

# Poorest nations get online

By Thalif Deen

Special to Sentinel-Voice

UNITED NATIONS - An African diplomat from one of the world's 50 poorest nations once complained that it took about five to 10 years to get a landline telephone connection in his home country — and an additional five years to get a dial tone on the new phone.

But since the widespread availability of hand-held cellular phones over the last five years, most of the world's least developed countries, referred to as LDCs, have made a quantum leap forward from one extreme to another: from no landline phones to an abundance of wireless phones.

In its landmark Brussels program of action adopted at a conference of LDCs in the Belgium capital in May 2001, the United Nations set a target for infrastructure development: increasing average telephone density in LDCs to five main lines per 100 inhabitants and Internet connections to 10 users per 100 inhabitants by the year 2010.

In a report to the two-day

high-level meeting on LDCs Monday, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan says "access to telephones and computers in LDCs has increased rapidly, suggesting that targets for telephone density and Internet connections in the [Brussels program of action] might be met."

"Dissemination of these technologies has reached rural areas and even the poorest," Annan said, saying evidence suggests that use of such technologies has had a direct impact on poverty through various channels.

Although "LDCs remain far behind the rest of the world in the use of new technologies," he noted, "the recent progress demonstrates the speed with which information and communications technologies can be introduced, and how they can improve the welfare of individuals in LDCs, including by reducing poverty and gender inequality."

In 2000, there were only 17 LDCs with one or more Internet connections per 100 inhabitants. In 2006, Internet use has grown by three to 10 times, although still below

one per 100 in 25 LDCs, according to the latest figures released last Friday by the U.N.

In a study released in July, the Geneva-based U.N. Conference on Trade and Development said LDCs still suffer from infrastructure weaknesses.

To meet these challenges, she said, the EU has adopted a new "Strategy for Africa" which includes an initiative on an EU-Africa Partnership for Infrastructure. This partnership will include investments in electronic communications infrastructure and services.

A report by the Geneva-based ITU, International Telecommunications Union, said that overall, access to the Internet has increased and there is more interest in deployment of broadband services in rural areas.

Although the majority of LDCs have not yet launched high-speed Internet services, popular demand is encouraging more countries to upgrade from dial-up connections to broadband.

The ITU warned that despite recent progress, LDCs continue to face major chal-

lenges.

"Rapid developments in the LDC telecommunications marketplace require new directions to be taken by policymakers and regulators," the ITU report said.

In many LDCs, it said, policy changes are required that would provide regulators with flexible tools to implement the transition to new network-development opportunities and attract investor financial flows into the sector.

The scarcity of technology infrastructure, the high cost of international bandwidth, the dearth of relevant local content along with the lack of cooperation among development partners and political instability also remain daunting challenges.

Cosmas Zavazava, head of the ITU stated: "What is really encouraging is the fact that there is incredible enthusiasm among LDCs to be part of the Information Society. This, coupled with the emergence of new, low-cost and affordable technologies, especially wireless, will hasten the pace towards universal access."

## Tutu dislikes church's gay view

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) - Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the first authorized biography of the Nobel peace laureate, said he was ashamed of his Anglican Church's conservative position that rejected gay priests.

In the book, "Rabble-Rouser for Peace," by his former press secretary, John Allen, Tutu also criticized the last apartheid president, F.W. de Klerk, for not accepting accountability for apartheid atrocities.

He said the failure caused him to regret having nominated de Klerk, along with Nelson Mandela, for their 1993 Nobel Peace Prize.

Excerpts from the book were scheduled to appear in South Africa on Friday and the biography was scheduled for release in time for Tutu's 75th birthday on Oct. 7.

The retired archbishop was critical of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams for bowing on the gay priest issue to conservative elements, particularly African bishops, in the 77-million member Anglican Church that includes Episcopalians in the United States.

In a 1998 letter to Williams' predecessor, Arch-

bishop George Carey, Tutu wrote that he was "ashamed to be Anglican." It came after the Lambeth Conference of Bishops rejected the ordination of practicing homosexuals saying their sexual relations were "incompatible with scripture."

Tutu also said he was deeply saddened at the furor caused by the appointment of openly gay V. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire in 2003.

"He found it little short of outrageous that church leaders should be obsessed with issues of sexuality in the face of the challenges of AIDS

and global poverty," wrote Allen.

Tutu's criticism of de Klerk stems from when Tutu was chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which offered perpetrators of apartheid crimes amnesty if they told the truth about their activities.

During the hearings, Tutu sometimes wept along with the victims of human rights abuses.

Allen wrote that the process left Tutu disappointed with some political leaders, particularly de Klerk, who he believed had not accepted

accountability for apartheid atrocities.

In response to a request for his reaction to the book, de Klerk said Allen had tried to be fair in reporting on the tensions between him and Tutu, recording the steps taken to address the violence and saying no evidence implicated the president in the violence.

De Klerk said he regrets the antipathy that Tutu subsequently developed for him and that their relationship has mellowed with time. He said he had the greatest respect for Tutu and for the constructive role he often played.

## Uganda papers outs gays

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Red Pepper, a sensational Ugandan newspaper, has turned its guns on the country's gay and lesbian population, with articles naming first names, workplaces and other keys to identification of alleged homosexuals.

"African culture does not condone this sort of thing," Arinaitwe Rugando, a senior editor at the paper, told the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, explaining the exposé.

First names of 45 gay men and 13 lesbians have been printed in *Red Paper* since they launched their anti-gay campaign. Recently, under the headline "Kampala's notorious lesbians unearthed," it "outed" two boutique owners, a basketball player, and the daughters of a former member of Parliament and

of a prominent sheikh.

The newspaper's readers were urged to come forward with the more names of gays and lesbians in order to "rid our motherland of the deadly vice" of lesbianism.

As a result of their names being published, some people have had to move from their homes, while others have "received strange calls," said Chris Kalema, spokesperson for the Makerere University Students Lesbian Association.

"In a country where a sodomy conviction carries a penalty of life imprisonment. [the decision] to publish names of alleged homosexuals is a chilling development that could presage a government crackdown," warned the group Human Rights Watch.

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