should be given freely."

He added: "Given that congregational members of the AACC member churches amount to a conservative estimate of 120 million Christians in Africa, we resolve that every congregation should be a center for health, healing and treatment. We will make

our congregations and health facilities havens of compassion."

Discrimination against those living with the virus, Ni-Nku said, would be considered a sin by the AACC.

Asked whether the church leaders had agreed on the use of condoms in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, given that some Christian denominations were opposed to condoms as a means of combating the spread of the disease, he said: "The conference was not hostile to the use of condoms."

Condom use, he added, would, for example, be the only way of preserving a family in a situation where either the husband or the wife was infected with the HIV virus.

"We recognize that condoms is one way of prevention, although the emphasis was, of course, on the moral issues of abstinence and fidelity," the Cameroon church leader said. "Do not forget that churches act in consonance with the (UN) World Health Organization, which recommends this as one way of prevention."

Sub-Saharan Africa is by far the region worst affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world. In 2003, an estimated 26.6 million Africans were living with HIV, including 3.2 million who became infected that year, according to the UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Ni-Nku told reporters that Africa had become the "epicenter" of HIV/AIDS not because its people were more promiscuous than people in other parts of the world, but because poverty made them more vulnerable to the scourge.

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