

U.S. elections have ramifications for Africa

By Nicole Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

This election has been an extremely long process. The Global War on Terror and the economic crisis will uniquely affect the African world, but I didn't hear substantial discussion about issues surrounding Haiti, Congo, and Liberia from either candidate. During this last administration, we have seen the democratically elected government in Haiti removed, the Global War on Terror spread to the African continent, and decreasing opportunity for voices on the ground in Africa and in the Diaspora to be heard.

Even with victories on debt relief for poor countries, Vulture Funds — hedge funds that prey on the debt of the world's poorest countries — threaten the important gains we have achieved.

The outcome of this election affects the 6 billion people outside of the G-8 countries, many of whom live in abject poverty, and I have some food for thought for our president-elect and his transition team.

The world can't wait: Eight years of war and pillaging have left the African World wondering when common sense and diplo-

macy will return to U.S. foreign policy. Double speak has cost time and lives in Darfur and Congo, and we have essentially stated that the lives of Americans are worth more than the lives of people around the world.

Respect sovereign nations and return to multilateralism: Iraq is not the only country that has paid with blood in the name of the "Global War on Terror." Over the past three years, the U.S. has indiscriminately bombed Somali refugee camps looking for two or three suspected Al-Qaeda operatives.

The next administration must work with other nations in an effort to get away from the pattern of unilaterally invading another country's borders for our own interests. We truly are the company we keep, and to be respected and multilateral, the U.S. cannot continue to be friendly with dictator-led regimes at the expense of democratically elected ones.

Don't throw the baby out with the bath water: The Bush Administration put into



NICOLE C. LEE

place mechanisms to combat HIV/AIDS, although the most effective methods for combating the pandemic fell victim to political pandering to conservative forces.

These initiatives should not be scrapped, but must be tweaked to gain the greatest benefit for the least amount of funds. Loopholes to benefit pharmaceutical companies or beltway bandits must be closed. The measurement of success must be lives saved. Period.

Energy alternatives must not be at the cost of the African World: In the pursuit of conservation and a holistic approach to the world's energy needs, we must work to ensure that the African World does not fall victim to poor planning and short term thinking.

Secretary Rice has called President Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea a "friend of the U.S." This "friendship" is certainly not based on his government's abysmal human rights record, but more about the country's proximity to untapped oil reserves

in the Gulf of Guinea. The last thing the people of Africa need is the further placating of dictators to serve U.S. interests. Moreover, the production of oil alternatives is a burden carried by much of the African World to the detriment of their local needs. Jatropha and palm oil, highly touted alternatives, are destroying wetlands and forests in Latin America and are not providing the industry promised in Mozambique. Biofuels are promoted as a new opportunity for African agricultural business, but this untested market will leave local farmers holding the bag.

Many of these plants make cultivation of other crops, even years later, very difficult. Experts say that the move towards biofuels may deepen the worldwide food crisis. The next administration must be more thoughtful than the last when it comes to the long-term implications of our policies.

None of these problems have easy solutions, and they won't be solved in the next twelve months. But it shouldn't stop us from demanding accountability from the next administration, whoever it may be.

Nicole C. Lee is the executive director of TransAfrica Forum.

Attacks on ACORN misguided, need debunking

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The attack on ACORN, Associated Community Organizations for Reform Now, by the political Right has two clear objectives. The first is a preemptive assault against advocates for voting rights who have been raising concerns since November 2000 regarding electoral theft being carried out by the political Right.

The second objective is to obscure who or what is behind the current economic crisis, a crisis that began in the mortgage industry.

In both cases, the political Right has released a smoke screen in order to avoid any discussion of real issues in both the electoral system and the system of finance.

ACORN, an organization which began in Arkansas in the early 1970s, has developed a reputation over the years as a fighter for poor people. Their base is substantially African-American, and at different points throughout their history they have championed the cause of the poor and the Black, in workplaces and communities.

In the early 1980s, for instance, ACORN established several independent labor unions that focused on organizing workers that much of the mainstream labor movement ignored (these unions later merged with the Service Employees International Union).

