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Details of the News

China-African Relations:

- **How will Chinese culture influence Africa?**

So far, media coverage of China's involvement in Africa has mostly been about investment. Stories of Chinese engineers in hard hats standing by roads up mountains in Ethiopia. Stories of Chinese farmers moving to Zambia.

But, in a push to extent its economic reach, China is now making a very real effort to export its culture to the world's poorest continent. Last year the Asian giant overtook the U.S. as Africa's top trading partner, confirming to the West that it has a real battle on its hands to maintain its influence over African nations.

But, while China's economic influence is now mighty and its cheap goods can be bought everywhere from Lagos to tiny tribal villages in remotest Ethiopia, Africans, especially young ones, still admire and try to copy U.S. culture.

Middle class teenagers in Nairobi dress like suburban kids from Atlanta, posters of Obama adorn minibus windows in Kinshasa, American hip-hop is everywhere.

China now seems to have realized this.

Here in Addis Ababa this week China and Ethiopia signed an agreement to work on a "cultural exchange program" from 2010 to 2013. Ethiopia's state news agency said the countries will dispatch "art troupes, artists, writers and art exhibitions" to each other. It will be interesting to see how mutual the traffic is.

And it's not just China trying to use culture to secure access to a continent overflowing with mineral resources and a largely untapped consumer market of nearly 1 billion people with more money in their pockets each year.

Addis Ababa is host to Chinese, Indian and even Turkish schools where Ethiopian children must sing the national anthems of those countries every morning, where they

learn their languages, their dances, their songs, and their particular set of manners. And where they learn a foreign history alongside their own.

Such schools and “cultural exchange programs” are mushrooming all over the continent as the war for influence over African countries heats up.

Similar schools from the European powers have, of course, existed for years, educating and, sometimes indoctrinating, Africa’s elite. But the British, the French, the Germans and the Spanish are losing ground to the world’s emerging powers.

So how will this all play out? What will the impact of these new cultural imports be on the individual cultures of African countries, arguably still the most unique and preserved in the world? Is this really just imperialism version 2.0?

- **Africa-Asia ties flying high**

AFRICA-CHINA/RISKS Investment from China and other Asian countries was an important factor in several years of unprecedented growth in Africa before the global downturn hit.

It is very much seen as a critical driver for Africa’s future growth prospects as well.

China has repeatedly emphasized its commitment to Africa through the global troubles and is emerging even more solidly implanted on the continent now. Other Asian countries are also pushing hard, as a recent high-level Indian visit showed.

As one of the main links between Africa and Asia, Ethiopian Airlines offers an interesting indicator as to how the ties have held up and are expected to grow.

Early last year it was talking of cuts, but it is now at 14 flights a week to China and 12 to India. It is planning flights to more destinations in both countries.

Unlike many airlines elsewhere, it also managed to double its profits in its last business year.

- **Nigeria's banks court Chinese investment**

15 years ago trade between China and Africa was worth \$3 billion, but last year that swelled to more than \$100 billion.

Most Chinese investment is focused on buying oil from countries like Nigeria, deals that include commitments to build infrastructure, like roads and railways.

Last August the Nigerian government was forced to bail out troubled banks and the reorganisation of the sector has left some institutions reluctant to lend, hampering projects to improve infrastructure.

But as Timothy Oguntayo, executive director of Skye Bank told the BBC's Russell Padmore, Chinese investment is a major opportunity.

Pan-African issues:

- **NIGERIA: So that Africa won't go hungrier**

The FAO prediction of famine by 2025, in sub-saharan Africa, is a cause for concern. AYO-LAWAL GBENOBA speaks with stakeholders on ways of preventing this emerging food shortage.

A Malawian, Wizaki Joseph, 47, buried her 21-year-old daughter, a divorced mother of two, Serena, who succumbed to hunger, in Fombe Village during the drought suffered in the country.

In Zambia, during the drought of 2004/2005, there was hunger. Gift Shiyanga, a teacher at the Kapopo Primary School in the Naluyanda district near Lusaka, the capital, revealed that around half of the 500 pupils were not getting enough food.

Kenya also experienced shortfall in food because of the 2009 drought. Elderly women and children queued endlessly to get food rations from government officials in Suswa. The failed rains mainly affected maize yields in Eastern Kenya, the coast area and parts of Rift Valley Province. Kenyans also suffered severe weather in the North Western and Eastern pastoral regions, deteriorating pasture availability and livestock body condition, with consequent increase of mortality rates.

During the second half of December, 2009, according to allAfrica.com, heavy rainfall caused massive flooding in low lying areas of Northern Central and Western provinces, washing away crops like sorghum, maize and livestock. This affected about 30,000 people, especially in the Turkana and West Pokot districts in the North Rift region, while some 3.8 million people are estimated to require food assistance till this month (February, 2010), when the 2009 maize crop production is slightly expected to improve the food crisis situation.

Irregular, spottily distributed and prematurely shortened rainy season in 2009 caused insufficient cereal and fodder production for people and livestock in Niger. When the country faced severe food shortages in 2005, nearly three million people were threatened by famine, while thousands of children were killed. As at now, according to a United Nations report in February, 2010, 7.8 million people, or three fifth of the population, are facing severe food insecurity.

A United Nations report, which warns about imminent food crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, by 2025, says despite good global cereal harvests in 2009, millions of people in dozens of poor countries are in desperate need of emergency humanitarian aid due to stubbornly high food prices. The Food and Agricultural Organisation(FAO) of the UN reveals that critical food insecurity is affecting 31 countries, and the situation is particularly acute in

East Africa, where prolonged drought and mounting conflict have left an estimated 20 million people in need of food.

FAO Assistant Director-General, Hafez Ghanem says: “For the world’s poorest people who spend up to 80 per cent of their household budgets on food, the food prices crisis is not over yet. It is now a global priority to increase investment in developing countries’ agriculture in order to fight poverty and hunger.”

The FAO report predicted a decline in cereal production in Western Africa, in 2009, blaming below the average rainfall, which forced farmers to replant crops and led to livestock losses in Mali, Chad and Niger.

In many of the sub-Saharan countries, prices of foodstuff have remained high. The price of millet in the markets of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger has remained from 21 to 42 per cent higher, while imported rice is between 22 and 46 per cent higher. Same in Nigeria where the prices of foodstuff have remained higher than what obtained two or three years ago. It is a common occurrence to see market women and consumers complain of never-going-down inflated food prices. Of recent, Nigerians witnessed another round of increase in food prices. Garri, a staple food, which sold for between N70 and N80, per congo, three years ago, later sold for N150 and N170, but now hovers between N180 and N200; rice, another common(?) food, two years ago, ranged between N150 and N180, but now, you need between N260 and N280 to buy a congo of rice; brown beans was N180, two years ago, but now, it sells for between N260 and N280; the prices of soya beans and other grains have also gone up.

Unanimously, people, from farmers to academicians, to agriculture experts, believe that Nigeria is a very blessed nation in terms of weather conditions and other natural endowments. While the major concern on food security in most sub-Saharan Africa countries are erratic climatic conditions, HIV/AIDS, mismanaged land, conflict, refugee movements, etc, Nigeria, mainly, is believed to be threatened by migration of young people from rural to urban areas, lack of investment on rural communities by successive governments, inadequate funding of agriculture, preponderance of aging farmers, get-rich-quick syndrome, epileptic power supply, etc.

The Baale Agbe of Oyo State and Chairman, Cotton Growers Association of Nigeria, Oyo State chapter, Chief Yusuf Akintola points out that the major factor that can contribute to food insecurity in Nigeria is the rural – urban drift which leaves 10 per cent of the population to be producing the food for 90 per cent. “Before now, 90 per cent of Nigeria’s population was producing the food that 10 per cent ate, but now, the reverse is the case. Everyone now wants to do white collar job and the youth, who are supposed to take over from us, are no longer interested in farming. If we old ones die, there are no young ones to farm. If nothing is done to rectify this, there will definitely be famine.”

Chief Akintola also pinpoints the attitude of some farmers who, he claims, complain about government not giving them money or necessary implements. To dismiss this, he asks: “or, is government giving money or implements to bricklayers and carpenters? Are

they not doing their work despite not getting anything from anybody? It is sheer laziness to wait for government before we farm. Government, although, must help in the area of implements like tractors and distribution of fertilizer to boost food production, while storage facilities are not enough, for yam, particularly.”

Dr. Joseph Adeboye Omole of the Institute of Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T), Ibadan, points out that one of the problems militating against food security in Nigeria is the get-rich-quick syndrome, which makes people abandon farming for ventures where they can make quick money. “It takes eight to 10 weeks before a broiler would be ready and our youths don’t have the patience for this, that is why you see many youths riding okada (motorcycle), instead of engaging in commercial farming. People have to be patient to make it in agriculture business, but they leave the farm enmass and the few people you could still see in the farm are old. Government has to take this serious or else, the FAO 2025 famine prediction would come to pass.

Omole believes that most of the factors that can culminate into food crisis, in Nigeria, are man-made, because, “Nigeria is a country blessed by God. All the natural disasters confronting other places are not experienced in Nigeria but irregular power supply, for instance, is a problem. For a livestock specialist, to breed day old chicks, you need power and if you buy diesel everytime to generate electricity, at the end, you discover that the end does not justify the means, and this is why prices of foodstuff have refused to go down. High cost of inputs can cause food crisis.”

Poverty is another factor Omole pinpoints because, according to him, to do large scale production in agriculture, you need certain amount of money and if the money is not there, little could be done.

Insincerity on the part of government, Omole says, is also a threatening factor as money meant to assist farmers end up in the hands of political farmers. “There was a workshop we were asked to organise and the people that attended the training were all members of a particular political party,” he reveals, warning, “if care is not taken, this can lead to a major food crisis.”

“When you talk of climatic problem, Nigeria is blessed,” he submits, but underscores conservation/preservation of farm produce as an important aspect of food security. “When we have plenty harvest during rainy season, there should be means of preserving the excess to save for the period of scarcity of food and the government should also encourage small-scale industries, which can use the excess farm produce as raw materials.”

Inadequate funding of research also comes to the fore as the Vice Chancellor of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and Chairman, Governing Board, IAR&T, Professor M.O. Faborode and the Director of IAR&T, Professor B.A. Ogunbodede, lend their voices to that of Omole on the issue.

At the 2010 in-house review of the institute, Ogunbodede, while speaking on: “Market oriented research for sustainable agricultural development, reels out:

“Nigeria is indeed a blessed nation. The country is endowed with abundant natural resources. These include 68 million hectares of arable land, fresh water sources covering 12 million hectares, 960 kilometres of coastline and an ecological diversity which enables the country to produce a wide variety of crops and livestock, forestry and fishery products.

“However, inspite of these natural endowments and favourable agro-ecologies, Nigeria is still far from attaining sustainable agricultural development. The per capita food production has not kept pace with the growing needs of the population. The country has continued to import agricultural raw materials.”

Ogunbodede, who emphasises the role of agricultural research in ensuring availability and adequacy of food throughout the year, claims that this important aspect of agriculture is not performing as expected because the agriculture sector is poorly funded.

To buttress his point, he points out: “Between 2001 and 2005, the aggregate federal spending budget averaged 824 billion naira per year. Of that amount, the agriculture sector budget constituted a very small share, averaging slightly less than 1.8 per cent of the total budget.”

Omole, in profering suggestions on how to curb the emerging food crisis, advises the government to formulate agric-friendly policies and put infrastructures in place, like modern farm settlements, to encourage people, especially youths, to stay in agriculture, rather than going for Okada business.

He mentions the implementation of programmes that will assist the young farmers, like buying perishable produce off them and establishment of cottage industries that will use the farm produce as raw materials.

“Government should subsidise agricultural inputs and put a good monitoring mechanism in place to ensure the inputs are not diverted.

“Good road network is another important aspect, to ensure a safer and cheaper transportation of farm produce to the cities and other markets; there should be enlightenment programmes on the importance and benefit of agriculture, while people should be educated on the probable dangers attached to not giving enough attention to agriculture; encourage backyard farming; make money available to farmers’ groups (cooperative) in form of soft loans, like government is doing with the Fadama Project and, people themselves must be sincere in using the money for what it is meant, and not to marry more wives or see it as their share of the national cake, which should not be returned,” he further submits.

The agriculture experts unanimously agree that government should tackle population explosion, which is regarded as a time bomb, as the agricultural output in the developing or Third World nations is far below what can adequately feed the countries' ever increasing population.

According to Baale Agbe, Akintola, nobody can do without eating, so, this emerging disaster is what everybody, all stakeholders and governments must join hands to prevent.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) says nutrient levels have declined over the past 30 years in some parts of Africa. Corroborating Professor Faborode on the importance of effective soil management, IFPRI reveals: "The result is that a continent that was more than self sufficient in food at independence 50 years ago, is now a massive food importer. The book, 'The African Food Crisis,' also points out that in less than 40 years; the sub-Saharan Africa went from being a net exporter of basic food staples to relying on imports and food aid.

• MINISTERS VALIDATE REGULATIONS ON PLANTS, ANIMAL SAFETY

The meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, environment and Water Resources, which comprises Ministers responsible for Agriculture,

Livestock, Health and Trade of ECOWAS Member States on Tuesday, 23rd February 2010 in Abuja validated three draft Regulations and one Directive on plants and animal health safety as well as the management of veterinary drugs.

These are the Regulation on the harmonization of the framework and operational rules pertaining to plant and animal health safety within the ECOWAS Region; the Regulation pertaining to the Community Procedures for the Management of Veterinary Drugs; the Regulation on the Creation and Modalities for a Functioning Regional Veterinary Committee within the ECOWAS Region; as well as the Directive on Veterinary Pharmacy.

The framework for harmonization of national legislations, in accordance with international health standards, seeks to help improve trading in animals and food commodities which will contribute to the framework of actions aimed at consolidating the common market while ensuring better consumer protection.

The Regulation on the establishment of an advisory technical committee will allow the provision of advice by the technical committee on all Community issues on health and the well-being of aquatic and terrestrial animals, among others.

In addition, the Regulation on the creation of a functioning veterinary committee mandates the veterinary committee to advise on all measures related to pharmaco-vigilance, establish a centralized process of marketing veterinary drugs and biological as well as target their free movement across the region.

At their one-day meeting, the Ministers who considered the report of experts from Member States were optimistic that the Resolutions would help provide the region with a relevant agriculture development instrument and ensure the protection of human health.

They also expressed satisfaction on the ECOWAS-UEMOA (Economic and Monetary

Union of West Africa) collaboration which facilitated the harmonization of the documents for the whole of West Africa. While urging the President of the ECOWAS Commission to ensure the accelerated adoption of the Regulations by the relevant statutory organs of the institution, the Ministers called for the setting up of a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation so as to ensure an effective implementation of the Regulations by all Member States.

They recommended that a communication strategy be urgently put in place in order to ensure ownership of the regulations at both the regional and national levels. The Ministers' recommendations are based on the Revised ECOWAS Treaty on agricultural development and food security which prescribes that Member States cooperate on the protection of plant and animal species as well as strengthen existing institutions in the management of natural disasters and the control of animal and plant diseases. Among those present at the meeting, this was chaired by Nigeria's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Joseph Nyager, who represented the Minister of

Agriculture and Water Resources of Nigeria other representatives are from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Togo.

The Chairperson of the Sub-Commission of Agriculture, Environment and Rural

Development of the ECOWAS Parliament and the Director of Animal Resources of the UEMOA Commission were also at the meeting.

- **Nigeria: Nigeria Remains the Giant of Africa**

The uproar in the media and comments from various quarters about the dwindling status of Nigeria in the comity of nations and Africa in particular made me to embark on a journey I tagged, 'Nigeria in the new Africa'. It is no news that the leadership role of Nigeria in Africa has attracted a lot of criticisms from Nigerian and foreign analysts, a country once unquestionably referred to as the giant of Africa now receive various baptismal names such as 'the sleeping giant of Africa', 'former giant of Africa', among other derogatory qualifiers.

This perceived change in status as acclaimed by some is based on the fact that a lot of changes and activities have taken place in Africa that have impacted positively on the continent. The recent developments in neighboring African countries challenge the authority of Nigeria as a role model to African countries, particularly the West African region.

Chief among these activities is the recent Ghanaian presidential and parliamentary elections, which is historic in many ways. It was the most contested election in the country's history, with record-breaking campaign expenditure.

Ghanaians went through three contentious rounds of voting, which resulted in the opposition's victory and the transfer of power from one government to another without a single loss of life. This is positive not just for Ghana, the election not only culminated in a peaceful transfer of power and the emergence of a minority as a new majority in parliament. Ghana's 2008 elections have been hailed by national and international observers as a model for Africa.

While Egypt, Ghana, Benin Republic, among other Africa countries, can boast of adequate and uninterrupted power supply, Nigeria still groans in perpetual darkness brought about by epileptic power supply even as the federal government failed to deliver on its promise of generating a meager 6000mw of electricity by the end of December 2009. As at today, Nigeria only generates within 3000 to 3700mw electricity.

One can go on and on to list several maladies befalling our dear nation but in view of the aforementioned and unmentioned problems one tends to ask, is Nigeria still the giant of Africa? Without mincing words, I say yes: Nigeria was, is and remain the giant of Africa.

Permit me to justify myself before you call for my head. It is a known fact that the role played by Nigeria in the maintenance and sustainability of peace in Africa is significant as it is the only country that has at the centre of its foreign policy the promotion, integration and support for African unity. It is this role that won Nigeria the giant of Africa and not its size, natural resources or economy as perceived by those who felt Nigeria is no longer relevant in Africa because of some yet to be resolved internal crisis.

To drive this point home is the fact that for nearly fifty years, Nigeria has emerged from a relatively obscure position under colonial domination to a major power in international affairs. This position as well as the commitment underpinning it has been expressed more forcefully in the defense of Africa, which in cooperation with other countries within the continent and in the Diaspora, has helped in keeping alive the pan-African ideal.

Thus between 1960 till date Nigeria has been actively involved in various ways in the struggle against colonialism in Africa; in demonstrating the cultural richness and diversity of Africa (FESTAC); in building and maintaining peace throughout the west African region; and in helping to establish, and continuing to support the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), the Organization of African Unity (OAU now AU), the Non-Aligned Movement and other organizations concerned with bringing peace to regions and people across the world. It was in defense of this objective that Nigeria broke off diplomatic relations with France in 1961 over the latter's nuclear tests in the Sahara desert.

Similarly, its membership of the "Frontline States" during the struggle against Rhodesia and against Apartheid South Africa; its long-term chairmanship of the UN special

committee against Apartheid and its leadership of peace keeping missions in Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leon, Guinea Bissau and Coted'Ivoire, etc, are all proofs of its commitment as a giant of Africa through peace building, peace keeping and conflict resolution.

The position of Nigeria as a mediator in Africa can not be over emphasized. This is precisely why we need to squarely reject the current calls from certain quarters in the Nigerian foreign policy community and their international collaborators for a disengagement from Africa's problems based on the spurious and untenable position that just as economic liberalization requires a minimalist, less interventionist state domestically, so too is a minimalist state required internationally. Since Nigeria, so the argument goes, is facing enormous domestic economic difficulties, it should withdraw into its shell and face its own problems.

This position overlooks both the simple connection between previous and contemporary forms of imperialist domination, appearing today more intrusively as globalization, and how both are implicated in many of Africa's current conflicts. Nigeria's commitment to peace in Africa and the rest of the world must be contextualized and justified not just in historical terms as a relic of past achievements; that commitment must be reinvigorated and informed by the imperatives of contemporary global events.

