

Somali expatriates fight to stop carnage

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

At a moment when the horrors of the war in Somalia are almost oblivious to most of us in the USA, members of the Somali Diaspora in the USA and Canada are taking steps to get organized and put the issue on the front burner. A recent conference — the second North American Somali Diaspora Conference — held in Virginia called attention to conflict in that portion of the Horn of Africa and the U.S. foreign policy that is making the situation worse.

After years of chaos following the overthrow of the dictatorship of Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia began to settle down under the complicated rule of the Union of Islamic Courts. This Islamist group, somewhat analogous to what the Taliban from Afghanistan, was, however, a distinctly Somali phenomenon.

Contrary to propaganda from the USA, the Union of Islamic Courts derived its support from the desire of the Somali people for an end to clan-based civil warfare and warlordism.

Additionally, it had absolutely no documented connections to Al Qaeda or any other terrorist groups.

In late 2006, Ethiopia using the bugaboo of alleged Union of Islamic Courts connec-

tions to terrorism, and with the backing and support of the USA, invaded Somalia in order to install the Transitional Federal Government, an institution with little support from within Somalia.

Although Ethiopia quickly and easily defeated the Union of Islamic Courts, the UIC regrouped and began a guerrilla campaign against the Ethiopian occupiers. If this sounds like Iraq, it has, in fact, many parallels. The Ethiopians are now bogged down in an occupation from which they are having difficulty extricating themselves.

Opposition to the Ethiopian invasion has come from various sources, including the Eritrean government (which has a contentious relationship with Ethiopia), other governments, and a significant section of the Somali Diaspora around the world.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has chosen to castigate all who criticize the invasion, implying, as in the case of Eritrea, that opponents are actively or passively supporting terrorism. In this post-9/11, post-Iraq invasion world, such charges have a chilling affect on all reasonable discussion.

In that light, the efforts among Somali



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émigrés and Somali Americans in the USA and Canada are significant, courageous and badly needed. The mainstream U.S. media has given inconsistent and often misleading coverage of the conflict in Somalia.

The Bush administration suggestions of an alleged Al Qaeda linkage to the war are regularly printed without comment or question. Further, there is a manner in which the reporting takes place where the reader gets the impression that there is no solution to the conflict — perhaps, outside of a continued Ethiopian occupation.

The annual conference challenged this portrayal and set the stage for the hopeful unification of Somali émigré organizations in their common efforts at advancing a sensible policy for the USA towards Somalia. Such a policy could include a demand for the Ethiopians to withdraw from Somalia; the development of an international peacekeeping force involving troops from countries that have not been compromised by the conflict; an active African Union/United Nations-supported peace process, and the significant infusion of humanitarian and development aid for the rebuilding of Somalia as a sovereign

nation-state.

Matters such as these were discussed at this recent conference.

Yet, in some respects, the most important contribution of the conference was the effort toward the development of a coherent Somali voice on the conflict, lifting the condition from the shadows.

By contrast, if one remembers the circumstances in Haiti in the months leading up to and following the 2004 coup that overthrew President Jean Bertrand Aristide, it was very clear that Haitians and Haitian-Americans were badly divided in their analyses of the roots of the conflict and of potential solutions.

This made it especially difficult to create an organized force, not to mention build a broad alliance, to counter the U.S. policy of destabilization and coup support.

The efforts of the Somali Diaspora are efforts that deserve the support of the broader community of people who endorse peace, justice and development for Africa, and stand against the Bush administration's belligerence and militarism around the world.

African Americans should be the first to stand with the Somali Diaspora in their quest to resurrect their homeland.

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Wilson free, but innocent William Mayo still shackled

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Not that he is the only person in prison for something he did not do, but for crying out loud, y'all, can a brother get the same attention and support that Genarlow Wilson got?

William Mayo has been locked up for 15 years; he received two life sentences plus 40 years in prison for a robbery he did not commit. He sits in a Georgia prison, rotting away, having been sent there in his 20s; he is now in his 40s.

He prays for the day he will be free, but he admits that his hope is fading. What will we do for this brother?

We put a great deal of energy into the Shaquanda Cotton, Genarlow Wilson, and the Jena Six cases, which was commendable and indeed worthwhile. But their cases came to the forefront long after Mayo was sent to prison. There has been a campaign for justice for Mayo ever since he was "convicted," but without the fanfare and celebrity of those we have seen in the recent past. Why is that?