ACORN also got very involved in championing fights around housing, specifically, the need for affordable housing. Along the way, ACORN developed a comprehensive voter registration component to their work

and have made themselves a significant player in bringing in often marginalized voting populations.

The political Right has been aware, for quite some time, that growing numbers of progressive individuals and organizations — not limited to African-Americans — have been deeply concerned that the November 2008

election could either be stolen or influenced by electoral theft by Republican-aligned forces.

In this context, massive "voter protection" efforts have been launched by unions and community-based organizations to ensure that every vote counts.

Yet, what the political Right has shrewdly chosen to do has been to shift the focus away from actual issues of electoral theft or questionable activities, e.g., the efforts in Michigan by Republicans to purge voters from the rolls who have been the subject of foreclosure, and instead focus on a relatively small organization — ACORN — with who many people are unfamiliar. This is called inventing a bogey-man.

Even if the charges were true — and I do not concede that in the least — there is no credible evidence that ACORN, as an organization, approved the mishandling of voter registrations.

In fact, anyone who has done voter registrations is aware that there is always the possibility of errors, and sometimes fraud by



BILL FLETCHER JR.

overzealous registration campaigners. This is actually a strong argument for automatic or compulsory official voter registration.

In either case, there is no proof that ACORN has done anything wrong, but there is a lot of smoke, and with the smoke, unclarity as well as a stench.

The second objective of the attack, which has received less attention, has been to try to blame ACORN for the current economic crisis. Specifically, the argument by the political Right is that ACORN, by fighting for the Community Reinvestment Act (in the 1970s!!) and demanding housing for poor people forced banks to provide loans to otherwise unqualified borrowers.

This argument lacks logic as well as facts. Since the CRA was passed in the 1970s, how would that explain what is transpiring in 2008? Second, the actual facts on the ground dispute this allegation.

Nevertheless, the political Right uses the scapegoating of ACORN as a way of saying that poor people in general, and Black poor

people in particular, are the source of the current crisis. Again, rather than helping one understand what is truly unfolding, the attack on ACORN creates another bogey-man such that we are led away from any examination of the banking system and the workings of U.S. capitalism.

All in all, the attack on ACORN has little to do with ACORN. They are a convenient target for the political Right. The attack could have just as easily been against any number of other groups that conduct voter registration and/or fight for housing for poor people. For this reason it is important that people of good will not only resist these irrational arguments by the political Right, but also that we speak up publicly against this disingenuous activity.

The attacks against ACORN by McCain/Palin and their right-wing allies should not be ignored; they must be confronted and debunked. Leaving them unanswered is like leaving a burn open to be infected.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies. He is the immediate past President of TransAfrica Forum and the co-author of *Solidarity Divided*, which analyzes the crisis in organized labor.

Turnout

(Continued from Page 4)

proceeding. "We believe in transparency," Bartlett said.

North Carolina has long had more registered Democrats than Republicans but hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976.

President Bush won the state by 12 percentage points four years ago.

Bush beat John Kerry by 17 points in Georgia, a state that last voted Democratic in 1992.

This year's trends are daunting for McCain, the Republican nominee. Polls out this week favor Obama in both North Carolina and Florida.

Last year, Obama said his place on the Democratic ticket would boost African-American turnout by 30 percent — poten-

tially opening up Southern states that his party hadn't won in more than a generation.

But Obama campaign officials now play down the prospect that his place as the first Black to top a major party ticket would sway enough voters to win the presidency.

"I don't think we should talk only about race. There are so many other factors — age, geography," said spokeswoman Carolina Adelman. "This campaign's not about race, it's about bringing people together."

Republicans also caution it would be a mistake to read too much into the early totals. McCain spokesman Mario Diaz said the GOP will benefit from high turnout on Election Day, and he noted the party has focused less on early voting than Obama.

"We anticipate the support to only intensify by Election Day," he said.

Walters

(Continued from Page 8)

than one thing at a time. So, we should be confident in putting forth the Black agenda now that we will not be asking one or two years out, "Where's the beef?"

Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African-American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

In response to a question in the last debate about their priorities, Barack Obama himself said that presidents had to do more