Africa possesses a substantial share of the world's fossils and fuels; yet, it is also one of the most marginalized continents in the world. It is a fact that this marginalization is intensifying to the extent that notions of 're-colonization' is today re-echoing in scholarly circles. And there are concrete reasons for this; the deployment of military resources by the West through military training/aid, military bases, arms sales, and increasing reliance on mercenaries in outsourcing arrangements are real manifestations of this growing marginalization, and an expansion of what Nkrumah warned against in the case of the Congo: the continuing struggle for the control of Africa's resources.

It is common knowledge that the State Department has estimated that in the next 10-15 years, the bulk of the energy requirements of the United States will come not from the Middle East, but from the Gulf of Guinea. In anticipation of this, there are already military training programmes and attempts to secure military bases in a number of countries in West Africa by the United States. Indeed a large deep sea military base is being contemplated by the US in the Gulf of Guinea.

These are disturbing facts and seem to lend credence to the general idea of the re-colonization of Africa. This is all the more reason why Nigeria's commitment to peace and development in Africa should be strengthened and support by all Nigerians and Africans. If it helped fight colonialism and apartheid as manifestations of imperialist domination and marginalization in the 60s and 70s, its role in conflict management within contemporary global context ought to be a logical extension of the struggle of the 60s. This is because we need to realize that the current conflicts in Africa are largely manifestation of these new and emergent forms of imperialism.

The history of Nigeria's participation in UN peacekeeping operations dates back to 1960 in the Congo just few days after her independence, wherein she not only contributed troops, but also commanded the UNOC operation. Since then, Nigeria has been involved in many UN peacekeeping operations in many parts of the world some of which are in Bosnia Herzegovina, Iraq, Kuwait, Western Sahara, Rwanda, Somalia, Mozambique, Cambodia, Lebanon, Angola, Beirut, India and Pakistan. It had over 3404 troops serving under the UN, making her the fourth largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in the world.

Given these contributions in the maintenance of regional peace, its enormous human and natural resources, its experience and capabilities in conflict management even in the face of changing nature of global conflict, Nigeria stands in good position to represent Africa and Black people all over the world.

Regionally, its efforts in institutional capacity for conflict management clearly demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Guinea Bissau and Equatorial Guinea as well as its support for democracy and development in Africa is a clear indication of the leadership role of Nigeria in Africa.

- **Côte d'Ivoire: UN envoy meets with African mediator in bid to solve electoral crisis**

The top United Nations envoy in Côte d'Ivoire today met with the African mediator seeking to end the political crisis threatening the much-delayed elections in the divided West African country.

The violence must end, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire Y. J. Choi told reporters after meeting with President Blaise Compaoré of neighbouring Burkina Faso who flew into Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's largest city, to help find a solution to the crisis sparked by the dissolution of the Government and the independent electoral authority earlier this month.

At least seven people have so far died during violent demonstrations against the dissolution. UN officials, including Mr. Ban, have repeatedly called on the parties to preserve the achievements made so far, including the provisional electoral list, and to quickly establish the definitive list for the elections, which it is hoped will bring stability to the country that was split by civil war in 2002 into a rebel-held north and Government-controlled south.

Originally scheduled as far back as 2005, the polls have been repeatedly delayed, most recently from last November to next month.

Again today Mr. Choi stressed the need to keep the progress already made in the electoral process. We are all agreed that the provisional electoral list must be preserved," he said, noting that it already contained 5.3 million voters, pending the resolution of disputes.

He voiced the hope that mediation by Mr. Compaoré, who has for several years acted as Facilitator in efforts to bridge the differences between the parties, will lead to the formation of a new government and electoral committee as soon as possible.

Mr. Compaoré met with all sides in the dispute today as well as with the diplomatic corps. Yesterday he met with leaders of the Ivorian opposition in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital.

The UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which Mr. Choi also leads, was set up in 2004 to help ensure a ceasefire and pave the way for permanent peace and democratic elections. Reauthorized repeatedly since then, most recently until 31 May, it currently comprises over 8,500 uniformed personnel, as well as 400 international civilian staff.
Source: UN

- **Ghana: Coups in Africa condemned**

The focus of the United States Africa Command, (AFRICOM) based in Stuttgart, Germany, is to professionalize the various militaries of Africa and assist them to know their roles in the democracies of their countries.

Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities to AFRICOM, said, "We get upset about coups in any African country since these individual armies especially the military are there to assist in protecting the interests of their citizenry and the democracy of their country."

Ambassador Holmes said political instability, chaotic situations and other undemocratic processes could prevent the achievement of social, economic and political targets of any nation.

He said the rule of law should be a priority in all military activities anywhere in the world and it would be against acceptable practices for the military to get involved in local politics.

Ambassador Holmes who was speaking to Ghanaian journalists at Stuttgart, Germany, on Monday, said Africa was previously ignored by the United States of America and after its independence the relationship between Africa and the USA was inconsistent and this prompted the establishment of the AFRICOM.

He said formerly Africa formed part of the United States European Command (EUCOM) but a critical examination of the maritime domain of Africa coupled with narcotic drug smuggling, human trafficking, weapons proliferation and other issues called for another approach to Africa.

Ambassador Holmes said the United States decided to re-organise itself to understand African issues, noting that through cooperation, long term engagement and training, various joint exercises are now done with local armies to improve their skills and

competencies.

He said apart from military to military training with their African Partner nations, there is also a military-civil component where the US military assists communities in social activities during their visits.

From: George Naykene, GNA Special Correspondent By Courtesy of US Government
Source: GNA - [Ghana News Agency](#)

- **Ghana: Seizure of cocaine on the decrease in Africa**

There is a decline in the seizure of cocaine in Africa since 2008 and no large seizures has been recorded in 2009, according to the annual report of the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB).

It noted that, this was after years of increasing cocaine trafficking from South America through West Africa to Europe and to a lesser extent to North America.

The report released in Vienna, Austria on Wednesday said smuggling of cocaine however, remained a serious problem and contributed to increasing drug abuse in West Africa.

Madam Naana Ampratwum, Chief Director, Ministry for the Interior on behalf of the Sector Minister, Mr Martin Amidu, announced this at the launching of the 149-paged report organised by the Narcotics Control Board (NACOB) in Accra.

The report contains an analysis of the drug control situation worldwide, to keep governments aware of existing and potential situation, that might endanger the objectives of international control treaties.

It said cocaine, estimated at about one billion dollars, was trafficked through Africa and West African distribution networks in Europe appeared to have remained intact.

The report said Africa continued to be vulnerable to the diversion of the chemical precursor's ephedrine and pseudo ephedrine, used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Central and North America, and called for the urgent need for African countries to improve their national mechanisms for precursor control.

It noted that cannabis remained the drug most widely produced, trafficked and abused in Africa and that cannabis destined for Europe, was produced in North Africa.

Heroin continued to enter Africa mainly through the countries in East Africa, but increasingly through islands in the Indian Ocean and as a spill-over effect, Mauritius had the highest levels of abuse of heroin in Africa.

The report said from East Africa, part of the heroin is smuggled to West Africa,

especially to Cote d'Ivoire and from Europe and North America.

"While the number and size of heroin seizures in West Africa remained very small, the organised crime networks based in the sub-region play a key role in supplying the drug worldwide," it added.

Source: GNA - Ghana News Agency

- **Ghana: Aids Fight in Africa**

Public Agenda (Accra)

The 2009 AIDS Update reconfirms Africa as the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS global epidemic. The continent represents 10 percent of the global population but accounts for 67 percent of all individuals living with HIV/AIDS, 68 percent of all new adult infections in 2008 and 91 percent of all childhood HIV infections.

In addition, 72 percent of AIDS-related deaths worldwide in 2008 occurred in Africa. To contain HIV/AIDS in Africa, South Africa and Nigeria need to play significant leadership roles.

South Africa is by far the leading economic powerhouse in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank 2008/2009 Africa Development Indicators report, South Africa 's economy represents nearly 23 percent of the economic output of Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria is the second-largest economy. Combined, South Africa and Nigeria account for 36 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa 's economy.

One out of every four black people in the world is a Nigerian. The country is a leading exporter of oil. It has the largest number of public and private universities and polytechnics in Africa.

Nigeria played crucial roles in liberating African countries from the last vestiges of colonialism in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, including the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The politics of Africa was dominated in the last decade by former President Obasanjo of Nigeria and former President Mbeki of South Africa, both of whom were highly influential in the founding of the African Union and the establishment of the New Economic Partnership for Africa.

South Africa is the dominant political and economic force in the Southern Africa region. Nigeria is the dominant political and economic force in West Africa. Both countries now face significant challenges from the AIDS epidemic.

South Africa has the largest concentration of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in one country, 5.7 million and counting. Nigeria has the third-highest number of individuals living with HIV/AIDS, at 3 million and counting. Combined, South Africa and Nigeria account for nearly 39 percent of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Africa.

South Africa needs to lead the fight against AIDS in Southern Africa. The recent announcement of a significant increase in resource deployment for HIV-preventive and AIDS treatment programs by President Zuma of South Africa is a step forward.

This should be followed by South Africa ' s scaled-up technical and economic assistance to its neighbors in the region. South Africa can team up with Botswana, a relatively wealthy country with successful AIDS programs to provide technical and financial support to other members of the Southern Africa economic bloc.

Nigeria needs to ramp up its own HIV preventive and AIDS treatment programs to reach individuals at risk and in need. More than 50 percent of individuals that qualify for antiretroviral therapy do not have access in Nigeria. In addition, Nigeria needs to work with other members of the West Africa economic bloc to significantly improve preventive and treatment programs and keep HIV prevalence and incidence rates low in the region.

In particular, Nigeria should work with other countries in the region to prevent runaway HIV epidemic rates in the post-conflict states of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d ' Ivoire. Guinea, with its current state of political uncertainty, needs close attention in view of the growing rates of HIV infection.

South Africa and Nigeria can lead the way in addressing the continued feminization of AIDS in the continent as a result of gender inequalities. African women account for 60 percent of all individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Africa, the highest rate in any other continent.

By setting an example with how they address gender inequalities, South Africa and Nigeria can set important markers for other African countries. They can also provide technical, financial and logistics assistance to other countries in their respective regions to address gender inequalities.

Both countries can set examples for other African countries by vigorously tackling poverty, a major driver of HIV transmission. Poverty increases the likelihood of high-risk behavior, including adults taking calculated risks in order to put food on the table for young children and other dependents. South Africa and Nigeria have high rates of endemic poverty and unemployment. Income inequalities are also high in both countries.

Finally, South Africa and Nigeria need to continue leveraging their influence in continental and regional organizations to sharpen AIDS response in the continent.

They need to continue working within the African Union, the African Development Bank, the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, and the Regional Office of the World Health Organization to mainstream the implementation of AIDS response into other health and development programs in Africa.

Both countries should also work closely to ensure the implementation of the pledge by African countries to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria services on or before the end of 2010.

- **Republic of Togo (Lomé)**

West Africa: Ecowas force to help deter country vote violence

West African states will provide a multinational force to help police next month's elections in Togo, where violence during a 2005 vote left at least 400 dead.

Tensions are high ahead of the vote, with opposition leaders accusing incumbent President Faure Gnassingbe of planning to rig the outcome.

"We're here for prevention, but we don't expect turmoil," Colonel Siaka Sangare, head of the Togo mission of the regional body ECOWAS, said during a press conference.

"My greatest wish is that the election takes place in a climate of transparency and calm," he added.

The mission will include 146 military observers from 13 ECOWAS member states. It will support local security forces, including Togo's specially trained election force numbering roughly 3,000, Colonel Sangare said.

The special election force, supported by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, has been managing security at campaign rallies which kicked off earlier this month.

- **Sierra Leone: Aid Organizations Promote Media Awareness as a Tool against Sexual Violence**

Last week, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized a workshop in Freetown to discuss the issue of sexual violence in Sierra Leone and ways in which the media could serve a positive role in drawing attention to the matter.

In addition to raising media attention for sexual violence, efforts to bring justice for war crimes in Sierra Leone have seen an increase recently. On 22 February 2010, Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon announced the appointment of Brenda Joyce Hollis as the new prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), a joint tribunal established by the Sierra Leone government and the United Nations, which acts to bring justice for war crimes committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone over the last 12 years.

Hollis leads the prosecution against former Liberian president Charles Taylor for crimes against humanity and for the 275,000 reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) that occurred in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the civil war. However, despite

legal progress made by the SCSL, no convictions have resulted from the 1,543 domestic violence reports and 927 sexual abuse cases that occurred just last year. Maria Butler, who is the project associate for the UN Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (UNFPA) told MediaGlobal, "The impact of sexual violence on women, communities, and the society has been overwhelming in this West African nation. National, United Nations, and civil society efforts have been welcome, however, more needs to be done to protect and promote women's participation in all communities of Sierra Leone."

According to an 2000 Amnesty International report titled "Sierra Leone: Rape and other forms of Sexual Violence against Girls and Women," the occurrence of SGBV has been systematic and widespread. Rape, abduction, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence have been prevalent in Sierra Leone for the duration of the armed conflict. Acts of sexual violence usually involve rebel forces, most of them members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Sexual violence of this nature can often result in physical injury, forced pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and death.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an organization that investigates gender-based violence in sub-Saharan Africa, also agrees that increasing media awareness is vital in combating the problem. Suzannah Sirkin, deputy director of PHR told MediaGlobal, "The use of media, especially radio, is a powerful tool to break through the isolation, stigma and silence surrounding sexual violence in West Africa and elsewhere. Perpetrators need to know that impunity will end as more survivors and their communities mobilize to stop rape-- first by speaking out --and then by pressing for meaningful redress, including prosecution."

In a December 2009 report conducted by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in collaboration with the UN Response to Rape Group, researchers found that only 12.5 percent of rape cases were reported to the police. Furthermore, the United Nations found that only 34 percent of sexual violence cases were reported in the rural communities compared to 68 percent in urban areas. Sirkin told MediaGlobal, "Survivors of sexual violence need information about access to medical care, about their rights to reparation, and how to connect to others to assert these rights and gain support. The media needs to give voice to survivors in a manner that does not sensationalize their plight, but rather asserts their fundamental dignity."

Human rights organizations are hoping that with increasing media attention, sexual and gender based violence will be taken more seriously by the government and also by the communities that are affected. Butler told MediaGlobal "Effectively addressing sexual violence in Sierra Leone demands a holistic approach that includes taking into account issues of prevention, protection, women's participation, and access to services for survivors of sexual violence."

- **Africa: Democracy Progressing in Africa, Transparency International Says**

"Hopeful" and "moving in the right direction" is how a senior representative of Transparency International (TI) describes democracy and governance across sub-Saharan Africa. But, he warns, managing peaceful political transition remains a big problem in much of Africa.

Akere Muna, vice-chairman of Transparency International's international board of directors, told America.gov February 22 that at the most basic level, trends are positive because people are discussing the need for increased transparency and accountability in their governments. Speaking by telephone from his office in Cameroon, Muna said there is still much work to do.

Transparency International is a civil-society organization that fights corruption worldwide through more than 90 chapters. Since 1995, it has published an annual Corruption Perceptions Index that ranks countries from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (free of corruption). TI's 30 chapters in sub-Saharan African countries monitor democratic conditions within their own countries, operating on the premise that local people know their nations best, Muna said, and building coalitions with civil society, the private sector and, ideally, their own governments.

Noting the dozens of elections are slated for Africa in 2010, Muna emphasized the need to manage transitions peacefully. These elections, he said, are "the first take and a test" of Africa's ability to follow through on increased democratization and transparency.

Muna warned that elections in themselves are not enough because sometimes a legally elected government takes office and simply "ties up the system," leaving a coup d'etat the only option for change.

The TI representative said "increased talk about the need for good governance and the corrosive impact of corruption is a welcome sign," but cautioned multiparty democracy "comes with certain constraints" that must be addressed.

"When politicians and political parties have to compete for votes, things can happen. When a society is not used to dealing with these factors," he said, legal safeguards must be put in place to guard against corruption.

He added that an African government is often the nation's main employer, and historically some governments have only hired from one ethnic group, a practice that can foster corruption. Also, many sub-Saharan economies remain highly dependent on cash, which contributes to corruption because cash is hard to track and easy to hide.

Muna, who is also president of the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), said people in sub-Saharan Africa tend "not to fight for certain things" -- like constitutions -- that are perceived to be handed down from above. Constitutions are not always fully understood or effectively used by the citizenry, he added.

One notable exception, he said, is South Africa, which has a working, living, actively used constitution due to its relatively recent struggle to end apartheid.

PILLARS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Too often in sub-Saharan Africa, "nobody interrogates the system" -- no one connects what the government is doing under the constitution and how those activities affect corruption, poverty and the government's responsibility to its citizens, Muna said. He cited Transparency International's framework of pillars of good governance as a way to measure a country's success in fighting corruption.

The pillars, he said, are key elements that can be used to measure progress on good governance. The National Integrity System Model of pillars includes areas such as media, civil society, an auditor general and international participants.

One of the vital pillars of good governance is accountability, Muna said, adding it requires a free press. "If you don't have a vibrant and responsible press, then it is impossible to be able to have any kind of system that holds any hope for the future. So the press has a key role to play and one that is not to be taken lightly."

Sub-Saharan African nations often lack an adequately trained free press that is informative, authoritative, responsible and not sensational, according to Muna. Drawing from his own experience in Cameroon, he said it is important for local journalists to report on government budgets and pending projects, such as the construction of a well or road in a village. Citizens then can question their leaders on the project's status and the disposition of the funds for that project. "That is empowerment that encourages accountability," he said.

An active civil society is also important. Muna described civil society as the "salvation" force charged with realigning governmental processes to ensure things are happening to improve society as a whole.

Commenting on recent events, Muna described Zimbabwe as a country suffering from a "total breakdown" of the pillars of integrity and good governance. He sees Guinea as a society emerging from a very unfortunate past where things now seem to be realigning, and he has hope for Niger as well.

Turning to Nigeria, Muna described a complex country with a dynamic free press, able to correct itself politically. Political correction is currently under way there, he said, with the elevation of Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to acting president. Muna warned, however, that Nigerians have long viewed corruption as a way of life.

In Madagascar, Muna said, recent political developments illustrate "Africa has problems managing political transition," something he termed a common problem in the region.

"Every time I look at American television and I see all those former U.S. presidents together, that is an amazing experience for Africans to visualize.

"How does one manage transition? That is the biggest question for Africa, to manage transition peacefully across the board in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger, Zimbabwe, so their governments are in line with the wishes and aspirations of their people."

- **Africa: Key African Countries 'Should Set Up Investment Fund' for the Continent**

Johannesburg — THAT no indigenous pool of investment capital exists is a structural difficulty in attracting foreign equity fund investment to Africa, says Noah Financial Innovation CEO Raymond Ndlovu.

He said yesterday at a Frontier Advisory and JSE event that two or three key African country markets should come together and establish an Africa investment fund, similar to funds from other regions of the globe.

South African managers wishing to find capital for investment in other African countries typically had to obtain it from global markets. African countries compete with other "frontier markets" such as Khazakstan and Ukraine for global equity capital.

Key markets in Africa, which has 23 stock markets, were likely to grow faster than developed countries and "you can't just sit here and have lazy capital in South African markets", said Ndlovu.

