

NIGERIA: YAR ADUA GRANTS AMNESTY, FREES OKAH AS 10,000 ARE EXPECTED TO SURRENDER

Nigeria as a leading light in Africa have been entangled in an internal strife with her oil rich region, the Niger Delta. The youths of the region have taken up arm struggle over



the long years of neglect suffered by their natives resulting from oil exploration and exploitation by oil multinationals. They have also cried out over environment degradation

and pollution through damaged facilities and gas flare that span over 50 years of oil activities in the region.

What further exacerbate the arm struggle, according to the militants is the lost of livelihood and non employment of the indigenes of the region by the multinational corporations in the region. But after a fierce launch of military attack on the areas controlled by the militants, the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Umaru Yar' Adua had planned to grant over 10,000 of the militant youths amnesty to surrender their arms as a means of ending attacks, which have crippled the country's oil industry for the past months. According to a Chief Coordinator of the amnesty programme, Air Vice Marshal Lucky Ararile "we are working in the region of about 10,000 militants, which had in between 50 and 60 camps in Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Akwa Ibom states." It was also gathered that each militant will be entitled to the sum of N20,000 as monthly emolument with additional N1,500 for food per day while at a reintegration centre. The idea is that for a period of 60 days there will be disarmament and demobilization. Since the declaration by the Federal Government of Nigeria of the amnesty, scores of the militants have found a window of opportunity to turn-in their arms.

As part of his 7 point agenda, President Umaru Yar' Adua had announced an amnesty running from August 6, 2009 until October 4, 2009. Following this gesture of the government, Henry Okah, a key leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) under trial for treason, was subsequently released. In recognition of this gesture, MEND declared a 60-day truce in its "oil war" which has seen oil production in Nigeria cut by more than 30 percent for the past two years. Meanwhile following a nolle prosequere by the Federal Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mr. Mike Andoaka, Henry Okah regained his freedom as the case of treason preferred against him at the Jos Federal High Court was struck out by the presiding judge.

AZIZ WINS MAURITANIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AMIDST CONTROVERSY

Sit-tight syndrome of African leaders have once again been displayed in Mauritania as the country's former military junta, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz was declared winner of the election held in July. The opposition parties have come out strongly to condemn the election described as a charade. The election initially meant to return the country to a constitutional rule is now being described as an extension of military governance. However, supporters of General Aziz are in frenzy mood celebrating the victory of their leader, driving around the capital city. Indeed, final results from Mauritania's electoral commission show Aziz winning more than half the vote, making him president without a second round of balloting in which his main political opponents had vowed to unite against him. With more than 64 percent of the electorate turn out, Interior Minister Mohamed Ould Rzeidzim says Aziz won more than 52 percent of the vote.

National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir finished second with more than 16 percent. Former Central Bank Governor Ahmed Ould Daddah was third with less than 14 percent. In a victory speech at a downtown hotel, Aziz said he is now the president of all Mauritania. The man who claims credit for two military coups said democratic elections are now the only way someone should come to power in Mauritania. Aziz congratulated voters for a peaceful election, and said they must work to resolve the political crisis and improve living conditions in the country.

Aziz toppled Mauritania's first freely-elected leader 11 months ago. He agreed to postpone an earlier vote in exchange for a power-sharing deal that saw his political opponents drop their electoral boycott to take part in the elections.



Boulkheir and Daddah joined fellow opposition candidates Ely Ould Mohamed Vall and Hamadi Ould Meimou in denouncing what they call an "electoral coup d'etat." They want the international community to investigate what they say were voting irregularities including counting opposition ballots for Aziz. But Interior Minister Rzeidzim, who was appointed as part of that power-sharing deal, said he has received no information that would lead him to question the vote. Arab electoral observers say they did see irregularities, including partisan electoral officials and security forces inside polling stations. But a preliminary report from the Arab Democracy Foundation says those irregularities did not affect the election. Aziz

says that if his opponents have any complaints about the vote, they should go to the Interior Minister and the nation's Constitutional Council. This is a big win for Aziz as Boulkheir and Daddah had pledged to support each other in a potential run-off against him.

