

In Africa, wages of sin leading to corruption

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It seems that whenever the subject of delivering some serious financial help to Africa arises, the issue of corruption comes up. It was the central point in a June speech by Paul Wolfowitz, the chief architect of the Iraq war, now head of the World Bank.

He cast corruption as a "disease," supporting the view by many that African countries have a moral flaw that prevents them from using such economic assistance productively and, consequently, has been the main barrier to the continent's development. The corollary seems to be that no amount of money will resolve Africa's problems until you eliminate corruption.

This is a naive old wag, promoted by Europeans, Americans and Africans alike. But it belies the fact that corruption exists in every country in the world, has never been eliminated anywhere, and will never be eliminated as long as there are human beings handling money and other forms of power.

Corruption comes in many forms and has different roots in history for many countries. In Africa and in many other post-colonial countries, it comes, in the first place, from the marriage between the culture of chieftaincy and the colonial administrative structure. In short, tribal chiefs and others of authority designated by the colonial government had the power to regulate access to that au-

thority. Thus, the payment of bribes became a way for people of substance to gain access in a system that has been in place for hundreds of years and is pervasive. I once had to pay "dash" to get my luggage transferred from one plane to another by an airport official in an African country.

Secondly, it comes from limited resources, the lack of financial institutions and expertise in management to ensure the transparent and efficient handling of large sums of money in a style to which Western financial managers are accustomed. This has been a circular problem.

Like anyone in poverty, African leaders misappropriate foreign economic assistance because of the pressure of many competing human crises in their countries and the lack of trained personnel that can effectively manage resources. And the lack of a sufficient flow of funds and skilled manpower fuels this problem.

The naive part is that many expect African leaders to simply adopt a new moral posture and eliminate corruption when the source of the problem lies in Western interests. The possession of political and economic power over Africans has historically given Europeans and Americans substantial control to



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regulate corruption to serve their own political interests.

From this vantage point, they oversaw a long line of "chiefs" such as Mobutu Sese Seko in the Congo, Idi Amin in Uganda, Papa Doc Duvalier in Haiti, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in Nigeria and others, who were permitted to systematically transfer billions of dollars of cash from

many Western sources into private banks in the West.

This was permitted as long as the recipients were faithful to anti-communism, delivered a steady stream of coveted minerals, or kept things safe for Western firms. If they didn't, they were assassinated, removed from office or otherwise neutralized. That's what they are now trying to do with Robert Mugabe, head of Zimbabwe.

An even more corrupt fact is that Western leaders feign a lack of complicity in this process. Some African countries have leaders with a great moral sensibility, an improving civil service and representative political systems, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda and others. But poverty and political interference from Western states in African politics will continue to promote a level of corruption, and the latter fact will continue to escape the scrutiny of

the press that it deserves.

Corruption in the West was combated early in the 20th century by the installation of a professional civil service, educational systems that contributed expertise to construct efficient financial systems, and a political system that held government accountable.

But if corruption is the use of a position of trust for dishonest gain, then it is still rampant in Western countries including the United States. Witness the recent spate of corporate scandals featuring Enron, WorldCom, KPMG tax shelter fraud, Time Warner security fraud, Martha Stewart fraud, and so forth.

And the president of the United States sits over one of the biggest financial corruption schemes in Iraq. A recent report by Stuart Bowen, Pentagon Inspector General, found hundreds of millions of dollars missing or not properly accounted for, companies such as Halliburton making suspect claims to the Pentagon for hundreds of millions more, and the U.S. Occupation Authority in Iraq missing hundreds of millions more in its administration of \$20 billion in Iraqi oil sales.

So, we should put corruption in perspective, and, yes, make all countries accountable. But don't use it as an excuse not to help Africa.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.

Qur'an

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Judge Joseph E. Turner determined that only the Holy Bible could be used in their courtrooms.

To use anything else, they added, would be "unlawful."

But the state Administrative Office of the Courts disagreed, noting that North Carolina's General Statute 11-2 does not specifically say the Christian Bible should be used to swear-in witnesses.

It uses the term "Holy Scriptures."

"Judges and other persons who may be empowered to administer oaths, shall (except in the cases in this Chapter excepted) require the party to be sworn to lay his hand upon the Holy Scriptures, in token of his engagement to speak the truth and in further token that, if he should swerve from the truth, he may be justly deprived of all blessings of the holy book and made liable to that ven-

geance which he has imprecated on his own head."