Equity funds were the biggest foreign market investors into Africa, although they tended to be fickle, mainly as capital markets were underdeveloped in most African countries since they were not yet able to run sustainable government financial systems.

Equity fund investment was being driven by fiscal and monetary policy changes, an upsurge in commodity prices, buoyant domestic demand and the easing of emerging market risk aversion.

Countervailing these positive factors was weak demand in developed countries that was curbing African export growth, a tentative recovery in global credit markets and the effect of potential sovereign defaults in Greece on global markets.

Key African markets for equity investments were Angola, Nigeria, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo, he said.

Investment in Kenya was being hampered by political instability, he said. There was also political risk in Nigeria, "but it is all risk reward ratio ... in spite of the risks, there are lots of opportunities".

Fungai Ruwende, partner of Actis, a global private equity group, said 1bn of 9bn the group had raised "before the bubble burst" was for African markets.

Private equity was globally a 1,7-trillion industry, but emerging markets attracted a small percentage and African countries an even smaller percentage of that.

South African investors could "do a lot more" and "by the time (they) wake up, China will already be there ... they're taking markets away from SA", he said.

Investment into emerging markets "is still an attractive proposition", and he expected some of the very large global private equity funds would be active in African markets this year.

- **Africa: Substandard Antimalarial Medicines Highlight the Need for Health Care Reform in African Countries**

Sub-standard antimalarial medicines are still sold widely in Madagascar, Senegal, and Uganda, according to a recently published study by United States Pharmacopeia (USP), a non-governmental organization dedicated to monitoring standards and quality of medicines and food around the world.

Dr. Patrick Lukulay, Director of the Promoting the Quality of Medicines (PQM) program at USP described multiple difficulties countries face in the struggle to guarantee access to high quality medicines. Substandard medicines are available because there is a public demand for affordable health options. So the market for substandard medicines continues to thrive as people buy these medicines due to a lack of resources--illicit medicines are sold at lower prices--and due to a lack of access to high quality medical distributors. People living in rural areas do not always have access to a government-regulated distributor, so will buy medicine from informal distributors in their communities. This is particularly problematic for malaria, because it is such a common ailment. Lukulay explained, "If your child has a high fever [one of the initial symptoms of malaria], you're not going to travel one hour to go to the capital city. You're just going to get what's nearest to your home."

In a country like Senegal, with fairly porous borders, people, particularly small-scale entrepreneurs, can import and sell medicine without the government's awareness. At times even large-scale distributors sell substandard medicines. These companies sometimes have links to the government, so even when weaknesses in their products are identified it can be a political battle to withdraw them from the market.

The study, "Survey of the Quality of Selected Antimalarial Medicines Circulating in Madagascar, Senegal, and Uganda", was a partnership between USP, the United States

Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Veerle Coigne, pharmaceutical management advisor for USAID explained to MediaGlobal: "With this study we are hoping that it will lead to targeted actions based on the samples that were found to be substandard. But beyond that, it will help keep the momentum going of improving the medicines quality assurance systems."

Lack of quality medicines is a public health risk in both the short and long term, and the stated goals of the study were to update and expand the knowledge of sub-standard antimalarials in these countries. When people take substandard medicine they may not effectively treat their disease. Even more worrisome is that, in the long term, the use of substandard medicines can possibly influence strains of malaria in becoming resistant to drugs, and therefore much more difficult to treat. Formerly effective malarial medicines such as quinine, chloroquine, and sulfadoxine/pyrimethamine have already become obsolete due in part to drug resistance.

The study found that 43 percent of samples in Senegal did not meet all of the tested standards. Uganda had a failure rate of 26 percent, and Madagascar of 30 percent. These are the overall results, but the study also explored which sectors and regions had greater pass or fail rates. For example, in Uganda all of the medicines tested from the public sector, which is to say authorized by the government, were up to standard. The breakdown of the information will be useful for pinpointing the areas that need improvement. Jennifer Murphy, supply chain advisor for the President's Malaria Initiative with USAID specified, "it gives you a kind of snap shot in time of what is available to consumers."

Addressing these issues is a complicated process, and drug regulation requires continuing efforts on the part of national governments. Coigne described the four steps necessary for a functional quality control program. These include first a solid registration system in which the government monitors imported medicines and regularly performs quality control tests before allowing the medicines into the market.

The second element is to license all of the actors in the distribution chain: pharmaceutical stakeholders, manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacies. Third, countries should have in-country quality testing laboratories. Senegal, Uganda, and Madagascar already have government regulatory bodies, but their technical capacity and the scope of their actions must be improved.

The final step is post-marketing surveillance. Coigne emphasized that this is especially important when the other systems are still in development. Post-marketing surveillance is when governments test medicines that consumers are using. When substandard medicines are found in the supply chain they can trace their origins and take action to withdraw the products from the market.

But Coigne underlined that this capacity building and strengthening of the whole medical regulatory system is a complicated and involved process. "It sounds easy; it isn't as easy. It takes a while before countries get it right, before the testing is done correctly,

before it's passed on for confirmative testing, before the reporting is done and before actions are taken."

To address the widespread quality issues, Lukulay, like Coignez, suggests strengthening post-market surveillance programs. But in light of the broader social issues of access and affordability, Lukulay also recommends implementing national health insurance programs. When people are paying for medicine out of pocket, they are often forced to choose the less expensive option. On the other hand, if the government subsidized regulated medicines and provided accessible distribution points, people would use high quality medicines. "If people know that they can go there and get the medicines at very reduced price, or next to nothing, then they will not be hesitation to go to the outlets to find these."

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- **Africa: Tissue Bank to Study 'Invisible' Stillbirths**

Dakar — US researchers have begun collecting tissue samples from thousands of pregnant women in an effort to learn what causes stillbirths – babies born dead – and preterm deliveries. This is the second of a three-part series on maternal and child health, and the seldom mentioned babies who are born after they have died.

Data is scarce on the more than 13 million babies born before 37 weeks of pregnancy every year – of which one million die – and an additional 3.2 million deaths that the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies as stillbirths, according to a recent report based on collaborative research led by the US-based Global Alliance to Prevent Prematurity and Stillbirth (GAPPS).

Lack of equipment and technicians to interpret ultrasound scans of the baby in the womb have made it difficult to gather information in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, where most these deaths occur, GAPPS said. Stillbirths were "neither recorded nor discussed in health policies, making them effectively "invisible", the report commented.

"Stillbirth is largely ignored globally," Craig Rubens, executive director of GAPPS and a paediatrician, told IRIN. "Most stillbirths do not receive an autopsy and parents are left with more questions than answers."

Aminata Ndiaye, 24, from Senegal told IRIN it was God's will that her baby was born dead in November 2009. "We do not have control over these matters - He who gives can also take away, and we must accept the good Lord's will."

Participants at an international conference on premature births and stillbirths, organized by GAPPS in May 2009, drafted an agenda to reduce stillbirths and preterm births by promoting low-cost proven interventions.

Based on a review of 2,000 studies of interventions conducted up to 31 December 2008, GAPPS looked at the success rate of 82 interventions and compiled a list of 21 that were proven to keep preterm newborns alive as well as prevent stillbirths and preterm births.

These measures include early breastfeeding, carrying a child against the mother's chest - "kangaroo" mother care - providing Vitamin K at delivery, and using ordinary air rather than oxygen to resuscitate babies not breathing at delivery.

Proven methods to prevent stillbirth include presumptive malaria treatments during pregnancy, syphilis screenings, boosting protein during pregnancy, and emergency obstetric care.

Unfortunately, these life-saving measures are not widely adopted due to lack of awareness about what causes preterm births and stillbirths, cultural barriers, poorly functioning health systems, lack of political will and resources, and corruption, according to GAPPS.

Lack of research

Researchers launched tissue-collection for the study in the US in November 2009, and plan to expand it to India and Africa. The goal is to collect samples of maternal blood, urine, vaginal and amniotic fluid, which surrounds the foetus during pregnancy, umbilical cord blood, and placental tissue from 6,000 pregnant women.

"The challenge with understanding preterm birth is that it has been looked at as an 'event' rather than a complex syndrome," Rubens told IRIN.

Unlike cancer researchers, who for years have had access to extensive tissue samples from patients with the illness, maternal and child health researchers have had little to consult.

There have been no standard operating procedures for collecting tissue specimens from pregnant women, which meant there was no tissue bank that researchers around the world could access, and therefore no large-scale scientific studies could be conducted.

High-quality specimens would speed up research into preventing newborn deaths and stillbirth rather than just reacting to it. "There is very little that can be done ... [without specimens], which is why most of the research focus for preterm birth has been on keeping the preterm neonate [baby] alive," Rubens told IRIN.

"The cost of prospective research is much more significant – you have to enrol a large cohort of pregnant women and follow them throughout their pregnancy," said Rubens.

A co-author of the study, Joy Lawn, of Save the Children, a UK-based NGO, noted that "Preterm births and stillbirths are ... a private loss to many families that should be on the public's priority list."

- **Africa: Banks in Africa Seek 1 Billion From ADB's Trade Initiative**

Johannesburg — THE African Development Bank (ADB) has received applications from regional financial institutions for about 1bn of trade finance since launching its new facility a year ago to stimulate African trade flows after the global financial crisis.

By providing liquidity and sharing risk with African financial institutions, the trade finance initiative will facilitate Africa's exports and imports at a time when the global financial crisis is cutting off critical funding," it said recently, in response to questions about take-up on the 1bn multiphase trade finance initiative it announced last March.

Credit Guarantee senior manager of investments and economic services Luke Doig said it was too early to tell whether improved global growth was being reflected in demand for South African goods.

"We have seen a marginal increase in demand for cover by exporters, but would need to wait for the first quarter to play itself out before we are prepared to say that the trend has become entrenched."

Reuters reported last month that Swift, a co-operative of 8300 banks in 209 countries that banks use to exchange financial messages, said trade finance flows had been rising since early last year but there had been significant ups and downs, such as a drop from June to September.

Data on international trade finance have been unavailable since 2004, when the Bank for International Settlements stopped compiling statistics to curtail cost. Swift can collate data on the number of trade data deals, based on messages going through its system, but not their value. There were 41,8-million messages on trade last year, 8,6% below 2008's figure, adjusted for business days. The World Trade Organisation forecast global trade would contract by 10%.

After the sharp collapse in markets in September 2008, the price of credit rose and banks shortened their lending periods, reflecting reduced appetite for risk, the ADB said. Availability of import finance was constrained by a lack of liquidity in international markets.

The ADB said it was processing several requests for its trade finance facility. It had signed letters of credit for 100m for United Bank of Africa, which the bank would use to advance credit to corporate customers on the continent after the retreat of non- African lending institutions.

ADB has also arranged a 1,2bn short-term loan to the Ghana Cocoa Board to buy the imminent cocoa crop, and has advanced 100m to Standard Bank of SA as part of the global liquidity trade programme.

The global liquidity trade programme aimed to leverage about 50bn of global trade from 5bn of commitments from public-sector sources.

- **Niger: Denial will not solve West Africa's hunger problems**

An emaciated boy waits for treatment at an emergency feeding centre in the town of Tahoua in northwestern Niger, August 2, 2005. Experts are warning that there is a risk of a similar food crisis in Niger this year if swift action is not taken now. REUTERS/Finbarr O'Reilly

An emaciated boy waits for treatment at an emergency feeding centre in the town of Tahoua in northwestern Niger, August 2, 2005. Experts are warning that there is a risk of a similar food crisis in Niger this year if swift action is not taken now. REUTERS/Finbarr O'Reilly

The indicators highlighting an imminent severe hunger crisis in West Africa's Sahel belt are gradually shifting from amber to red with the latest warning from the European Union's aid department (ECHO) that there is a risk of famine if swift action is not taken now.

But how would such action work if the leaders of the countries that require help are in denial of the chronic hunger problems they face?

"There are certain countries that have a certain allergy to being seen to be in crisis. Their image is important," Brian O'Neal, a director at ECHO, told a news conference in Dakar.

Niger seems to be a case in point.

With an estimated food deficit of 30 percent for 2010 the country has been described as the "epicentre" of the looming shortage to hit millions in parts of Chad, Nigeria and Burkina Faso but its authorities do not want it to be termed a crisis.

At the start of this week, the authorities said the country was not at risk of a food crisis only to later confirm the veracity of a leaked government report showing that up to half of Niger's 15 million people will face food shortages this year. Nonetheless, officials insisted that they can handle the situation.

A Niger government spokesman said on Thursday food security issues should not be a reason for international partners to exaggerate the situation in a manner that "humiliates" Nigeriens and come into the country on the basis that they are bringing food aid.

It is not the first time that authorities in the country ranked bottom of the U.N. Human Development Index are denying a food crisis.

In 2005, they maintained that the country was not facing a severe food shortage until pictures of hungry, malnourished Nigerien children appeared in international media.

So, which image of Niger has endured more? The one of a glorious uranium-rich country or the one in which 4 million people including 800,000 children suffered from hunger during the 2005 crisis?

MALNUTRITION PLAGUES WEST AFRICA

But Niger is not alone.

Most West African countries, particularly those in the Sahel which runs along the southern edge of the Sahara desert, suffer from severe malnutrition problems affecting 30 to 50 percent of the population in some countries but just as in Niger authorities are reluctant to admit that it is a crisis.

Many governments consider that admitting the existence of malnutrition is not only "shameful" but would also imply that policies to provide welfare in their countries have failed, opening the floodgates to international criticism.

"It is necessary to help them ensure that we're not talking about a negative picture of the country but a positive picture of a country recognising its problems and fighting to deal with its problems with the help of the international community," O'Neal said.

As a result, the international community has opted for the soft approach through advocacy to get government to recognise that there is a problem with food security and malnutrition.

"We want them to know that most crises are not linked to internal management," the regional head of the U.N. humanitarian agency OCHA, Herve Ludovic de Lys told journalists recently.

In the meantime, 300,000 children die each year from malnutrition in the Sahel, according to the U.N. children's agency (UNICEF). This is more than died in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami or a major earthquake; the difference is that experts say deaths from malnutrition (or hunger) are completely preventable - if leaders made it a priority.

Ghana:

1. Political News:

- **Gov't to Fly Down Craig Murray**

Credible sources at the National Security has hinted The Chronicle that the government of Ghana has taken serious notice of an article written and published by Mr. Craig Murray, a former UK deputy High Commissioner to Ghana and a human rights activist, where he alleged massive corruption in the award of contracts under the previous New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration.

According to our information, the government has decided to officially invite Mr. Murray to help investigate a number of corruption allegations he made, which he published in his website www.craigmurray.org.uk.

"The government, upon critically reading of the article, and listening to him on various radio stations, has decided to invite Mr. Murray within the shortest possible time, to help investigate the matter," a high source at National Security hinted.

The source further noted that the decision was in line with President Mills' desire to fight corruption in all forms in Ghana.

Craig Murray, a human rights activist, writer, former deputy British Ambassador, and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Lancaster School of Law, on his website on February 8, this year, published an article under the caption, 'The UK and Corruption in Ghana: the British Government are the biggest hypocrites,' and held subsequent interviews.

In his article, he alleged massive corruption during the President Kufuor-led administration.

Below are excerpts of his article:

British High Commissioner Nick Westcott is not afraid to step into controversy. Having boldly told us that Vodafone did nothing wrong in their acquisition of Ghana Telecom, he now lectures Ghana that incoming governments must respect contracts entered into by the outgoing government. Of course, that is true. As a general point, it is a simple statement of the legal position.

But, we all know that Dr. Westcott did not mean it as a general point. He meant that investigations into contracts, including Kosmos and Vodafone, must be stopped. Otherwise, he warned, investor confidence would be damaged - a warning that foreigners would take their dollars elsewhere.

But what is the logic of this position? No government may question any contract entered into by a predecessor, no matter how corruptly? That, if you are a dreadfully corrupt

foreign businessman, who has bribed a minister, you only have to hang on until the government changes, and then you cannot be investigated? Plainly this is nonsense.

The fact is that, as detailed in a series of articles in the Financial Times of London, there are a whole number of questions about the Kosmos deal, which gives experienced observers great cause for concern.

Case of Kosmos & EO Group

One which particularly worries me, is how, on the best oilfield in Ghana, Kosmos were able to get a royalty rate of only 5%, when the average on other fields is over 11%. There are suggestions that partners from EO were active on the Ghanaian government side of the negotiation.

There are also credible stories of Kosmos handing EO millions of dollars in cash notes for "marketing and publicity".

Is Ghana forbidden from investigation, because the government has changed? No, and they must not be bullied out of it by the British, Americans, IMF or World Bank. Those will always back wealthy Western companies against a developing African nation.

The Vodafone deal suffered - at the very least - from a lack of transparency and a lack of a level playing field for others - including France Telecom - who wished to compete. The final sales price was definitely too cheap.

I would like to know how Ghana Airways' invaluable routes were awarded to GIA - a bunch of obscure and inexperienced investors who came only fourth in the official assessment of bids. The result has been the almost total disappearance of Ghana's whole aviation industry.

I would like to know how industrial development funds were given to a network of companies, the ultimate ownership of which traced back to the Minister of Industry.

The British High Commissioner has the problem entirely backwards. It is not that the government is not honouring existing contracts. I am Chairman of several companies, including Atholl Energy. Atholl had a contract with the NPP government which has been honoured by the NDC government, because we carry out our work diligently and honestly.

The problem is that where contracts are not honest, action has not been fast enough, or decisive enough to root out corruption.

The Rotten deals Two of the worst examples are in the energy sector. Let us look at the case of another British company, Zakhem International Ltd. They are building the Kpone Power Project for VRA.

VRA bought the turbines from the manufacturer, Alstom, for US \$70 million. They then paid Zakhem US \$80 million upfront to install them and provide the ancillary equipment.

After three years, what do Ghanaian taxpayers have to show for their US\$150 million? Absolutely nothing. An empty field at Kpone, surrounded by Ghana's longest concrete wall so the Ghanaian public cannot see that their money has been stolen.

What is happening about it? Nothing, because Zakhem and their Ghanaian partners have stolen enough money to bribe all the officials involved. They are now claiming around town that the new government is also "in their pocket".

Most of the \$80 million has vanished forever, while the \$70 million turbines are now badly damaged by disuse.

Or look at Balkan Energy. They claimed to have spent US\$100 million on refurbishing the Osagyefo barge, at a time when they had really spent less than US\$10 million.

Under an astonishingly corrupt contract, Balkan are to lease the barge for \$10 million per year, from the government of Ghana, but then charge Ghana over \$40 million per year for its use as a "Capacity charge". They will in addition, charge the government of Ghana for the fuel, and make a profit on that too. It is as if I rented your car from you for 100 Ghana cedis a month, then rented it back to you for 500 Ghana cedis a month, plus charging you a premium on all the petrol you use.

Balkan stands to make a total of about \$1.5 billion in profit from the people of Ghana from this terrible deal. It is the most corrupt contract I have ever seen. It is astonishing that a country like Ghana would enter into a contract with Balkan, whose owner, Gene E. Phillips, has stood trial as a gangster in the United States.

These are not crimes without a victim. Everyone who pays any VAT or other tax in Ghana is putting money into the pockets of these disgraceful conmen. Most of the taxpayers of Ghana are very poor, and the money is being taken by people who are very rich.

That is why I am speaking out. I am not supporting any political party. I am supporting the ordinary people of Ghana.