Every time I think of William, having seen him treated so unfairly by a Georgia judge at a hearing 2005, I feel angry, sad, disgusted,

impotent and horrified at the prospect of just being in prison, aside from being there unjustifiably. When are we going to see the kind of outrage and indignation about William that we saw in the other cases?

Even if you are a skeptic, you have to admit that even if William committed those crimes, he should be out of jail by now. You have to admit that two life sentences are a bit much for a robbery where no one was hurt, nothing of substance was taken and those who did the crime were captured right away. C'mon, brothers and sisters, where's the mitigation in William's case?

This is a man who was three credits short of graduating from Morehouse College; he was an honor student; he was a scholarship recipient; and he was a mentor for other young Black men.

William was an active member of his church and well on his way to being the kind of Black man we say we need in our neighborhoods. Why are we not doing everything to see that he gets a proper hearing, at least



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an opportunity to prove his innocence? What does the State of Georgia have to lose by allowing William Mayo his day in court?

Aside from the fact that Georgia citizens should be outraged at paying tens of thousands of dollars per year to keep William in jail, there should be a national wave of interest and activism centered on this case.

At this point, having lost nearly 16 prime years of his life, he should be on probation, at least, parole — or totally free. This man should not be sitting in prison, wasting away, when he could be doing so much good out here where we need him.

If you want to read more about William and his case, go to www.freemayo.com and look at the evidence; listen to the interview of Tyrone Wilson, who committed the crime, as he reveals how he and the other young man were coerced to say that William was guilty.

Listen as he admits that William had nothing to do with the crime for which he was convicted. Listen, browse, and then tell me you cannot get involved in this cause. Tell me you can continue to turn your head away from this stark reality.

Tell me that we are not guilty of neglect and complicity by not bringing the same attention to William's case as we brought to the others.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised in the other cases, and the publicity was overwhelming. Celebrities were leading the charge and calling for justice. Where are they in William's case? The folks who have been working to get Mayo freed are raising money by selling dinners and holding raffles to pay for attorneys and investigators. No national campaigns, except for the BMDC, the Blackonomics Million Dollar Club; no huge donations by celebrities, and no

NAACP Defense Fund involvement. What's up with that, y'all?

Mayo was a close friend of Ennis Cosby, Bill and Camille Cosby's son, who was tragically murdered in 1997. There is a photo of the two of them on the website. As I stated, William was dedicated to his spiritual growth, and he worked in his church. He was also a student at Morehouse, a college of tradition and consciousness, as stated by Keith Robinson, who played the character Devean in the new movie, "This Christmas." If what he said is true about the principles of Morehouse College students, we may be on to something here.

If you read this column regularly or have read any of my four books on economic empowerment, you knew I would not end this article without giving you something to do.

Here's the deal: I don't know Bill Cosby, but some of you do. As Cosby travels around the country espousing personal responsibility and appropriate behavior by our young people, it would be great if he would put in good word about William Mayo, a model of personal responsibility, prior to his unjust lockdown.

Anyone out there know Tom Joyner? I heard him celebrating Genarlow Wilson's freedom, and I am pretty sure I also heard him say a scholarship would be provided for Wilson to attend college. A campaign on the "Tom Joyner Morning Show" would be "oh, oh, oh" so beneficial to Mayo.

Finally, the brothers and alumni of Morehouse could each donate a few bucks to the Mayo Fund and get involved in raising the consciousness of this society about William's plight. Imagine the collective impact all of you could have. There it is.

Let's get busy, y'all, cause William Mayo is still in prison.

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Alford

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official from Oklahoma. When approached about J.C.'s comments on CNN News, Mitt Romney retorted, "What's the charge? Is there something wrong with that?"

He then explained that he hired only the best workers, and if that means an all-White staff, so be it. This, my brother and sisters, is "bigot code." It is the same thing they would say to keep us out of the military, college and professional sports, the better public institutions and corporate offices.

It wasn't because of racism but that we just weren't good enough, and that's how God

made it. It falls right along with the "Cain Curse Doctrine." Slick-haired Romney is starting to appear to be very arrogant for all the wrong reasons. There is an aura about him that smells anti-American and anti-Christian. He appears to be a blast from the past, and that is not good for us as a whole and harmonious society. Is Mitt Romney a racist? Racial slurs, racist upbringing, racist slights, racist hiring and racist excuses — seems like an easy question.

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