SUDAN LODGES A FORMAL COMPLAINT TO UN OVER CHAD RAID

Even as other African countries are making frantic efforts to end the carnage in Sudan, their neighbour, who suppose to be their brothers keeper, Chad, has been fingered in the air bombardment of Darfur.



This, the Sudanese authorities therefore used as an alibi to lodge a formal complaint against the neighbouring country Chad with the United Nations (UN) Security Council, for bombing Darfur. It was reported that two Chadian aircraft bombed Umm Dukhun area of West Darfur State, an area believed to be the base for Chadian rebels opposed to the rule of President Idriss Deby Itno. Sudanese Ambassador to the UN, Abdul-Mahmoud Abdul-Halim was quoted as saying; "Sudan has delivered to the UN Security Council a complaint against the Chadian violations and the repeated aggressions." He also said Sudan retained the "full right to repulse such irresponsible acts," calling the alleged raids "criminal and unjustifiable".

Much as there are fears for a fresh hostilities in the border region between the two countries, Sudan has continued to maintain that she would stick to previous agreements except provoked beyond endurance. Again, Sudan has also fingered some forces in the Security Council of supporting the said attacks. This expression though may not be unconnected to previous support given by Chad's former colonial master, France to its ripostes rebel attack. But Ndjamena has denied Sudan's accusation, saying it only bombed rebel positions within her territory.

EGYPT: QUESTIONS BENEFITS OF NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT SUMMIT

In a continent with lots of retrogressive reports on poverty and underdevelopment there are still some that its citizenry can ask relevant questions when government are embarking on what looks like elephant projects. That perhaps, is what the Egyptians are doing to their government as the country felt proud to host the 15th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. So, while the government pride itself for hosting the 15th Non-Aligned Movement summit in the resort of Sharm el Sheik, many citizens are wondering what use or benefit such a meeting has for their country.

The more cynical are convinced the summit is needless propaganda for the government,



which in their eyes attempts to improve its international image by hosting similar events regardless of domestic profits. The NAM meeting includes 118 member countries represented by no fewer than 8,000 personnel, and questions were raised on how much they will cost Egyptian taxpayers, who are not likely to receive anything in return.

The movement, which former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser founded with Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, was formed by countries that chose not to ally with either the United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, it was clear the movement lost some of its defining aspirations only a few years after its establishment. Egypt was forced to take sides with the Eastern Bloc after the 1956 war against Britain, France and Israel in the aftermath of nationalizing the Suez Canal. In the 1960s, the Union Soviet became Nasser's strongest ally against the West, and Soviet experts were helping Egypt on Nile River projects and building its army.

Pundits contend that nowadays Egypt has more reasons not to be considered a nonaligned country. An article published by Al Dustour newspaper titled "An aligned regime heads a summit for nonaligned countries" says Egypt has been a strategic ally to the United States in the Middle East for more than two decades. The article doubts whether any regime in the world is capable of fulfilling all its interests without being aligned to one big power or another.

It is also clear that some countries have come to this year's summit with national rather than universal agendas aimed at the movement's original goals. The highlight of the summit is expected to be the meeting between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart, Yusuf Raza Gilani, at which Singh is set to voice his country's demand for the summit to call for a fight against terrorism amid tensions between Iran and Pakistan. All this makes many Egyptians unhappy over their nation's role and financial outlay as summit host. Such disappointment is compounded by experts' awareness that NAM is increasingly less fruitful.

GHANA HOST PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Ghana again made history as the first black President of America, President Barack Obama visited the country. Obama on his visit hailed a "new moment of promise" in the African continent, using the period to urge all nations on the continent to establish their own identity in an increasing interconnected world. Speaking to an array of



Ghanian Parliamentarians, Obama traced his roots to the sub-continent, declaring, "I have the blood of Africa within me."