I first spoke out about corruption in Ghana back in 1999, when I was Deputy High Commissioner there. It caused a sensation in the Ghanaian media at the time. But, people do not know that I was nearly sacked by the British government as a result.

The British Hypocrisy

The British government did not object at all to my attacking corruption in Ghana. The reason I was nearly sacked was, because I said, "Sadly some British companies have been

involved in this corruption." I was carpeted by the British government, and told I must never mention British companies' corruption.

At the time, I was thinking of the British company, International Generics Limited, and their involvement in scams over the La Palm and Coco Palm hotels. The hypocrisy of the British government in defending corrupt British companies was most famously seen, when Tony Blair ordered an end to a prosecution of the arms company BAE, over massive bribes they had paid in Saudi Arabia. Blair declared that prosecuting BAE was not "in the national interest".

Last week, BAE again escaped criminal prosecution, and were allowed to pay a fine instead, for corruption in Africa, including Tanzania. So Nick Westcott is only continuing a British hypocritical tradition of condemning corruption, unless it is British corruption. The truth is that, sadly there was a major increase in corruption in Ghana, especially in 2007 and 2008.

That was a major reason why the Ghanaian people voted to change their government. But, so far there is little indication that the new government has done much to root out the corruption. The danger in this is that ordinary people will become disillusioned with the political process.

Ghanaians are not stupid. People know who stole money, and they see them swanning around town in their fancy cars, unashamedly living the highlife. This can corrupt society. Young people can easily draw the conclusion that the way to make money is to be a corrupt politician, or a drugs dealer. The further danger is that, just like in Nigeria, they conclude that all the politicians of all the parties are into the corruption, and that is why everyone gets away with it.

I did not use to think that was true in Ghana, but I really am beginning to wonder, unless we see some effective action soon. So, rather than protecting the corrupt, the British High Commissioner should be offering help and assistance actively to attack corruption. That includes corruption by British companies.

He should also remember that with oil revenues within touching distance, Ghana will soon have her own investment funds, and no longer be so dependent on foreign investors. It is not for the colonial master to kick Ghana. The boot will soon be on the other foot.

Murray has since indicated his readiness to cooperate with the government with investigations into the issue, to unravel the truth.

- President Mills directs Ministers of State to create jobs

President John Evans Atta Mills has directed Ministers of State to produce sector blueprints for job creation by June this year.

In addition; all sectors should mainstream job-creation into their programmes.

These are part of a grand scheme for job creation, promised in the manifesto of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) to invest in people, create jobs and run an open, honest and transparent government .

President Mills announced these directives in his second State of the Nation address to Parliament in Accra on Thursday.

He said inculcating in the youth the spirit of nationalism, self-belief and belonging, would be paramount in the Better Ghana agenda.

"We will give more meaning to arts and culture as a potent educational tool to drive the programme of nation building. The Education and Culture Ministries are being mandated to collaborate in this regard," President Mills said.

On the exploits and gallantry of the national team, Black Stars, and victory of the Black Satellites in their recent continental and global assignments, President Mills expressed confidence that the Black Stars would reach for the finals in the World Cup tournament in South Africa next June.

He recalled commitments made in the first State of the Nation Address to Parliament last year among which he promised to take a different political path to empower Ghanaians to believe in themselves.

This, President Mills said, was exemplified by the Black Stars who made Ghana proud by reaching the finals in the African Cup of Nations in Angola 2010.

He said "Ghana football is on the ascendancy and like our footballers, we, as Ghanaians, should also believe in Ghana and in ourselves".

President Mills commended the Government's economic management team for their efforts in bringing the economy back on track.

He said there were challenges in tackling the unsustainable budget deficit, unpaid bills, arrears and crippling judgment debts.

President Mills said: "We had to take bold and difficult measures to achieve fiscal consolidation and macro-economic stability.

"We meticulously assessed all the arrears and commitments in the pipeline and this enabled us to devise a credible "Arrears Clearance Strategy" and avert excessive pressures and current and future budgets".

He noted that this had earned commendation from the private sector in both national and international circles and sent a message of government's determination to come to terms

with the economic challenges.

2. Economy:

- Economic and Organised Crime Bill Awaits Parliamentary Approval

The Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, Mrs. Betty Mould-Iddrisu has announced that the Economic and Organised Crime bill is currently before Parliament awaiting approval to be passed into law. The bill, when passed, will lead to the establishment of the Economic and Organised Crime Centre to fight organized crimes and other business-related crimes in the country.

Mrs. Mould-Iddrisu made the revelation at a signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Ghana and United States (US) in Accra yesterday. She further announced that the government was setting up a Financial Intelligence Centre to fight money-laundering and other related crime activities soon.

Mrs. Mould-Iddrisu stressed that "All these show that the government is committed to fighting crimes in the country. We are always playing catch up with drug traffickers. We have not being a very successful agency in the prosecution of narcotic cases. We believe that with all these reforms we will prosecute better".

The Minister thanked the US government for its continuous collaboration with the Ghanaian government to curb drug trafficking and encouraged other donor countries to support her ministry in that direction.

Mrs. Mould-Iddrisu was happy to say that we are hoping that this programme will enable the police to be trained to assist combat the crime situation in the country. She disclosed that the ministry has set up 14 teams to deal with different crime areas including cyber-fraud and money-laundering, while 200 Attorneys were trained last year to help curb crimes in Ghana.

On his part, the US Ambassador to Ghana, H.E Donald Teitelbaum said the two countries were vigorously fighting against narcotics traffickers who are using Ghana as a transit corridor, and the agreement signed today is another indication of the continuing partnership between the two countries on projects of mutual interest.

According to him, the agreement will provide for the temporary assignment of a US Government Prosecutor to work with Ghanaian judicial officials to investigate organized crime cases associated with narcotics trafficking and money-laundering.

The training to be conducted under the agreement will enable Ghanaian officials to apprehend the leaders of drug trafficking organizations operating in Ghana and secure convictions that will send them to jail for a long time. The continued cooperation

between the US and Ghana to stem the flow of illegal drugs will result in a safer and a more secured Ghana.

- University Students Want Clear Cut Policy On Oil

THE UNIVERSITY Students Association of Ghana (USAG) is calling on the government and other institutions related to the country's oil find, to come out and explain to the people of Ghana, how much revenue, in percentage terms, will accrue to the state.

The group is also demanding from the government regulations it has put in place to prevent imperialism; its preparedness to manage the oil production for the benefit of the citizenry, as well as steps taken to strengthen state institutions like the Fire Service, Police Service and Armed Forces.

The call by the Association was contained in a press release signed by Mr. Enoch A. Afoakwa, President of the Association, dated Thursday, February 22, 2010, and under the headline "Ensure Transparency in Ghana's oil to complement Article 25 clause 1 Section C and E."

"The University Students Association of Ghana (USAG) wishes to appeal to the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Prof. J.E.A. Mills, the Minister of Energy, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC), and the Ghana Chamber of Mines, to, as a matter of urgency, come out to explain to the youth, especially university students and the good people of Ghana ,on the percentage stake of the nation in our oil production, regulations put in place to prevent imperialism, the preparedness of the nation to manage it for the benefit of the citizenry, and steps taken to strengthen state institutions like the Fire Service, the Police, the Armed Forces," the release stressed.

According to the Association, the hope of the nation, including the elite class, was in a state of suspense, following various thought-provoking opinions experts in the oil field, financial management and the academia, give on the state of affairs, and the possible outcome of the commercial production of oil.

"Among these experts is the first Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mr. John Lipky, who warned that unless Ghana's fiscal affairs were managed carefully, the oil revenue would not be able to make any real difference in growth, job creation, and living standards."

According to Mr. Afoakwa, the statement by the IMF boss, "contradicts the earlier heaven promised Ghanaians before, during, and after the 2008 general elections, by the various political parties in Ghana."

Meanwhile, the President of the Association has ruled out political undertones in its demand.

Speaking in interview with Shaft Fm's Kwabena Yeboah yesterday, he explained that it would be unfortunate for anyone to read politics into the issue, since Ghanaians need answers to the questions posed by the Association.

He was however silent on the Association's next line of action, should the government fail to bow to their demands.

- Ghana is a beacon of success - Virgin Group's Founder

Mr Richard Branson, Founder and Chief Executive of the Virgin Group, a British venture capital conglomerate, has noted that "Ghana is a beacon of success in the sub-region" and should capitalize on her successes to transform society.

He said the country's institutions had significantly improved with favourable business climate and competitive market, making her to be more attractive to investors.

Mr Branson made the remark in a pre-recorded presentation played to participants at the just ended Opportunities Conference 2010, organised by Forethought, an indigenous events management firm in Accra.

His presentation was on the topic: "Effective Strategisation in a Competitive Global Market, how to Succeed in times of Adverse Challenges".

The two-day conference themed "Shifting Paradigms, Shaping Possibilities" and sponsored by Zain Ghana, was to identify Ghana's business opportunities and empower participants on how to create wealth out of those opportunities for the development country.

It was addressed by personalities drawn from the corporate, academic and public sectors, who spoke on wealth creation through entrepreneurship and innovation.

Conference participants included people from academia, students, entrepreneurs and business leaders from all sectors of the economy.

Mr Branson said with a favourable business climate, Ghanaians should rise up to challenge and healthily compete with other business interests in order to enable them to enjoy gains of the country's success story.

He advised especially young entrepreneurs not feel daunted by competition but to persevere adding that the beginning of every endeavour was challenging but those who pushed through became victors.

Using himself as an example, he said, despite the global economic meltdown, he had been working to launch an airliner called Virgin Atlantic on the Accra - London route by spring this year.

Mr Kwame Pianim, an Economist and Business Consultant observed that "The economy of Ghana in 2010 is at a historically defining moment with the oil find of 2007."

Mr Pianim explained that the opportunities, which the oil sector would offer would be enormous and expressed the hope that they would help to propel the country into an era of accelerated and sustainable transformational development.

Ms Joyce Aryee, Chief Executive of the Ghana Chamber of Mines said many natural resources such as Mica, Marble, Clay and Salt which had huge revenue base were under-exploited.

She, therefore, called for a carefully re-evaluated programme to mine such resources for the benefit of the country.

Source: GNA - [Ghana News Agency](#)

3 Energy:

- Country's 2010 Oil 'Boom' - Ensuring Public Interest over Private Gain

Ghana is on the precipice of an oil 'boom'. The nation's anticipated oil production begins this year, 2010. And along with the production, the public's high expectations from oil wealth, in addition to the potential threats that come with this oil 'boom'.

Even as we remain optimistic, we should not underestimate the potential dangers of our new circumstances to our democracy, national unity and our nation's socio-political security. There sure are no greater exigencies now than laying strong foundations for transparency and accountability, both in the preparatory stage and the eventual management of our oil wealth.

Disputes related to natural resources have exacted a toll on far too many African societies, turning the dreams of national prosperity that come with the discovery of such natural resources into perpetual nightmares. Consequently, these disputes have resulted in violent conflicts, environmental destruction, corruption, untold human hardship, displacements and a devastated future for entire communities. This sad but true reality causes even the most exuberant optimist to wonder if the discovery of oil in one's country should be a cause of jubilation or trepidation. I am cautiously optimistic about Ghana, that the nation will take full advantage of the positive and negative lessons from others to ensure transparency and accountability as oil production begins.

This article is a contribution to Ghana's determination to ensure a peaceful, productive and prosperous oil era. It outlines specific critical statutory, institutional, social and community strategies for ensuring transparency and accountability in the management of Ghana's oil.

The reality of oil in Africa today

Aside from a few exceptions, wherever there is oil on the continent, there is misery and conflict. The causes of these conflicts, as seen across the region, range from a lack of mechanisms for accountability, inequities in the distribution of oil wealth, to injustices of endemic political and corporate abuses of human rights in affected communities. This is manifested through the violations of rights, total disregard for laws and flagrant disregard for the interests and wellbeing of communities.

A common trend as seen in oil-related conflicts from Angola and Nigeria to Sudan, among others, is the emergence of aggrieved and exploited groups of citizens, who resort to violence as the only means of demanding accountability, inclusion and justice. 'A riot is the language of the unheard', as Martin Luther King put it. The billions of oil wealth generated do not reflect in the conditions of the people and the communities from which the oil is drilled. The continent's leading oil producers - Algeria, Nigeria and Angola[i] - rank 104, 158 and 143 respectively on the 2009 United Nations Human Development Index. Other resource-endowed African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) also rank near the bottom of human development in the world.

The absence of strong mechanisms for accountability and oversight have allowed small cliques of greedy elites and their corporate allies to amass the oil wealth to the detriment of national development in too many of our countries. It is a trend too pervasive across the continent, but Ghana can and must do things differently.

Outlook of Ghana's extractive sector

Until its independence in 1957, Ghana was called the 'Gold Coast' for its rich endowment in gold. In addition, Ghana is blessed with bauxite, aluminium, manganese ore and diamonds. Today Ghana is the 2nd and 10th leading gold producing country in Africa and the world respectively[ii], bringing in export earnings of US\$1,277.2 million in 2006 and US\$1,733.78 million in 2007, according to the 2008 official budget statement. Heretofore, the several decades of management of Ghana's mining resources has been characterised by very little transparency and accountability, a characterisation that should not be repeated with the management of oil resources. There's never been any serious public discourse, oversight or curiosity about where the revenues from the millions of ounces of gold produced so far end up. Consequently, the interest of foreign multinationals and a few local elites have dominated and controlled the management and wealth from the sector.

The 2007 discovery of oil reserves and the anticipated production estimates of up to 150,000 barrels per day[iii] is likely to change Ghana's economic outlook. Oil will topple the mining sector as Ghana's foreign exchange earner.[iv]

The significance of the expected impact on both the country's economic outlook and on the communities and livelihoods of citizens demands a more responsible management than we have seen with mining in Ghana and in oil production in other African countries. The government of Ghana and the other stakeholders have indicated their laudable intentions for the effective and equitable management of the oil and the oil wealth, as

citizens continue to outline their expectations and aspirations towards this wealth. Transparency mechanisms and tools, citizenry awareness and political will are important ingredients needed for the fulfilment and realisation of the commitments and aspirations.

The choices we make and the mechanisms we put in place at this critical stage, will shape the economic and security conditions of our country in far more ways than we can imagine.

We have woefully failed some of the initial tests, particularly with the initial negotiations and allocation of shares and contracts. Many critical details on contracts, investments and government plans remain unavailable to the citizenry. Other critical decisions and commitments have been made behind closed doors with alleged suspicious 'sweat equity' deals for some politicians and their allies. The Financial Times on 7 January 2010 reported on an ongoing investigation by Ghanaian and US authorities into one of such deals[v] involving key associates of ex-president John Kufuor. The new government has also abrogated a number of contracts for not following due diligence.

The ultimate guarantee for transparency and accountability is the citizens of Ghana - citizenry oversight. We all have a role and a responsibility to help Ghana turn the page on the management of oil in Africa. Citizenry oversight with regulatory and institutional mechanisms for transparency and accountability are prerequisites for safeguarding Ghana's socio-economic and security interests in the oil era. I wish the intense interest in oil aroused among foreign interests and Ghanaian elites would inspire the same level of interest among the country's citizens.

Why Ghana can and must be different

A number of existing conditions present Ghana with the opportunity to ensure transparency and accountability. Not only do Ghanaians take great pride in being lauded for outstanding democratic and peaceful credentials, they are serious about it. Getting the oil thing right will no doubt boost this international recognition and national pride. Ghana also enjoys a high sense of national unity compared to its regional neighbours. Ghana's stable and peaceful political environment, democratic space for free press and civil society activism are all important conditions that can help Ghana in this endeavour.

Ghana is fortunate to have a president at this critical moment that is widely regarded as a leader of high integrity. Most Ghanaians including even his fiercest opponents express their confidence in President John Atta Mills's integrity. As encouraging as this is, it does not guarantee the same level of uprightness from the rest of his team who would be involved in the management of the oil. It also does not guarantee that he will have the political savvy to identify and expel his appointees who indulge in corruption. More importantly, as Barack Obama said in his historic speech in Accra, 'Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions',[vi] institutions that can prevent and, when it does happen, can detect and redress corruption. Above all, 'we the people' are Ghana's greatest asset.

Statutory and institutional mechanisms

Two important legislative provisions must be met before oil production begins. The proposed Freedom of Information Act should be passed and must guarantee unconditional public access to information, including on revenues, investments and contracts. Second, our law-makers must upgrade our statutory framework to 21st century standards. Ghana's situation today is significantly different from what it was when the two major statutes governing the exploration, development and production of petroleum resources in Ghana - the PNDC Law 64 and the Petroleum Exploration and Production Law, PNDC Law 84 - were enacted in 1983 and 1984 respectively. The government has indicated its readiness to strengthen the country's legal framework. 'It is imperative that Ghana's legal regime relating to the oil and gas industry is reviewed and adapted to Ghana's new condition as a major oil producer', states Ghana's attorney general.[vii] This commitment must translate into expeditious and deliberate action.

Accountability and disclosures

Our institutional frameworks must ensure accountability from both state and non-state actors in the oil sector. Multinational corporations play a major role and sometimes wield even greater power in the management of these resources and should be adequately checked and monitored. Additionally, there must be institutional mechanisms in place to allow regular disclosure and publication of all agreements and licences, payments, collections and contracts. Furthermore, I would go as far as to recommend an 'anti-kick-back' law that mandates all public officials to disclose any gifts or payments received from any of the stakeholders in the oil sector. 'Kick-backs' are increasingly becoming an acceptable norm in Ghanaian politics. It is a system where public officials knowingly and wilfully expect or accept bribes or indulge in other forms of quid pro quo for favours from certain commercial interests.

Checks and balances

Ensuring genuine accountability and transparency will require a clearly defined system of independent but accountable regulatory, governing and commercial bodies. These bodies should be independent enough to perform their functions without fear or favour but with checks and balances to prevent any functionary body becoming too powerful or isolated.

Institutional capacity development

Government must proactively invest in the capacity development of the relevant institutions and public officials who will be responsible for management, regulatory and revenue functions. We must pursue these efforts with the same level of aggressiveness we see with infrastructural development efforts.

Formal civil society role

Official oversight framework should have a formal role for civil society.

Citizenry participation

The media and civil society actors must foster public engagement and dialogue on all aspects of the process, particularly on environmental impacts, oil revenue management and the defence of the rights of journalists, activists and communities that may be targeted for daring to demand accountability from powerful interests.

Accountability for the wellbeing of host communities

There must be clear mechanisms for protecting the interests and wellbeing of communities - all interest groups and not only the local elite. For example, compensation for farming and fishing communities who may be affected by oil production must be appropriated in ways that cater for the various actors whose livelihoods depend on it and not just the interest of the chiefs and traditional leaders. Additionally, there must be full disclosures on all potential threats resulting from the oil production in these communities. There must be a clearly defined system through which citizens and communities affected by the oil process can channel their concerns and grievances.

Citizenry oversight

Vigilant citizens remain the best guarantee against corruption and for safeguarding the public interest. Citizens and the media must see and treat their monitoring role as a responsibility. Based on the pathetic track record of most of our political and public officials, personal and not public interest is going to be the foremost priority of most of those who would be representing us in the planning, negotiations and decision processes. If 'we the people' don't stand up for our collective interest, no one else will do it for us.

Alternative and shadow reports

Civil society actors, including think-tanks and citizens groups, should produce regular alternative and shadow reports on key aspects of the oil sector, including environmental and community impacts, oil-wealth management and adherence to human rights and international standards. These shadow reports will offer important perspectives that may be missing from official reports.