According to Judge Albright, however, "Holy Scriptures" means only one thing.

"Everybody understands what the Holy Scriptures are," he told the *Greensboro News & Record*. "If they don't, we're in a mess."

That's when the AOC backed off, deciding instead that either the courts or the General Assembly were better suited politically to make the final call.

"The ACLU-NC seeks a court order clarifying that North Carolina's existing statute governing religious oaths is broad enough to allow use of multiple religious texts in addition to the Christian Bible," the July 26 press statement continued. "In the alternative, if the Court does not agree that the phrase 'Holy Scriptures' in North Carolina state statute must be

read to permit texts such as the Qur'an, the Old Testament and the Bhagavach-Giyta in addition to the Christian Bible, then the ACLU-NC asks the Court to strike down the practice of allowing the use of any religious text in the administration of religious oaths."

ACLU-NC filed the lawsuit not on behalf of the Muslim woman in Greensboro or the Muslim community in North Carolina, but its own 8,000 membership across the state that it says is inclusive of Jews and Muslims.

Critics of the ACLU-NC lawsuit charge the liberal group is just trying to change years of legal tradition, and that their real goal is to get the Bible out of the courtroom.

Not so, says Jennifer Rudlinger, executive director of ACLU-NC. There is no problem with the Bible being used by the North Carolina

courts, just as long as other books of religious faith can also be used.

"The government cannot favor one set of religious values over another and must allow all individuals of faith to be sworn in on the holy text that is accordance with their faith," she said in a statement. "By allowing only the Christian Bible to be used in the administration of religious oaths in the courtroom, the State is discriminating against people of non-Christian faiths."

Probably the ACLU-NC's strongest argument is the First Amendment's Establishment Clause in the U.S. Constitution which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

But what about those who are not practicing members of a particular faith? How do North Carolina courts swear them in to "tell the truth, the

whole truth, and nothing but the truth"?

The state laws under NCGS 11-3 allows for a witness or juror who does not wish to place his hand on the "Holy Scriptures" to just raise his right hand for the nonreligious oath.

NCGS 11-4 defines that secular oath as replacing the word "swear" with "affirm," and deletes "so help me God."

And in many jurisdictions, those of the Jewish faith were sworn in on the Old Testament, since by faith, they did not believe in an afterlife.

The Tar Heel controversy has received worldwide attention.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations said the use of only the Christian Bible in North Carolina courtrooms is evidence of "an inappropriate state endorsement of religion."

"Eliminating the opportu-

nity to swear an oath on one's own holy text may also have the effect of diminishing the credibility of that person's testimony," Arsalan Iftikhar, legal director for the council, told *Cybercast News Service.com*.

The group Americans United for the Separation of Church and State says that maybe religious texts should be banned from the courthouse altogether.

"The easier solution would be to dump religious oaths from court proceedings," the nonprofit group said on its website. "Traditions do die, some with great difficulty and consternation. Citizens before their public courts should be required to tell the truth under penalty of law; they should not be required, pressured or even asked to take a religious oath before engaging in business before those courts."

Cash Michaels writes for *Wilmington Journal*.

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about our economic problems.

The participants will rally at Cadillac Square at 9:00 a.m. and then march to Cobo Hall for the summit. Please spread the word about this initiative, and encourage brothers and sisters to lend their support by coming to Detroit — from Indianapolis and Chicago-Gary area; from Toledo, Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, Ohio, and from other cities in the area. The development of a Black business district in Detroit will have residual effects across this country by sending out a wave of encouragement, confidence and pride, and by providing the model for future enclaves.

We must do this, folks. We have no other choice, and we have no other alternative to sinking even further into the abyss of economic despair and desperation. Can't you see what is

happening in this country? In this world? Black people are an afterthought, some little inconvenience that must be tolerated. More and more, we are treated with disdain; the only worth our lives hold to many in this society is when we are in a prison cell or in an army uniform.

While I pray that we will change — White and Black — I pray especially that Black people will change. Status quo is a prescription for failure. Haven't you had enough failures? Aren't you tired of being mistreated and exploited? If so, come to Detroit a week from Saturday and make your statement that "Black is Back." And remember what Maggie Lena Walker said: "You can stand up and be counted, or you can lie down and be counted out."

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