Displaying his oratory prowess, Obama confessed that Washington has for long seen the nations of Africa as patrons rather than partners in world affairs, saying it is time for that to change. But for this change to take effect, President Obama emphasized that the destiny of Africa is up to its people and their leaders, and of course "the boundaries between peoples are overwhelmed by our connections", he said. That he noted that his visit to Ghana is to further demonstrate that Africa is not separate from world affairs.

Obama pointed out that events in Africa do not lose their effects at the continent's borders and said Africa is a fully integrated part of the global economy. "What happens here has an impact everywhere," Obama said during a meeting with Ghanaian President John Atta Mills.

Obama scheduled a 21-hour visit to the West African nation to highlight that country's democratic tradition and engagement with the West. During his first visit to sub-Saharan Africa since taking office, Obama sought to lift up the continent of his ancestors - while keeping its emotions in check. Greeted by a rush of excitement on his arrival in Accra, the United States' first black president planned a speech to Ghana's Parliament on Saturday outlining his hope for a future Africa prospering in democracy. He was also visiting a hospital and a one-time slave trading post, joined by his wife, Michelle, a great granddaughter of slaves.



But his speech was also pitched as a sobering account of Africa's enduring afflictions: hunger, disease, corruption, ethnic strife and strongman rule. Selecting Ghana as the starting point of his black Africa travels, the president sought to highlight a continental success story. Obama flew to Ghana after the G-8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, approved a new \$20 billion food security plan. It aims to help poor nations in Africa and elsewhere avert mass starvation during the global recession.

SOUTH AFRICA IN SEARCH OF LANDMARKS IN AIDS VACCINE

Probably due to the alarming death as a result of AIDS in the country, South Africa is intensifying efforts to breakthrough in the discovery of vaccines to cure the pandemic. Recently, the country announced the launch of clinical trials of the first AIDS vaccines created by a developing country with assistance from the United States. It was declared the vaccines were feats by scientists who overcame skepticism from colleagues and political leaders who shocked the world with unscientific pronouncement about the disease.

According to the lead scientist, Professor Anna-Lise Williamson of the University of Cape Town "It has been a very, very hard

journey," she told the audience comprising of American health officials who gave technical help a n d manufactured the vaccine at the U.S. National Institutes of H e a l t h . Williamson said she sees no choice for South Africa, at the heart of the epidemic, "where we have got the biggest ARV (anti-retroviral) rollout in the world and still hundreds of people are dying every day and getting infected everyday."



Trials to test the safety in humans of the vaccines began in July on 36 healthy volunteers, Anthony Mbewu, president of South Africa's government-supported Medical Research Council, said in an interview. Mbewu's respected organization shepherded the project. A trial of 12 volunteers in Boston began earlier this year.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease and a leading AIDS researcher, said the South African scientists received more money from his institute's research fund than any others in the world except the U.S. He called it "the most important AIDS research partnership in the world." But he warned "There are extraordinary challenges ahead," referring to the years of testing needed now that South Africa has reached the clinical trial stage. Fauci noted that scientists do not understand why the search for an AIDS vaccine is so difficult, except that they are trying to do better than nature: "We have to develop a vaccine that does better even than natural protection."

South Africa was the site of the biggest setback to AIDS vaccine research, when the most promising vaccine ever, produced by Merck & Co. and tested in 2007, it was found that people who got the vaccine were more likely to contract HIV than those who did not. During nearly 10 years of denial and neglect, South Africa developed a staggering AIDS crisis. Around 5.2 million South Africans were living with HIV last year the highest number of any country in the world. Young women are hardest hit, with one-third of those aged 20 to 34 infected with the virus.

In 1999, the ministries of health and of science and technology founded the vaccine initiative and poured 250 million rand (\$31.2 million today) into it over eight years.

Some 250 scientists and technicians worked on the project, along the way gaining scores of doctorates and producing work for professional publications as well as a model for continued biotechnology development in South Africa.

The first trial may have been started in the U.S. to allay any criticism that the U.S. was collaborating in an AIDS vaccine that would use Africans as guinea pigs. The field of AIDS vaccine research is so filled with disappointments some activists are questioning the wisdom of continuing such expensive investments, saying the money might be better spent on prevention and education.