Capacity development

Capacity development is required for civil society actors and activists so that their oversight and activism will be constructive, effective and enlightened. Various citizenry constituencies must be sensitised and empowered for effective public oversight of our public and private activities.

Finally, President Atta Mills has the opportunity to leave a legacy of transparency and accountability. After all, the single most important quality that propelled his candidacy to power is his perceived high level of integrity. Such a legacy will not only guarantee him an enviable place among Ghana's presidents, but will be a vindication of the confidence

Ghanaians posed in him. Above all, it will be the right thing to do and Ghana will be better for it. We will need our president's leadership in this regard but all Ghanaians must share in the responsibility of making 'our oil' the most transparently managed on the continent.

- Lukoil discovers hydrocarbons offshore Ghana

A consortium, LUKOIL Overseas, (56.66%), US Vanco (28.34%) and Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, GNPC (15%), has discovered a significant hydrocarbon accumulation in the Dzata structure of the Cape Three Points Deep Water Block in the Gulf of Guinea offshore the Republic of Ghana, Lukoil said in a press release.

The discovery was announced at a meeting in Accra on Friday between Vagit Alekperov, President of OAO LUKOIL, and John Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana.

The total area of the block is about 5,200 square kilometers, while the water depth within the block ranges from 200 meters to 3,000 meters. The Dzata-1 structure lies at a depth of almost 2 kilometers.

The Dzata-1 well, drilled to a depth of some 4.5 kilometers from the sea level, tapped a 94-meter-thick hydrocarbon column containing a 25-meter multilayer oil and gas pay. The primary reservoir sandstone contains gas and light oil. The well was drilled by a semi-submersible drilling unit for deepwater drilling, equipped with a dynamic positioning system. At present, the drilling is completed; the well is plugged and temporarily abandoned. The newly discovered hydrocarbon reserves are assumed to be quite significant. A program of detailed field appraisal will help assess and commercialize the discovery.

The agreement for exploration and development of the Cape Three Points Deep Water Block was signed in 2002. In 2005, a 3D seismic survey covering 1,500 square kilometers and a geological engineering study were carried out in the block. LUKOIL joined the project in 2007. On April 1, 2009, the Government of Ghana, LUKOIL, Vanco and GNPC signed a new exploration and development agreement for the block, which was ratified by the Parliament of Ghana on June 30, 2009.

"The Dzata discovery confirms the high prospectivity of Ghana's deepwater shelf and creates an opportunity to efficiently develop the hydrocarbon resources with the application of state-of-the-art technologies" Alekperov said.

4 Environment:

- Environment company fumigates Accra Psychiatric Hospital

Trends Envitech Limited, an environment management company, is undertaking a GH¢ 10,000.00 fumigation project at the Accra Psychiatric Hospital to help solve its sanitation challenges.

The five-day exercise, which started on Tuesday, would include disinfecting the 23 wards and drainage system against crawling and flying insects and rodents.

Mr Delali Kofi Adayi, Administrative Director of Trends Envitech, said the project was part of the company's corporate social responsibility toward the development and well-being of the inmates.

"As a company we are aware of the numerous challenges the hospital faces in terms of sanitation."

Mr Adayi said the pest control component of the exercise was a preventive measure to help avert some of the common disease including malaria and skin disease which inmates suffered from as a result of bites from lice and bedbugs.

Mr Abraham Bortei, Deputy Health Service Administrator of the Hospital, said they faced challenges including acute shortage of water and lack of accommodation among others.

He said the hospital was congested because it was built for only 600 patients 106 years ago but is now housing 1,200 patients and water shortage particularly posed danger to the health of the inmates, he added.

Mr Bortei said since the establishment of the Hospital only 30 per cent of its sewage system had been changed to plastic pipes adding "This is causing the low pressure of water to the hospital."

He said once the system was modified the water problem would be a thing of the past and called on other organizations to come to the aid of the hospital.

GNA

Source: GNA - [Ghana News Agency](#)

5 Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6 Health:

- Ghana to Host second WHO meeting on Tobacco

Ghana has been selected to host the second working group meeting on World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in April this year.

The meeting is to, among other things, identify and develop opportunities for practical cooperation with competent intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations in the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing.

It is also to help achieve the FCTC's objective of protecting present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to smoking, as well as the reduction of demand for tobacco products.

At the inauguration of a nine-member Local Planning Committee to plan for the meeting scheduled for April 20 to 23, outgoing Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Oakley Quaye-Kuma, said the WHO convention on tobacco control was the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO, which is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirmed the right of all people to the highest standards of health.

The objectives of the working group meeting is among other things to interact with other global players and to deliberate and strategise on alternative livelihoods to tobacco growing in order to protect the environment and the health of persons in the production and manufacturing of tobacco products.

About 40 participants from 18 member countries will be attending the meeting.

The FCTC treaty adopted in 2003 by the World Health Assembly, is the world's first treaty devoted to health to get people to quit smoking and to reduce the estimated five million deaths annually caused by smoking.

He said tobacco smoking is unhealthy and causes chronic diseases that could lead to death, adding that smoke damages the lungs and is the principal cause of lung or bronchial cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

"What many people, smokers and non-smokers alike, may not know is that tobacco use increases risks of cancer of many sites in the body in addition to the lungs.

"These include the head and neck (covering cancers of the oesophagus, larynx, tongue, salivary glands, lip, mouth and pharynx) urinary bladder and kidneys, uterine cervix, breast, pancreas and colon," he said.

The Deputy Minister said people who cultivated and handled tobacco leaves were equally at risk of tobacco related diseases, such as green tobacco sickness, pesticide intoxication,

respiration and dermatological disorders and other types of cancers.

To this end, the FCTC called on all parties to the Convention to raise awareness about the addictive and harmful nature of tobacco products and about industry interference with tobacco control policies, as well as avoid conflict of interest from government officials and employees.

According to the Deputy Minister, Article 17 and 18 of the Framework Convention deals with provision of support for economically viable alternative activities and protection of the environment and the health of persons.

Parties to the Convention were, therefore, required to promote economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers, growers and, as the case may be, individual sellers, he said.

In order to make progress in the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing at the district, regional, national and international levels, Mr. Quaye-kuma said, there was the need to increase the participation of specialized local and international agencies which are recognized experts in this process.

The Chairman of the Local Planning Committee, Dr Akwasi Osei, Chief Psychiatrist at the Ministry of Health, said issues to be discussed at the meeting would be adopted by the General Assembly towards the end of the year as a guide for the world towards the control of tobacco production, marketing and consumption.

He said Ghana was in the good books of WHO, hence the choice for the second meeting and pledged the committee's readiness to ensure a memorable and very productive meeting.

Source: GNA - [Ghana News Agency](#)

7 Human rights/Gender/Social Issues:

- Fire Scare in Kumasi and Bolga

PANICK-STRCKEN workers of Kessben Fm and Kessben Group of Companies had to run helter-skelter for their lives, when the building housing the radio station caught fire on Monday morning.

Smoke engulfed the imposing Aseda House building, located at Adum, when one of the cables which connects electricity to the building caught fire, forcing workers of the radio station, and other businesses, to run for their lives.

But, for the agility and swiftness of one of the security guards, and the receptionist on duty, the famous building, owned by the former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kumasi Asante Kokoto Football Club, Mr. Kwabena Kesse, the worst scenario would have happened.

When The Chronicle rushed to the scene of the incident, few minutes after it occurred, workers in the building had gathered in groups discussing the incident, and how God Almighty had rescued them.

The Head of Programmes at Kessben FM, Mr. Otuo Acheampong, aka 'Sometymer', told the paper he was on air hosting the station's sports programme, when news of the fire outbreak reached him.

"One of our security guards informed me of the incident, and when I came out I saw smoke coming out from a part of the building," he narrated. It was Thomas, one of the receptionists, who quickly applied the company's fire extinguisher to douse the fire, before the arrival of personnel from the National Fire Service.

The outbreak at the Aseda House comes in the wake of increasing spates of incidents of fire disasters which have plagued the country in recent times, with the latest being the one which occurred at the premises of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in Accra.

But, for the innovative leadership of the Upper East Regional Health Director, Dr. John Koku Awoonor-Williams, which led to adequate installation of fire extinguishers at the Regional Health Directorate, the recently renovated two-storey building housing the unit, would have also been razed down by fire last Monday.

The fire, which occurred at about 10:30 a.m. on Monday, would have been a repeat of recent fire outbreaks in the nation's capital, Accra, that led to destruction of property worth millions of Ghana cedis, and the loss of vital documents.

The fire forced workers of the Directorate out of their offices, including the Regional Health Director, Dr. Awoonor-Williams, who later narrated how the fire occurred to this paper.

He said it was observed that the cable taking power from the main transformer at source got burnt.

No casualties were recorded because the fire was immediately put out by staff at the Directorate, with the aid of adequate fire extinguishers, even before the personnel of the Ghana National Fire Service arrived.

According to the Regional Director, after the renovation of the Directorate, the personnel of the fire service were called in to train the staff on fire detection, prevention, and control, after which each floor was furnished with fire extinguishers.

He charged other heads of government ministries, departments and agencies to be responsible enough in taking good care of government properties as if they were their personal belongings, to prolong their lifespans.

When this reporter visited the Directorate, some workers were seen taking fresh air outside, since the weather was not conducive for them to sit in their offices.

8 Geo-Strategic issues:

- Vice President Mahama leads delegaton to South Korea

Vice-President John Dramani Mahama is leading a government delegation to the Republic of South Korea from 27th February to 4th March 2010.

A statement signed by John Abdulai Jinapor, Media Coordinator for the office of the Vice-President, said the Vice-President would be accompanied by the Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Hon. Alban Bagbin and the Deputy Minister of Finance, Hon. Seth Tekper.

The visit, which is at the invitation of the South Korean government, would afford the Vice-President the opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations between Ghana and the Republic of South Korea.

While in Korea Vice-President Mahama is expected to explore Korean investment opportunities into Ghana within the housing, water, agriculture and energy sectors.

It is expected that, through a joint cooperation between the two countries, the visit would also facilitate the commencement of the construction of a 200,000 housing unit project in Ghana. The delegation is expected back home on the 5th March, 2010.

Nigeria:

1 Political News:

- Britain backs Nigeria's interim president

Britain on Friday threw its weight behind Nigeria's acting president after the surprise return from a hospital abroad by ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua sparked fears of a fresh leadership crisis.

Yar'Adua discreetly arrived in Nigeria on Wednesday, throwing the country into confusion and reviving concerns of a leadership squabble just two weeks after his vice-president Goodluck Jonathan was installed acting president after a leadership vacuum of nearly three months.

The former colonial ruler joined a chorus of concerns that Yar'Adua's return would not plunge Africa's most populous country, the world's eighth biggest oil exporter, into uncertainty regarding who was in charge.

"It is important to avoid uncertainty at this time," British Ambassador Bob Dewar said in a statement.

The United States and local political activists have voiced fears that the return of the frail Yar'Adua could be a ploy by his loyalists to sideline Jonathan and stir instability in the West African giant.

There was a flurry of statements from government on Thursday to reaffirm Jonathan as being in control, after Yar'Adua returned from Saudi Arabia, where he had been receiving treatment for a serious heart condition.

Jonathan was referred to as vice president in the first statement from Yar'Adua's office, which confirmed the ailing president's return, but said that his deputy would remain in charge while Yar'Adua continues to recuperate.

Dewar said Britain welcomed the official clarification on leadership.

Opposition activists have also expressed concern that Jonathan appeared to have been sidelined in the preparations to fly Yar'Adua back.

Dewar said the British government continued to encourage Nigeria to act consistently with "the constitution and the principles of democracy, good governance and the peaceful rule of law".

"It is also important at this time to avoid any political or constitutional confusion that could put at risk the integrity and transparency needed in the conduct of public affairs," he said.

Yar'Adua had been in Saudi Arabia since November 23.

It was not clear Friday whether the two leaders had met following Yar'Adua's return to Nigeria.

Jonathan himself moved to reassure the 150 million Nigerians on Wednesday saying "the ship of state is on course" while Yar'Adua continues to recover.

Britain urged Jonathan to quickly push ahead with the many "pressing priority issues" affecting Nigerians such as combating corruption and poverty, enhancing governance and democratic accountability, and bringing peace and stability to the oil-producing Niger Delta.

"The British government will support the acting president and government in taking these and other issues forward in a spirit of constructive partnership," said Dewar.

- I understand timing of Mend's threat –Agary

What are some of the hitches in implementing the post-amnesty programme?

I won't call them hitches. At the end of the amnesty proclamation on October 4, 2009, you know that some of the big militant leaders actually were disarmed in the last minute. It took a while to document them. And the process of demobilizing and documentation took a long time. We have to capture these people; people have to get their biographical data because at the end of the day, their names will be gazetted to give effect to their renunciation of militancy. So the process of documenting them took a while. And when Mr. President directed that they had to be part of the planning for the reintegration, it also took some time for us to get the representatives of the ex-militants to sit in the meetings of the committee. And when they became part of the committee, after the inauguration, they also needed time to look at what had been done. And in doing that they needed to go back to consult with their principals, those that they are representing, the ex-militants. All these have been part of the process that we have engaged in to come up with a good work plan that would soon be rolled out.

But most people believe that the amnesty programme has been seriously threatened by the sickness of the President.

No, I think before Mr. President left (for medical treatment), he had laid the groundwork for us to proceed beyond the disarmament and the demobilisation phase. And what has happened or what has gone on has been the fact that we have been in the planning process. And since the representatives of the ex-militants were made members of the committee, of course we have had to listen to them, and accommodate their views. We have given them opportunities to go back to consult, to review the work plan that had been developed before they joined the committee. And I think we have harmonised our positions and I think we are going to roll.

There were disagreements among the ex-militants over who should represent them in these meetings. How was it resolved?

I was not involved. You know, we also have the Senior Special Adviser on the Niger Delta, Mr. Timi Alaibe, and he has played a lot of roles in getting them to reach a consensus and they have sent their representatives. Their representatives, at least T.K. Ogoriba and Kingsley Kuku are activists that I know, that can represent them well. And they have been representing them well with two others. There are four representatives and I think they are doing very well in pushing their issues, and they have done very well in their contributions to the reintegration programme, in terms of identifying gaps that we have been able to agree on. I don't know how they were picked but I think they have picked good people to represent them.

In spite of the amnesty, we still have threats issued by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta?

Well, coming from the Niger Delta, I understood the timing of the MEND's threat, and I think anybody who is politically sound in Nigeria should be able to understand the

MEND's threat. Because even as I sat there, I was getting calls as to what was happening to our brother (the Vice President) because I think what was so manifestly clear and easy to do was not being done. And so naturally, like I said somewhere, we all have our issues in this country, and that is why we are also working very hard that there is peace in Nigeria. And we can achieve that through peaceful dialogue. Yes, the boys are there. But the majority of these boys will not go back to the creeks. You know, they have come out. There is security, their fears have been unfounded. To a large extent, government has kept its side of the bargain. If you don't go back and commit crime, you are a free person. So I don't think that violent militancy is going to be pursued. What I see coming is intellectual engagement because a lot of the issues that created the militancy have not been addressed. And those issues will be addressed on the table through dialogue, through negotiations. Issues like fiscal federalism and true federalism, environmental degradation, ownership and participation are being addressed now through the sub-committees.

Since he took over as the Acting President what has Dr. Goodluck Jonathan done on the effective implementation of the post-amnesty programme?

Don't forget we have been paying these ex-militants even though we have not really started effective reorientation and reintegration and the training programmes. Somebody has been approving the funds; somebody has been giving some direction and leadership beyond the chairman of the committee. It was the Vice President now Acting President that inaugurated the five sub-committees. So, it is not like things have stopped. As a matter of fact, the creation of the five committees has enabled critical planning for the implementation of the other aspects, to deal with the others issues away from the human issues - the environmental issues, the infrastructural issues, the oil and gas, the security, the community participation issues. Those committees are now working and they are all at the planning stage and after planning you implement. So really, nothing has stopped and I don't think that when people are planning, you need to keep talking. I think it is the end product that the public should be interested in. But may be, there is need for us to probably brief (them) regularly. So, Mr. President, like I said, laid a very good framework for us to build on.

How would you react to the threat by some members of the House of Representatives to impeach the Acting President over the issue of changing ministers?

I don't want to believe that they said that because there are a lot of people I respect in the House. I don't believe they would have said that. But most importantly, I think if they said that it would be very unfortunate because at this time everybody is working very hard to put this country together. And for me, who has been involved in the amnesty programme, I know the great effort that the Niger Delta people have made to get to this level of peace in the region and this is still a fragile peace. And these statements are not helpful in this circumstance. I don't think rascality is the exclusive preserve of any geographical region of this country. And while some of us - and the 'us' includes northerners - have been working very hard to make peace, to keep this country together, it is absolutely distasteful for elected members to be making these threats. I think, it is,

quite frankly, unacceptable. And sometimes you just wonder whether people wish this country well.

- What can Nigeria expect now?

The return of Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua three months after he left for a Saudi hospital might normally have been seen as a sign that a long spell of debilitating uncertainty was over.

But this was no ordinary return for a long absent president with an army band and a red carpet.

Yar'Adua was moved under cover of darkness from a plane to an ambulance and then driven to the Aso Rock presidential villa in Abuja. No pictures. No comment.

In fact, nobody outside his immediate circle has had a chance to see him and that apparently includes Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, who two weeks ago assumed executive powers with the support of parliament to end a power vacuum.

A statement from Yar'Adua's spokesman thanked Jonathan for his help and said he would continue running affairs of state while the president convalesces. Before seeing the president, he was due to meet his wife, Turai.

Yar'Adua's return was welcomed by many in the country of more than 140 million although there were widespread doubts about whether he would return to office and questions over what would be the role of his aides and powerful wife.

What will the new arrangement mean for chances of addressing problems such as unrest in the Niger Delta, power shortages, ensuring fair elections and corruption? What will it mean for the political intrigues ahead of an election due within just over a year?

- Testimony by Nuhu Ribadu - Examining the U.S.-Nigeria Relationship in a Time of Transition

The following is the testimony of *Nuhu Ribadu* at a recorded hearing on U.S.-Nigeria relations before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC. Ribadu was head of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) from 2003 to 2007. He is currently a visiting fellow at the Center for Global Development and a senior fellow at St. Anthony's College at Oxford University.

Good morning and thank you for this kind invitation Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson and distinguished members of the subcommittee. It is a cherished opportunity to speak to you today. Your subcommittee has shown sustained interest in Nigeria, an interest, that I must say, has not been misplaced or gone unnoticed.

From a personal perspective, I would like to thank you, Senator Feingold, for the bold comments you made regarding my safety and security, after my removal from the Chairmanship of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). I recall, with gratitude, that you sent letters to President Yar'Adua in January 2008 and then again with Senators Levin and Isakson in December of 2008. I remain eternally grateful for these timely acts of support and advocacy.

Nigeria in recent history:

Nigeria, like most nations, has had its share of internal issues. We can all agree that this is not unusual for a country in our state of development. However, few will deny that we made relative, if even major, progress in the past decade. Much of this progress was made possible through a strong relationship with the United States. Sadly, in the short period since May 2007 when President Yar 'Adua came to office, much of these gains were lost through ill-advised policy reversals and entrenchment of corrupt persons in strategic positions.

This abuse of office and arrogance of power are emblematic of President Yar' Adua's governing style during his tenure in office. Nigeria's precipitous retreat from the reform gains made during former administration is due to the lack of preparation, vision and the unbridled self-interest of many of the people Yar'Adua surrounded himself with. The story is now widely known that last November, President Yar Adua left the country for medical treatment, and, typical of his administrations, left no one in charge of the affairs of the state. Naturally, the situation got worse. But fortunately for our country the Nigerian Senate acted prudently this month, recognizing Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as acting president.

Upon taking office, Acting President Jonathan signaled his desire for meaningful reform by immediately removing the controversial Attorney General and Minister of Justice Michael Andoakaa, affirming his commitment to electoral reform, re-engaging the Niger Delta militants and taking steps to improve power generation and distribution.

While this development presented us with the opportunity for change, it came loaded with the challenge for the democratic, legal and peaceful resolution of our situation.

True, the major challenge is ours. Yet the international community, and the U.S. in particular, must play a crucial role in ensuring that Nigeria seizes the opportunity of this moment to get back on track.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask for America's assistance in restoring law and order to Nigeria and want to focus my remarks on three crucial recommendations:

1. Insisting on constitutional and legal continuity;
2. Restarting the fight against corruption; and

3. Ensuring free and fair elections in 2011.

Constitutional and legal continuity

I applaud Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and others, including Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Isakson and other members of this subcommittee, for your strong comments on the need for constitutional continuity and rule of law in Nigeria. But the time for talk is over; action is needed and action can only start with your direct engagement and communication with our new leadership.

Nigeria proved its willingness to follow its laws and uphold its constitution through the peaceful management of the crisis. We now have a sitting vice president as acting president, and with the support of the United States and others this trend could continue.

To further this goal, the United States should: support Nigeria's civil society, monitor internal developments closely, state unambiguously that any resort to unconstitutional action against the Nigerian people will be resisted, and back pro-democracy movements inside the country.

The breakdown of law and order is largely responsible for the incessant conflicts in all parts of the country, and this point must be strongly registered.

Fighting corruption

There is no need to reiterate the problem of corruption in Nigeria. It is a well known fact that without addressing the corruption problem all other problems--from executive lawlessness, to stealing of votes, and the pillage of state recourses for personal use--will remain untouched. The United States has already done so much to help fight this problem. The challenge of the moment is to demonstrate through action that enough is enough.

As the head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the anti-corruption agency in Nigeria, my team and I fought against this cancer alongside U.S. officials. Unfortunately, in 2007, I was forced out by the re-entry of blatant acts of corruption. To help Nigeria get back on track, here is how the United States can help:

First, the Department of Justice, the FBI and SEC need to continue the prosecution of cases we tirelessly worked on together. We have thousands of pages of detailed evidence and intelligence on corrupt officials which are sitting, waiting to be used. I am overjoyed to hear that in the United Kingdom, the Metropolitan Police is continuing with its case against former Governor James Ibori. It will give most Nigerians cause to cheer that the U.S. also does the same and continue their cases.

Second, expand on the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. The FCPA allowed for the prosecution of a number of corrupt businesses and sent a wave of panic among those who were previously able to get away with their corruption. This line of action can be

furthered if you include foreign nationals among those who can be prosecuted on U.S. soil. It is important to include those who accept the bribes and use your financial institutions to hide or launder these funds. Corrupt Nigerians fear the reach of U.S. law into their illicit activities. Start acting upon that fear.

Third, it is time to deploy the powers already available in your instruments. You can encourage the administration to use existing powers under Proclamation 7750 by issuing travel bans against those known to be corrupt. The United States can also cooperate in the creation of Interpol red notices; confiscate stolen assets found on U.S. soil; and insist on the extradition of corrupt foreign nationals. You must continue to name and shame those who do not fear justice at home.

Acting President Jonathan's emergence provides the United States with a second chance to purposefully reinvigorate the fight against corruption in places like Nigeria. These three broad acts are vital steps towards positively turning the situation in Nigeria around and can also be applied to the rest of Africa.

Electoral reform

Perhaps the most important and pressing issue effecting Nigeria today is electoral reform. In the recent election in the Anambra state, the people showed they are ready to make their voices heard. This was only possible because President Yar'Adua and his cronies were distracted and unable to meddle in the democratic process.

To ensure free and fair elections in 2011 however, the task needs to start now. The Justice Uwais Commission's recommendations are a modest but good start that needs to be followed through in its entirety. The National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute and others can start assisting now to support voter registration exercises.

This can be followed up by encouraging the government to clean up the electoral commission by appointing credible personnel with proven integrity and credibility, while the civil society needs to be engaged and supported. They will be the true force behind a change for these elections.

- State's Carson Urges Nigerian Election Reform, Credible 2011 Vote

The top U.S. diplomat to Africa says he has stressed to Nigerian leaders the importance of a credible 2011 election and urged the country to make electoral reform one of its highest priorities to allow a peaceful transition in line with democratic principles.

In his February 23 prepared testimony to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said he met with acting President Goodluck Jonathan during his visit to the country earlier in February.

Carson said Jonathan's designation as acting president by the Nigerian National Assembly in light of President Umaru Yar'Adua's continuing medical absence has demonstrated Nigeria's resolve "to find a path forward consistent with its constitution and in line with democratic principles" despite the political vacuum.

"We commend the commitment of all elements of Nigerian society to constitutional process and the rule of law," Carson said. "We will continue to support the Nigerian people as they work through their democratic institutions to resolve the challenges facing their great nation."

The assistant secretary said that while in Nigeria, he met with a broad spectrum of political, religious and civil society leaders, and discussed improvements on governance, efforts against corruption, violent extremism, as well as Nigeria's national elections, which are scheduled for April 2011.

The 2011 vote "must be credible," Carson said. Nigeria "cannot afford a repeat" of its 2007 elections, which he said were "marred by poor organization, widespread fraud and numerous incidents of voter intimidation and violence resulting in the deaths of more than 300 people."

Elections held February 6 in Nigeria's Anambra state, while deemed credible, suffered from "poor logistics and administration," with only a 16 percent voter turnout, Carson said.

"This is one area where the Independent National Electoral Commission, which is in need of improved leadership, must do better," he said.

The United States has been supporting electoral reform in the country by printing out Electoral Reform Commission recommendations for distribution by Nigerian organizations, as well as by organizing symposiums, seminars and other activities on the issue.

"We are prepared to provide technical assistance to Nigeria's election commission provided they demonstrate a willingness to fulfill their primary role of strengthening election administration," Carson said.

Along with encouraging electoral reform, Carson warned that "endemic corruption" has been a major factor in preventing U.S. private-sector investment, and that poor governance has played an even greater role in the disconnect between the country's wealth in natural resources, as Africa's largest oil producer, and the poverty of its people.

"There can be little progress in reducing child mortality, fighting poverty, creating jobs and improving the business climate without improved governance," he said.

Carson said Nigerians have expressed dissatisfaction at being included on the U.S. Transportation Security Administration's "Countries of Interest" list in the wake of

violence within its borders and the attempt by a Nigerian national to detonate a bomb on board a U.S.-bound jet on December 25, 2009.

"Nigerians perceive this as collective punishment for the actions of a wayward son, when in fact they shared our outrage at the attack and have been providing assistance to the ongoing investigation," he said.

"Let me be clear, our friendship and relationship with Nigeria is strong and continues to be based on a wide range of important bilateral issues," Carson said.

Condemning the "chronic politically motivated, inter-religious violence" in the Nigerian state of Plateau, Carson urged all sides to "address the hostility between religious and ethnic groups and bring perpetrators of such acts to justice."

The tensions in northern Nigeria "have religious overtones and are perceived by outsiders as fighting between Christians and Muslims," he said. But "the real conflict is one of politics," and he urged Nigerian political leaders to recognize this and work with national religious leaders to promote a dialogue to peacefully resolve the issues.

- Yar'Adua Okays Acting President Jonathan

Abuja — Conflicting signals emerged yesterday, indicating that the presidency appears to be in a quandary in the aftermath of yesterday's dramatic re-appearance of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua after three months of treatment in Saudi Arabia.

The president who suddenly left last November 23, returned unannounced in an air ambulance in the wee-hours, accompanied by another plane bearing his large entourage, including the ministers that were delegated to see him in Saudi Arabia.

The first sign of confusion was the shelving yesterday of the scheduled meeting of the president's cabinet, which Acting President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan has been chairing in the president's absence.

Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Alhaji Yayale Ahmed, who announced the postponement at about 12.15 pm while addressing ministers and other participants at the Council Chambers said:

"I am directed by the Acting President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, to inform you that the Council meeting has been postponed. Accordingly, we are to go back to our offices."

Ahmed announced that a special meeting with the Acting President with all ministers in attendance was being convened at 2 pm at the Conference Hall, and that attendance was mandatory.

Our correspondent observed that by 9.30 a.m, almost all the ministers, including those delegated to visit President Umaru Yar'Adua in Saudi Arabia, were seated for the (weekly) meeting, awaiting the arrival of either the President or the Acting President.

Yar'Adua's prolonged stay in Saudi Arabia led to the National Assembly's resolution empowering Jonathan as Acting President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

A presidency source said cabinet meeting was shelved to watch the next move of Yar'Adua who is said to be convalescing at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

As the high drama in the presidency played out, President Yar'Adua announced through his special assistant on media, Mr. Adeniyi, that his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan would continue to attend to affairs of state till he was fully recuperated to resume office.

Meanwhile, the ministers converged later at 2pm in the vice president's conference room where Jonathan informed them that the President has returned to the country.

Giving details of what transpired at the meeting with Jonathan, Information and Communication minister, Prof. Dora Akunyili, told journalists at the State House that Jonathan informed them that the president was back and that he (Jonathan) would be meeting with the first lady, later, to be briefed on the state of health of the president.

She also quoted Jonathan as saying that he has been briefed by some aides to the president, indicating that he has not been able to see his boss.

"He invited us for a meeting in his meeting room at 2pm and when we came he told us that the president has returned and that he has been briefed by the aides of Mr. President and that he hopes to see the wife of the president this evening and that when we meet next week, we will be briefed on the outcome of the Saudi trip by the members of council. And that when he is eventually briefed by our president he will call us again," he said.

Answering reporters' question's, however, Akunyili said she heard news of the president's return on Cable News Network (CNN), confirming insinuations that most of the ministers were kept in the dark about his return.

In his statement, Adeniyi said the president is grateful to Nigerians for their prayers and concern for his health announcing however that his health has "greatly improved."

He quoted the president as being thankful to Jonathan for effectively piloting affairs of the country in his absence while asking him to continue until he is fully recuperated.

The statement read in part: "President Yar'Adua wishes to express his profound gratitude to all Nigerians for their prayers for his recovery, their exceptional generosity of spirit and their appreciation of the fact that all mortals are subject to the vagaries of ill-health.

"President Yar'Adua is grateful to the Vice president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, for competently overseeing the affairs of state in his absence.

"The President also wishes to thank the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the entire membership of the National Assembly, the Governors' Forum, the Judiciary, the Armed Forces and other security agencies, former heads of state and other eminent Nigerians for their roles in maintaining order and stability during his absence."

- **Yar'Adua May Resume Office Without Legal Formality, Says Molajo**

NOT a few Nigerians have reacted to the sudden return of President Umaru Yar'Adua to the country he left 91 days ago without informing the National Assembly as constitutionally required. In his reaction , Mr. Tani Molajo, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, said: "I hope and pray that his recovery will be full and permanent. As he recovers bodily, I hope he will also recover as soon as practicable, the reins of power as President.

"Concerning Jonathan, if the President has transmitted to the National Assembly as provided in Section 145 of the Constitution, so on his return, he is expected to transmit another written declaration to NASS to enable him resume office.

"But, it is common knowledge that he did not transmit any letter before he left. And, it is by some rather strenuous thinking that NASS has taken it upon itself to interpret the BBC as the declaration provided for by Section 145.

"The problem there is that the declaration must be in writing. So, the lingering and troubling question of NASS resolution purporting to empower the V-P to assume the office of President is in acting capacity. So, that first problem created by that resolution has created a fresh problem. How does the President resume power. He cannot write to them to resume power since he did not do so when he was leaving. So, he cannot use S.145 to resume power.

"So, the question that arises is whether NASS will pass another resolution to revoke the earlier one by which they attempted to empower Jonathan to act as President.

"To my mind, that will be an anomaly because you cannot revoke that which is incompetent. In the eyes of the law, an incompetent act never come into being. So, if I am right, the Acting President was never legally empowered.

"President Umaru Yar'Adua may, therefore, resume office without any legal formality whatsoever," he added.

Ijaw warn against attempt on Jonathan's life

The Ijaw Monitoring Group, IMG, said, yesterday, that the arrival of President Umaru Yar'Adua has not affected the acting president capacity of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.

In a statement signed by Comrade Joseph Evah on behalf of IMG, the Ijaw insisted that Jonathan remains the Acting President until President Yar'Adua appears before the Nigerian people and physically address the National Assembly and inform it that he is back and medically, physically, psychologically and mentally capable to govern Nigeria.

FG insists that it was not the mandate of the returnee President to say that Jonathan was still acting, adding that "Jonathan was inaugurated by the National Assembly. We urge the Niger Delta to be at alert as any attempt to threaten the Acting President's life must be resisted at all cost."

AC tasks FG

In its reaction, the Action Congress urged the Presidency to make public disclosure of Yar'Adua's health status.

AC's National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, said: "Our reactions like any other person to Yar'Adua's return is very clear, but what is not clear is his condition of health. Our party hopes that he recovers fully. We also call on the Presidency to make a full disclosure about the state of health of the president."

It's embarrassing, say Opara, Okei-Odumakin

A former Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives in the President Olusegun Obasanjo era, Chief Austin Opara and a top human rights activist, Dr. Joe Okei-Odumakin, also reacted.

According to Opara: "The way and manner the President was brought into the country is condemnable, despicable and it is a shame that the president of our own nation is smuggled into the country. It is condemnable and unacceptable.

The President did not ask for the sickness that has befallen him and Nigerians have been praying for his quick recovery. For the fact that he's ill, he should not be ashamed of it, he didn't ask it for it. So, for smuggling him into the country is not the right thing, it is an unjust manner and I condemn it. And, Nigerians should, because we need to be briefed about the status of our president.

To Okei-Odumakin, "It is so embarrassing that the President of a country like ours, will come back and his return was shrouded in secrecy, journalists were chased away from the airport before he was taken away in an ambulance.

"Well, this is not a secret society. We are running a government that has a constitution, if it were a secret society, we would have said it is acceptable. It does not have any implication, Jonathan is still there.

"What we need do is to ascertain because we have not seen Yar'Adua yet. It is for FEC to declare him incapacitated because nobody knows where he is now, we have not seen him speak on any television and, so, it is another diversionary tactics.

"It's going to give room for the few people that hijacked power to continue to do that and we are not going to progress as a nation.

"Jonathan should continue to act and he needs to be empowered, but FEC needs to declare the president incapacitated.

- Jonathan Remains Acting President, Says Yar'Adua's Aide

AS anxiety and confusion persisted Wednesday in Aso Rock over who presides over Nigeria's presidency, the Presidency said Acting President Goodluck Jonathan will continue to function in the capacity until President Umaru Yar'Adua fully recovers.

In a statement issued by the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Mr Olusegun Adeniyi, the Presidency said "after being discharged by the team of medical experts overseeing his treatment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua returned to the Presidential Villa, Abuja early this morning (Wednesday)".

"However, while the President completes his recuperation, Vice President Jonathan will continue to oversee the affairs of state", the statement noted.

While assuring that the health of President Yar'Adua has greatly improved on account of unceasing prayers of Nigerians and by the special grace of God, the statement said "President Yar'Adua is grateful to the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, for competently overseeing the affairs of state in his absence".

The Statement

"After being discharged by the team of medical experts overseeing his treatment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua returned to the Presidential Villa, Abuja early this morning (Wednesday).

President Yar'Adua wishes to express his profound gratitude to all Nigerians for their prayers for his recovery, their exceptional generosity of spirit and their appreciation of the fact that all mortals are subject to the vagaries of ill-health.

President Yar'Adua is grateful to the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, for competently overseeing the affairs of state in his absence.

The President also wishes to thank the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the entire membership of the National Assembly, the Governors' Forum, and the Judiciary, the Armed Forces and other security agencies, former heads of

state and other eminent Nigerians for their roles in maintaining order and stability during his absence.

President Yar'Adua wishes to re-assure all Nigerians that on account of their unceasing prayers and by the special grace of God, his health has greatly improved.

However, while the President completes his recuperation, Vice President Jonathan will continue to oversee the affairs of state."

- Yar'Adua Can't Be Seen

AMIDST palpable confusion that enveloped Aso Rock, following the arrival of recuperating President Umaru Yar'Adua, the outcome of a meeting convened by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan in the place of the weekly Federal Executive Council, FEC, meeting, which he earlier postponed, revealed that since the arrival of Yar'Adua, Jonathan was yet to set his eyes on him.

However aides of the President have briefed the Acting President on the secretive arrival of the first family in Nigeria, which saw the deployment of heavily armed men and women of the elite guard, the Presidential Guards Brigade, a development reminiscence of a war situation.

Investigation by Vanguard revealed that despite the hurry return of President Yar'Adua to Nigeria, apparently to avert a looming impeachment; the President will continue to be incommunicado for a long time, as he was still undergoing serious but intensive medication.

It was learnt that apart from the his doctors, wife, Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua, the Chief Security Officer, Mr Yusuf Tilde, the Aid-de-Camp, ADC, Colonel Mustapha Onoyiveta and perhaps children, no nobody, no matter how highly placed, may be able to see the ailing President.

Following the inability of Jonathan to see his ailing boss, despite the short distance of few meters in the Presidential Villa, a meeting was scheduled for yesterday evening between Jonathan and the First Lady, Turai, obviously to discuss grey areas of who heads the Nigeria government with full executive powers.

Secretary to the Government of the Federation, SGF, Alhaji Yayale Ahmed, who headed a six-man team to Saudi Arabia, which returned yesterday, had officially announced to cabinet members that the Jonathan directed the immediate postponement of the FEC meeting, after ministers had waited in vain for over two hours.

"Honourable Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen, the Acting President has directed that this (FEC) meeting be postponed till further notice. He has asked that you go back to your

respective offices. However, there will be a meeting by 2:00 pm in his conference room. It is mandatory for ministers to attend", he said.

Minister of Information and Communication, Professor Dora Akunyili, who briefed State House Correspondents at the end of a brief meeting between Jonathan and all cabinet members, disclosed that apart from the Acting President none of them, ministers has been able to set their eyes on Yar'Adua, development she believed could be frustrating; even as she calls for more prayers for the country and the president.

"He invited us for a meeting in his meeting room at 2:00 pm and when we came he told us that the president has returned, he has been briefed by the aides of Mr President and that he hopes to see the wife of the president this evening and that when we meet next week, we will be briefed on the outcome of the report of the Saudi Arabia trip by the members of council. And when he is eventually briefed by our President, he will call us again".

It was further learnt that the Acting President, in the mood of the nation, may have shelved many official engagement within and outside the Aso Rock, until and when the current but deepening political quagmire normalises.

A Minister who agreed to speak on the condition of anonymity said the move by the Acting President to meet with Ministers and assure them that there is an end to the ongoing political intrigues in the presidency was a smart and a matured one by him, perhaps to douse rising tension among actors, in the emerging scenario.

2 Economy:

3. Energy:

- Ukrainian company to revive Ajaokuta Steel

The Ambassador of Ukraine to Nigeria, Mr. Valery Vasyliiev, on Tuesday said a Ukrainian firm had been engaged to audit the Ajaokuta Steel Company in Kogi to ascertain the amount needed to revive it.

The ambassador said this during a courtesy visit to the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Chief Achike Udenwa, in Abuja to brief the minister on the proposed visit of the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs to the in March.

He said the audit, which was expected to be concluded in one month, would ensure that the company, which was built in the 1970s by Ukraine would be back on stream.

"About 80 people who are specialists in different areas from Ukraine are now working in the Ajaokuta steel complex carrying out an audit to estimate what will be done and how much money is necessary to start production," Vasyliiev said.

He said the company, known as Reprom, would bring to bear the experience of Ukraine in steel production, which Nigeria needed for development, especially in her rail system.

Vasyliiev added that another Ukrainian company, Jaden Holding, had also been engaged to help in the reconstruction of the Jos Steel Rolling Mill.

He said the Ukrainian government was interested in exploring new frontiers in trade and economic cooperation in different spheres of the Nigerian economy.

He said, "Ukrainian businessmen are interested in co-operation in different spheres of the Nigerian economy such as oil and gas, electricity, agric and food processing and free trade zones.

"This good experience should be used in Nigeria and Ukrainian companies are interested in participating in the various projects of electricity, transport infrastructure and production of building materials."

On the foreign minister's visit, he said, the visit would be an opportunity to sign two agreements on trade and economic cooperation as well as reciprocal promotion of investment.

"The signing of the documents will facilitate our cooperation in all spheres," he said.

Responding, Udenwa noted that Ukraine, was a highly industrialised country in eastern Europe, especially in the steel production and nuclear stations, which were needed for Nigeria's power sector.

He said "I am aware that we have been trying to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement and investment promotion with your country. I hope when the foreign minister comes it will be signed.

"One of the modern day features of diplomacy is economic diplomacy."

The minister stressed that both countries had a lot of potential ahead of them and urged business people from Ukraine to ignore bad foreign reports on Nigeria, saying that "most investors have found Nigeria to be an investment haven."

- Gov't unfolds post-PIB oil regime

THE Federal Government yesterday disclosed part of the sweeping reforms it plans in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to make it a viable business concern. According to the Acting President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, the new Nigerian National Oil Company Limited will be fashioned along the lines of other successful national oil companies and "will not get grants from the government."

The declaration came as indications emerged that the fortunes of the country's oil and gas industry may be dwindling, as oil production from the nation's hydrocarbon resources has continued to slide since 2005, and may decline further in the nearest future.

Jonathan, who stated this yesterday while declaring open the 10th edition of Nigeria Oil and Gas Conference in Abuja, said the government has the capacity to implement the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) when passed by the National Assembly.

At the forum, the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Dr. Rilwan Lukman, also unfolded the face of oil business in Nigeria after the PIB is passed.

The Acting President said that under the new regime, the NNPC will be operated as a business that is conscious of its mission in the market place and that the new company will have the capacity to borrow money from the capital market for its operations and be able to pay dividends to its shareholders.

He said: "It will be a company that will acquire the capacity to operate within and beyond our national boundaries. As a business concern, the new NNPC will be required to pay to the government, royalties and taxes just like any other company. The challenge of restructuring NNPC may appear daunting but it is clear that the set goals are achievable."

To Jonathan, the oil endowment in the country should be channelled towards the enhancement of the common good and should not be used as a tool of oppression by a few. According to him, not having electricity and having gas in abundance is painfully paradoxical and has left a sour taste in the mouths of the Nigerian people.

His words: "Oil must be an agent for good and development and not violence, war and impoverishment. Our goal is to ensure that the benefits of petroleum be enjoyed and be seen to be enjoyed by all Nigerians - rich and poor. A situation where majority of Nigerians are denied the benefits of power supply, which the petroleum industry can guarantee through the availability of gas, for example, is unacceptable. For Nigeria to be exporting gas and yet does not have this vital resource for domestic power generation is like a farmer who, after a bumper harvest, sells off all his produce, spends the proceeds on other material things, and consigns the family to living in hunger. It is not and will never be a wise proposition. As corporate citizens, oil and gas companies have a responsibility to be good neighbours. We cannot live in darkness when we have a better option of a life under uninterrupted power supply; we must have electricity in Nigeria and oil and gas companies must partner with us in delivering this to the Nigerian people within the shortest possible time. The government has identified a number of critical areas that must be accomplished in order for us to usher in a new era for the oil and gas industry in Nigeria."

Dismissing the belief that the amnesty programme may have derailed, the Acting President said the programme is fully on course. He also warned merchants of war who profit from the restiveness in the Niger Delta that they would soon meet their Waterloo.

He said: "The challenges of rehabilitation and reintegration would be met by our bold determination for holistic development of the area. I want to assure all those who laid down their arms for peace to prevail in the region that the neglect will not be repeated. I believe that all post-amnesty programmes, including the provision of infrastructure and facilities that will keep the youths fully and beneficially engaged, will be implemented. Even as we are determined to do things differently, we are not unmindful of activities of criminal interests who profit from perpetrating illegalities in the Niger Delta. Pipeline vandalism and illegal oil activities will not be tolerated."

Rilwan hinted that the anticipated changes in the industry would be on auto-pilot immediately the PIB is passed. He added that deregulation may indeed be waiting for the take-off of PIB implementation.

His words: "Certain changes have to be effected immediately the law comes into being and this is because the moment the law comes into being, the existing structures have to be replaced in the system. In order to address this execution challenges, an implementation framework will need to be developed which would, among other things, identify the various tasks (that) must be accomplished for a new petroleum industry law to materialise."

The minister stressed that the PIB was packaged to conform to the aspiration of most of the stakeholders and in the process, several changes were made to suit observations by the Federal Inland Revenue Service.

"These memoranda were subjected to thorough deliberations with the key stakeholders in the industry and indeed about 56 changes were made to respond favourably to the comments of International Oil Companies (IOCs) through their trade organization - OPTS. And 36 changes were also made to response to the concerns expressed by the Federal Inland Revenue Service and 66 other changes in response to other stakeholders.

"The process, we believe, will herald a new era of accountability, transparency, overhaul of fiscal regime, provision to support host communities, provision on local content and establishment of policy and regulatory institutions with clear demarcation of responsibilities. We also hope that it will establish an efficient, integrated and commercially viable national oil company among others. We would like to state that there are many challenges ahead of us with the realization of this objective. The immediate challenge is the passage of the Petroleum Industry Bill into law," he said.

However, Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron Nigeria Limited have said that the proposed PIB, could drive away billions in investment, lead to slow development of deep water reserves and help Angola overtake Nigeria as Africa's biggest oil producer.

Shell's Executive Vice President for sub-Saharan Africa, Ann Pickard, said at the conference that the content of the bill, if passed into law, would take years to correct.

She said that under the current version of the proposed PIB, the government would be allowed to renegotiate old contracts, impose higher costs on oil companies and retake acreage that firms have yet to explore.

Pickard said: "The simple, passionately stated priorities of government have been completely lost in a cumbersome document that lacks insight into the very basics of our industry.

"If passed in the form currently proposed, its mistakes will take years to correct and its harsh terms for deepwater projects could drive as much as \$50 billion in investment elsewhere."

She said that the bill should address issues of multiple taxes, royalties and other concerns of the international oil companies (IOCs) and other stakeholders before it is passed.

Pickard also told the Nigeria government to address the challenges in the oil and gas sector or risk being eclipsed by its sub-Saharan African rivals.

She added: "Nigeria's position in global oil and gas markets cannot be taken for granted.

Nonetheless, Pickard refuted recent speculation that Shell intended to terminate its 50-year relationship with Nigeria. "Take it from me, Shell has no plans to pull out of Nigeria," she said.

However, Pickard forecasts that offshore output from Angola - whose much younger oil industry's total output has already surpassed Nigeria as sub-Saharan Africa's leading producer - would be double that of its northern rival by 2020.

She said some \$50 billion of planned investment in Nigeria's hydrocarbons would not proceed if planned reforms went ahead without revisions.

Pickard said the stagnation of Nigeria's investment-starved oil industry could be blamed on "a failure to recognise that we all benefit from taking a fair share of a growing industry rather than an excessive share of a declining one."

Corroborating Pickard, the Managing Director of Chevron Nigeria Limited, Mr. Andrew Fawthrop stated: "Current legislation being discussed will drastically slow down deepwater growth, adding: "Dialogue is needed to ensure that the government's well-thought -out aspirations are achieved by the Petroleum Industry Bill and not inadvertently derailed."

The fortunes of the country's oil and gas industry may however be dwindling, as indications emerged yesterday that oil production from the nations hydrocarbon resources has continued to slide since 2005, and may decline further.

The Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Odein Ajumogobia, who concurred with this position at the ongoing conference, said that oil supply in Nigeria stands the risk of retrogression, as the Federal Government moves to implement its flare-out policy.

This, according to him, makes it imperative for the government to aggressively pursue the oil industry reform, which is seen as a vehicle to promote investments in the sector and boost national oil output.

Pickard had declared: "Nigeria's oil and gas production has not only failed to grow, but has fallen every year since 2005.

"Its share of global oil production is shrinking with it. It has fallen just over 30 per cent since 2005. Investment in the industry has stalled. Final Investment Decisions (FIDs) are not being taken in deepwater and unlike Australia, no new Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project has been approved onshore," she said.

But the NNPC yesterday urged the National Assembly to accelerate the passage of the PIB, arguing that the country is losing additional revenue of US\$ 287million in accruals to government from the three PSCs monthly without the legislative approval.

In a statement, the Group General Manager, Group Public Affairs of the Corporation, Dr. Levi Ajuonuma, disagreed that the PIB threatens to make a bad situation worse.

The NNPC said: "What Shell wants us to do is to keep subsidising the production of gas which they end up exporting to their home countries to guarantee their national energy security. As I speak Nigeria is still subsidising gas for export because the cost of producing gas is recovered from oil revenue. There is no country in the world that does not get value for its natural resources. But we are getting negative value from gas in Nigeria. The big question is if Nigerians are willing to forego subsidy from petroleum products which they consume, why should Shell or any other international oil company operating in this country expect Nigeria to keep subsidising the gas that they export to other countries? That and many more abnormalities are what the PIB is seeking to correct."

On the argument that the proposed bill will make the Nigerian Production Sharing Contract (PSC), the harshest in the world, despite the so-called high risk environment, the NNPC also disagreed, saying: "Currently Nigeria has one of the lowest government take in the world for PSC which stands at 42 per cent whereas the international average worldwide is 75 per cent. In Angola it is 78 per cent, in Norway it is 76 per cent even Ghana which has not even started is proposing about 80 per cent. What is even being proposed under the PIB is 70 per cent which is still less than what Angola is getting today. So how can that be harsh? For 10 years we allowed them to operate the Liquefied Natural Gas, LNG, in Bonny without paying a kobo as tax to the government because of a tax holiday all to encourage investment. Now Nigeria wants to maximize its gas potential to the fullest".

Ajuonuma explained that the PIB was seeking to ensure that Nigeria and Nigerians reaped the full benefits of their God-given resources.

“Research shows that 80 per cent out of every one U.S. dollar invested in the oil industry, goes offshore. That is why PIB is talking about local content. Under PIB no oil company can import cooks and stewards from their country to work in Nigeria as expatriates,” he stated.

The NNPC described as untrue, the claim by Pickard that Shell missed an opportunity to make contributions in good time for the drafting of the bill.

"Many nations like, UK, Alaska (U.S.), Venezuela, Algeria, Russia, Alberta, Angola, etc have changed fiscal system to respond to operational and economic realities without recourse to foreign interest or IOCs. Yet it is an open secret that both Houses of the National Assembly conducted a robust public hearing to accommodate the ventilation of opinions and comments from all stakeholders".

4. Environment:

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

- Nigeria must set example for rest of Africa in tackling HIV, says UNAIDS chief

The head of the United Nations agency leading the global effort against HIV and AIDS has commended the Nigerian Government for its progressive policies, while calling for greater efforts to tackle the epidemic and set an example for the rest of Africa.

Nigeria must take the lead in setting the regional and African Union agenda in eliminating mother to child transmission of HIV by 2015. Without Nigeria's leadership, this goal will not be met in the African continent, Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), said during a visit to the country.

According to UNAIDS, there are nearly three million people living with HIV in Nigeria second only to South Africa on the continent with about 1,000 new infections every day.

The agency noted that there is a growing demand for access to treatment and prevention services within Nigeria, which can only be met by strengthening the current partnership between global, national and local partners.

We cannot afford to let down the four million people living on treatment and the millions who are waiting for it, said Mr. Sidibé.

Nigeria has only 30 per cent of the resources available to meet the needs of the national AIDS response, with the global economic downturn impacting negatively on the amount

of resources available at the national and state level.

Mr. Sidibé, who was on a joint visit with Ambassador Eric Goosby, the United States Global Coordinator on AIDS, met with a number of officials, including Health Minister Professor Babatunde Osotimehin. He also visited Kaduna state, where adult HIV prevalence is around 7 per cent.

Source: UN

- FG to establish medicinal plants farms

The Federal Government has said that it will establish experimental medicinal plant farms in the six geo-political zones to provide raw materials for the research and production of traditional medicine.

Director General of the National Natural Medicine Development Agency, Mr. Frank Okujagu, said this in Abuja at the Annual Natural Products Expo.

He said the establishment of the farms would assist in promoting the cultivation and conservation of medicinal and aromatic plants for the production of pesticides that were on the brink of extinction.

The NNMDA boss said the agency had started to articulate and pursue projects that could support the development of bio-business sector of the nation's economy.

He added that the agency was pursuing its critical and strategic mandate of exploiting the potential of the nation's bio-resources to create jobs and wealth.

Part of the agency mandate include, research, documentation, development and promotion of the nation's natural medicine.

He said the agency had started conducting ethno-medicinal and veterinary survey and documentation of Nigeria's medicinal plants toward developing a national inventory of natural medicine.

"We have completed the survey and documentation for South West, South East and North Central while the other zones are in different stages of being finalised.

"At present, we have collated research from 1970 to 2007 and published a book of abstracts of published research findings on Nigeria medicinal plants and practices," the News Agency of Nigeria quoted Okujagu as saying.

Also speaking, Director-General of the National Bio-technology Development Agency, Prof. Bamidele Solomon, said medicinal biotechnology had offered economic production of insulin for curing diabetes, human growth hormones and treatment for some cancers.

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- Jos crisis: Plateau Gov't to rebuild victims' houses

The Plateau Government is to rebuild the houses of victims of the recent crisis in Jos as a way of alleviating their sufferings.

Executive Secretary, Plateau Emergency Management Agency, Dakwo David, disclosed this in Jos, at a stakeholders meeting to review their roles during the crisis.

"We have been giving people food items for about two months. Now is the time to show them that we really care about them by providing them with shelter.

"We have made recommendation to the state government for assistance. This will go a long way in rebuilding confidence in them because they think nobody cares for them," David said.

According to him, the internally displaced persons need to be given a minimum accommodation comfort, and it is better they leave the camps and return to their homes as soon as possible.

The executive secretary said some 40,000 persons were internally displaced during the crisis, but that most of them were now residing with their relations.

David explained that the process of distributing relief materials was abused by disgruntled persons, who made false claims that they were victims and used the crisis to enrich themselves.

He alleged that, some of the disgruntled persons claimed to have many wives and children when they were actually single, stressing that relief materials were now distributed through religious leaders.

Also speaking, Mr Dennis Onoise, Coordinator, Save the Children, UK, an International NGO, lamented that, children were most vulnerable during emergency.

Onoise pointed out that nobody took care of the immunisation needs of children in camps or the menstrual needs of girls who were disconnected from their parents.

8 Geo-Strategic issues:

- A bridge between Nigeria and Cameroon

An exhibition of artworks featuring Nigerian and Cameroonian artists has held in Lagos, in a major collaborative effort between Cameroonian artist Catherine Pittet and the Mega Plaza. Tagged 'Valentine Art Exhibition', the exhibition opened at the

Mega Plaza, on Idowu Martins Street in Victoria Island, Lagos, on February 12 and displayed until February 21 on the shopping mall's third and fourth floors.

Speaking on how the event came about, Pittet, who organises exhibitions under the auspices of her company, Gondwana, said she followed her husband down to Nigeria when he got a job with the CFAO group. Not wanting to sit idle, she decided to pursue her passion for the arts and put up exhibitions involving Nigerian and Cameroonian artists in joint displays like this one. "I was doing exhibitions for many years in my country so as my husband is here I decided to do the same thing I was doing in my country," she said.

The encouragement to go ahead with her plans came from the chairman of CFAO group, Molade Okoya-Thomas. Pittet showed him a copy of brochures from her past exhibitions and he described what she was doing as "interesting." According to Pittet, his unwavering support helped bring her plans come to fruition.

An avid art promoter, Pittet's first exhibition in Nigeria was the sixth edition of 'The Last Pictures Show', which took place last October at the Civic Centre, Lagos. It was not her first involvement with Nigerian artists. Previous editions of The Last Pictures Show had featured Nigerian artists and others from across West Africa. She had also twice taken Nigerian artists to Paris as part of a UNESCO exhibition.

"I love Nigeria because Nigerian people have been very kind to me and have accepted me. All my artist-friends have supported me." Pittet however urged for more support from gallery owners and others in the art sector, who, she says, have yet to really warm up to her. She believes this is due to their mistaken belief that she is only in Nigeria temporarily. "I'm not just passing through, I live here and that's why I'm doing this," she said.

Different but similar

"I think in Nigeria and Cameroon the people are the same people but for the coastline dividing us. For me, I don't feel like I'm not in my home." Pittet believes one similarity between Nigerian and Cameroonian artists is visibility. Both groups need more recognition than they currently get. "That is why I'm doing what I'm doing." Eleven Nigerian artists were featured in this exhibition, with a slighter higher number from Cameroon, but then, "I would like more people to come because it's not every day you have Cameroonian artists in Nigeria." She expects a result for Cameroonian artworks on display in Nigeria similar to that received by Nigerian artists when their works were displayed in Cameroon. "They sold all their paintings because it was Cameroonian collectors' first time of seeing Nigerian artists," she said.

Pittet also believes that art in Cameroon is very abstract while Nigerian artists tend towards [realism]. Nigerian artists probably won't accept that as true. "Of course some are abstract too but the majority is [realist]. I see many paintings of Oshodi market, many of the bridges and the village, of the environment. Cameroon, they say the same thing but

you have to look, you have to discern. You can see it is there, but you have to look deeper: same world but different way to express it.”

Pittet prides herself as an all round artist – she sings, acts, paints, sculpts and designs clothes and furniture. She was however quick to praise Nigerian art. “They are very good, but what is more important is to go out so that we can show the world we have good art.”

The art lover who has been in Nigeria for about a year continues to encourage Nigerian artists to pursue their art. “We expect more Nigerian artists to come so that we can go out. Try to measure yourself with those outside.”

- Corruption: Liberia seeks EFCC's assistance

The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission on Wednesday called for the support of Nigeria's anti-graft body, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, in its efforts to fight the menace of corruption in Liberia

The appeal was made when a delegation of LACC paid a working visit to the Chairman of the EFCC, Mrs. Farida Waziri, in Abuja.

The delegation was led by LACC Executive Chairman, Mrs. Frances Johnson Morris.

While receiving the delegation in her office in Abuja, Waziri pointed out that if there was any doubt as to the commission's resolve to do its job, the recent happenings in the banking sector should be a sign of a greater and more determined EFCC.

She said, "For us in EFCC, this year, we have promised and we have begun to show them the signs that we will smoke out many corrupt persons from their comfort zone to face trial while we retrieve from them our common wealth, which they have stolen when we entrusted power into their hands."

She mentioned some of the achievements of the commission to include the conviction of over 80 people and the recovery of lost funds and assets in excess of \$3bn in the last 15 months.

She therefore called for an increased partnership and cooperation among law enforcement agencies across Africa, especially West Africa.

Waziri commended Nigerians for their unshaken faith in the work of the EFCC, stressing that more support was needed from other institutions towards the establishment of special courts and the passage of asset forfeiture bill.

Responding, Morris expressed her appreciation to EFCC and Waziri in particular, for the audience granted to her delegation.

"We are here because of the positive reputation of EFCC which even our development partners always cite as example."

Morris, who was a former Chief Justice of Liberia, said her organisation which was barely two years, needed to gather as much information as possible to put LACC in the same pedestal as any other law enforcement agency in the world.

"There is no physical violence now in Liberia but even the peace is being undermined by corruption especially when you consider the poverty and population of our country."

Other West African States

Cameroon:

- 24 people injured in Cameroon clashes.....H7

At least 24 people including a number of civilians and one soldier have been injured in Cameroon during clashes over a cell phone, official says.

Violence erupted in the coastal town of Limbe in southwest Cameroon, government spokesperson Issa Tchiroma Bakary said Thursday. Three of the injured are in critical situation, A Press TV correspondent quoted the official as saying.

Several vehicles were also damaged in the violence.

"During the night of February 23 to 24, (Tuesday to Wednesday) an incident involving members of the BIR Delta (a rapid response unit in charge of security in the region) and civilians in Limbe, took place in Church Street," Bakary said in a statement.

Trouble began when a BIR soldier had his mobile telephone taken following a fight with some fishermen, a security source said.

An official report on human rights in Cameroon in 2007 and 2008 voiced concern over the behavior of certain elements of the BIR.

Press TV

- Cameroonian security forces on alert to prevent opposition protest marches....H1

The Cameroonian security forces have been deployed in the economic capital Douala, to keep the opposition and civil society from holding demonstrations to mark the second anniversary of the February 2008 hunger riots in which forty people were killed, official sources said here.

The administrative authorities, who were opposed to the commemoration march at the Madagascar roundabout, a poor district of Douala, where three protesters were killed in 2008, have deployed a large number of security forces in the city.

Since Friday morning, army helicopters crisscrossed the Bassa area, near the most important industrial area of the country where a rally is expected to draw protesters.

They are mainly militants and sympathizers of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), the Union of Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) and the New African Nationalist Dynamic (NODYNA).

Dressed in black, these mourning people who were unable to hold either their march or their meeting, were however allowed to reverently lay wreaths on the graves of the victims.

Cameroon had been badly shaken by protests against hunger in late February 2008, during which forty people were killed, according to government figures, while human rights defense organizations such as the Association of Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) speak of one hundred deaths. Following a week of violent protests, the government had lowered prices of commodities like rice, flour, fish or salt, while the authorities increased by 15% the salaries of civil servant and state officials .APAnews

- New wave of cooperatives in Cameroon help HIV-positive women gain economic independence.....H7

Many people living with HIV face not only health issues but may also struggle to make ends meet economically. A number of HIV-positive women in north west Cameroon are taking the initiative by generating income through cooperatives, with the assistance of the International Labour Organization (ILO) funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Cooperatives (coops) have historically provided much needed support for the disadvantaged, but people living with HIV have been marginalised or ignored, with coops sometimes refusing to disburse grants in the belief that investing in them would not see worthwhile returns. This project, set up last year, aims to change that.

The project aims that women gain more financial independence and generally enhance the quality of their lives. So far it has helped more than 100 women to operate in a broad range of areas including commerce, tailoring, designing, rearing pigs and poultry, secretarial support and communication services.

A revolving micro-credit fund scheme was set up in three micro-finance institutions across the North-west Region in Bamenda, Kumbo and Wum.

A number of safeguards were put in place by the ILO and its partners to try to ensure the project's success. Support structures, called 'Centres of Competence' were provided by the CoopAfrica organization. These centres offered skills and resources for cooperative members to prosper and grow, pool resources and become increasingly empowered.

As well as funding grants for the micro-projects, assistance included training managers and psycho social and economic counsellors from the targeted micro-finance institutions to support beneficiaries. The training package contained business development, management procedures, AIDS support, counselling and stigma reduction components.

Capacity-building workshops were also held for HIV-positive women from the targeted communities on various aspects of running a business. Following the assessment of 192 micro-projects submitted after the training, 68 received seed funding and all of the beneficiaries are now running their own businesses.

Cheaka Toure from the ILO sub-regional office for central Africa believes that through this project both people living with HIV and their communities benefit. He notes that not only do resources go directly to those who are HIV-positive but they become key participants in the local AIDS response. "The project addresses HIV issues in a comprehensive and integrated way, combining behaviour change and care with economic empowerment of people living with HIV who are now main actors in their own destiny and can take care of themselves economically."

Evodia A, one of the beneficiaries, has seen her life turned around. "I rear pigs. Before the project I had a single pig and with the funds that I got, I now have six. I have even set up a garden which is being fertilised with material from the piggery and now I harvest vegetables from the garden for my nutrition."

A key knock-on effect of the relative success of the project is a greater self-confidence and hope among the women. Many others living with HIV have also expressed their willingness to become involved in the scheme.

Dameni Oussematou from Integrated Development Foundation, an ILO partner, has noticed this newfound self-confidence. "I am impressed by the rapid change the coop members are demonstrating. They are now business oriented... and proud to show it. The saving habit is gaining ground; the repayment rate is 98% in two of the three cooperatives". He adds, "And men living with HIV have expressed a strong willingness to be targeted by this intervention too".

Dr Mamadou L Sakho, the UNAIDS Country Coordinator for Cameroon, shares this enthusiasm for the cooperatives. "This is a large and notable project. A great deal of progress has been made and it has certainly had an impact at local level and reflects and responds to issues on the ground. It would be welcome to see knowledge about the intervention reach a wider audience now."

There have been numerous lessons learned. For instance, the capacity of the beneficiaries needs to be further built, given their heavy reliance on frequent visits from cooperative institutions to monitor their businesses and provide guidance. Identifying a greater number of activities with high income potential for the future is also suggested.

- Burma: Junta police escort Cameroonian from French embassy....H5

A Cameroonian man, yet to be identified, entered the French embassy compound today on Pyidaungsu Yeikthar Street, in Rangoon's Dagon township. A group of about two dozen police and USDA waited in front of the embassy for him, according to an eyewitness who spoke to Mizzima.

The eyewitness also reported that the police were led by a township-level police commander. It is unclear why the Cameroonian man was wanted by the Burmese police.

According to an official from the embassy who requested anonymity the Cameroonian man was being questioned by police and then ran into the embassy. After discussions with police, the man was handed over to the Burmese authorities by the French embassy. According to the French embassy staff person: "It is a normal case not related to politics. Later, he came out of the compound and went with the police. The event was over", said the official.

A large section of present day Cameroon was at one time a French colony and it is likely the man speaks French. Cameroon like many African countries does not have an embassy in Burma.

- Taps running dry in soaking wet Cameroon.....H4

Every day before going to school, Pulcherie and her brothers get up early and head to fetch water a short walk from their home.

The trouble is, everyone else in their district of the Cameroonian capital Yaounde does the same, even though the source is unreliable and the water untreated. The wait "is long and exhausting," said Pulcherie, 11.

It's not much better at home. "Sometimes we wait up until four o'clock in the morning but the water still isn't running."

Cameroon has an abundance of freshwater resources - Lake Chad lies on its northern border - but its water sector is highly fragmented and underfunded, according to a UN report published last year.

The taps have been running dry since early January, not just in Pulcherie's home district of Essos but in many other parts of the capital and elsewhere in this west African state.

Sometimes there's no water for days. In some areas it can be weeks.

At Camerounaise des Eaux, the private company that provides running water at a price, they say supplies have dropped enormously because of the falling level of the river Nyong in the centre of the country.

The company blames a prolonged dry season for the Nyong drying up.

Still, public discontent is perceptible: in late January, residents in the Damas quarter of Yaounde threatened violence.

Such a feeling of revolt "is understandable," said Theophile, who lives in the area. "We suffer a lot because of (the lack of) water," he added.

Then he headed off with the 20-litre (5.2-gallon) jerrycan he has got into the habit of filling at a bore-hole about two kilometres (just over a mile) from his home.

Under public pressure, municipal authorities have formed teams consisting mainly of fire fighters and policemen who supply needy districts with water - via fire hoses.

Long queues quickly form whenever they arrive at the distribution points, with people carrying all sorts of containers and jerrycans.

"It's a good thing. It allows people to get their supplies" while stifling "threats of revolt", said Emmanuel Moubitang on distribution day in Essos.

Yet the fact Cameroon is experiencing shortages, giving the nation's huge water resources, points to a much wider failure than a river drying up.

The sight of fire fighters distributing water is "a disgusting, unacceptable situation," lamented a senior member of a non-governmental organisation under cover of anonymity.

"It shows up the failure of the system," he added, saying all Cameroonians "should be ashamed".

The government recently approved an investment programme worth 609 million euros (£537 million) for the water sector after a 20-year freeze, said Michael Tomdio, the minister in charge of water.

Even when everything is working, only 29 per cent of Cameroonian households have direct access to drinking water, the government admits.

And even being linked up to the network does not guarantee permanent access to running water in this country of nearly 19 million residents.

In the Nsimeyong III-Ebom suburb of Yaounde, for example, water hasn't been flowing through the pipes for more than a year now, according to one resident, Etienne Amougou.

He said Camerounaise des Eaux didn't appreciate it when people opposed to monthly maintenance charges for water meters "purely and simply tore down the meters".

- IFC Launches Business Edge Training in Cameroon to Support Small Business Growth.....H2

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, today launched its Business Edge management training system in Cameroon, increasing its support for entrepreneurs and small and medium sized businesses in the country.

Business Edge is an interactive learning program that offers skills training to help managers increase their knowledge and run more efficient businesses. The product has helped thousands of entrepreneurs in emerging markets in Africa and around the world improve their skills and develop their businesses.

“Supporting the growth of smaller businesses is a major focus of IFC’s work in Africa. The launch of Business Edge in Cameroon underlines IFC’s commitment to supporting private sector growth in the country,” said IFC Country Manager for Cameroon, Henri E. Rabarijohn.

IFC has partnered with six consulting firms in Cameroon to deliver Business Edge training to businessmen and women. These partners are: Africa Audit Council (AAC), and Business Management Solutions (BMS), Diversity Management and Consulting (DMC), PANESS Conseil, FIDA Conseil et Cible.

IFC has already certified 15 trainers to deliver Business Edge training in Cameroon, where small businesses dominate the private sector, but often struggle to obtain the support they need to grow.

IFC’s strategy in Cameroon includes increasing support to the small and medium-sized business sector; improving the business climate; and supporting direct investments in key sectors such as energy and infrastructure. including supporting the growth of smaller businesses.

About IFC

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, creates opportunity for people to escape poverty and improve their lives. We foster sustainable economic growth in developing countries by supporting private sector development, mobilizing private capital, and providing advisory and risk mitigation services to businesses and governments. Our new investments totaled \$14.5 billion in fiscal 2009, helping channel capital into developing countries during the financial crisis.

- Victoria Oil signs 14 Cameroon gas offtake deals....H2

Victoria Oil and Gas has signed offtake agreements with 14 Cameroonian firms for gas from its Logbaba project, due to begin production later this year, a company official told Reuters on Friday.

The agreements, most of which will run for five years, amount to supplying 226,000 cubic metres of gas per day to industrial city Douala, said Steven Jorgensen, general manager of Rodeo Development, Victoria's Cameroonian subsidiary which operates the project.

Daily demand in the power-hungry city is estimated at 425,000 cubic metres, he said.

It will sell at \$453 per 1,000 cubic metres, far higher than gas fetches on international markets, but less than prices Cameroonian firms pay for imported fuel oil.

"That before we start production we have already secured so many customers is an extraordinary development for us," said Jorgensen. "It's a very good sign and we can now move into the financial market with a lot of confidence, since there is a ready market."

By contrast, Ukraine paid \$208 per 1,000 cubic metres for Russian gas in the final quarter of 2009.

Firms to have signed deals with Victoria include brewers Societe Brasseries du Cameroun and Guinness Cameroon, food company Nestle and industrial firms PLASTICAM and CICAM.

POWER DEFICIT

Buyers say the startup of Logbaba, expected in mid-2010, will lessen their reliance on expensive imports of fuel.

"Every day we use 27,000 litres of imported fuel oil to power our generators, which is very costly for our company," said Emmanuel Fouotso Adji, commercial manager of textile firm CICAM.

"The Logbaba gas will provide us a very viable alternative. It will be much cheaper, clean and more effective. This will cut production costs and lower prices of our goods."

Victoria will sell all of Logbaba's gas locally, Jorgensen said, as the energy deficit in Douala has created a big enough market. The firm plans to build a 12 km pipeline to transfer the gas to clients, some 85 percent of whom are within 10 km of the project site.

Inadequate power supply in economic hub Douala is a serious impediment to economic growth in the central African country.

A recent study by Cameroonian industrial federation GICAM said most businesses in Douala lost about 10 percent of revenue due to inadequate power supply, said the group's senior economist Justin Fotsing.

“By constraining development of the private sector, insufficient power supply is hampering economic growth,” Fotsing said. “Not only is it raising costs for enterprises, some of them have folded up and others forced to cut down production, laying off thousands of people.”

Reuters

Chad:

- Gov’t Seeks Withdrawal of Military Component of UN Mission....H1

The top United Nations peacekeeper is flying to Chad next week after the African country called for the withdrawal of the military component of the UN mission that was set up over two years ago after tensions increased along the border with Sudan's war-torn Darfur region.

Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Alain Le Roy's trip was announced after Chadian Permanent Representative Ahmad Allam-mi told a news conference at UN Headquarters in New York today that the military component of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) had served its purpose.

He said Chad was not calling for an immediate withdrawal of the military component, but an "interim solution" and wished to work out a compromise between total withdrawal and merely extending the mission's mandate as it stood.

MINURCAT was set up in 2007 to ensure the security of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Darfur, other displaced persons and humanitarian workers. But with new agreements on border security with Sudan, and with MINURCAT not strong enough to provide complete security in eastern Chad, it was better for Chadian forces to take over and for the mandate to be adjusted before it expires and comes up for renewal in March, he said.

The Security Council today discussed the issue and were briefed on ongoing contacts between the Secretariat and Chadian authorities by UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes and Mr. Le Roy on all aspects of the mandate, particularly the positive contributions in the humanitarian field.

The 15-member body "expressed their full support for MINURCAT and encouraged further consultations on the way forward," Ambassador Gérard Araud of France, which holds the Council's rotating presidency for February, said in a press statement.

Accusations that the authorities want the mission out before legislative elections this year, thus removing potential witnesses to fraud, are a "totally baseless rumour," Mr. Allam-mi said, pointing out that elections were not even included in MINURCAT's

mandate. The polls would take place under the aegis of the European Union, and many international observers would be in the country to ensure they were free and transparent, he added.

The mission currently comprises some 2,800 uniformed personnel and 430 international civilian staff, 400 local civilians and 148 UN Volunteers. Its mandate calls for it to liaise with the national forces to create a more secure environment, combating in particular the problems of banditry and criminality; and to support efforts to relocate refugee camps which are close to the border.

In the humanitarian field, it is entrusted with promoting human rights, with particular attention to sexual and gender-based violence, recommending action to fight impunity, and assisting the Government in promoting the rule of law, including support for an independent judiciary and a strengthened legal system.

Cote d'Ivoire:

- CPJ: Ivory Coast's suspension of France 24 is politicized....H1

The Committee to Protect Journalists is concerned about politically motivated censorship in Ivory Coast after authorities banned international French broadcaster France 24 on Monday on bogus allegations of unprofessionalism over coverage of political unrest in the West African nation.

Speaking to Reuters today, Frank Anderson Kouassi, the president of Ivory Coast's National Broadcasting Council (known by its French acronym as CNCA) accused the Paris-based satellite station of reporting many deaths in a peremptory manner after security forces opened fire on an anti-government protest in the southwestern city of Gagnoa on Friday. Ivorian military chief Gen. Philippe Mangou declared in a public statement to the media the same day that five people had been killed and several injured in the clashes, according to news reports. Kouassi told CPJ that France24 had aired unbalanced information. In a press statement on its Web site on Monday, France 24 said it hoped the CNCA would reconsider the ban, saying that it seemed unjustified.

The ban on France24 deprives Ivorians of an essential source of information on the critical political situation in the country, said CPJ Deputy Director Robert Mahoney. We call on the authorities to reverse this ban and refrain from censorship.

Several local journalists CPJ interviewed said they believed the ruling appeared to be meant to suppress France24's exclusive coverage of opposition movements across the country. The government-controlled national broadcaster Radio Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) has not carried demonstrations or interviews with demonstrators, they said.

Thousands of Ivorian opposition supporters marched to the studios of RTI in the economic capital, Abidjan, in January to protest against what they described as President Laurent Gbagbo's monopoly of publicly funded state media, according to news reports. Earlier this month, the official National Press Council suspended private daily Le

Patriote for three days over several stories critical of members of the government, according to news reports.

- Several people have been killed in Ivory Coast during clashes between security forces and demonstrators.....H1

Security forces fired live bullets into the crowd of thousands of protesters, a demonstrator told the BBC.

The violence in the town of Gagnoa is the latest in a series of protests against President Laurent Gbagbo.

Last week, Mr Gbagbo dissolved the government and the electoral commission following a row over voter registration.

The opposition accuses him of stalling on presidential elections, which have been delayed every year since 2005.

'Gunshot wounds'

Since last Friday there have been protests in towns across the country, but this is the first time people have been killed.

The BBC's John James in the commercial capital Abidjan spoke to one of the demonstrators in Gagnoa, who said the police had fired into the crowd with real bullets.

Other reports said the deaths had come afterwards when police searched for opposition protesters.

Speaking to the AFP news agency, hospital staff in the town said three bodies had been brought to the hospital and that the victims had gunshot wounds.

The Associated Press news agency, quoting the opposition, says three people were killed and more than a dozen injured, after police opened fire on demonstrators.

A police source confirmed to AFP that there were "some dead", but he could not say how many people had been killed.

There are reports of demonstrations during the day in several other towns in Ivory Coast.
BBC

- Ivory Coast opposition to join new unity government.....H1

Opposition leaders in Ivory Coast say they are ready to join a new unity government, ending a standoff that has threatened the country's peace process.

The move follows President Laurent Gbagbo's decision to appoint a new electoral commission.

The latest crisis began two weeks ago, when President Gbagbo dissolved the previous body, accusing it of fraud and being controlled by the opposition.

President Gbagbo's decision led to deadly protests.

Early on Friday, the authorities announced a new election commission, headed by a member of the opposition and tasked with preparing long-delayed elections.

Later senior opposition leader Alassane Ouattara told reporters that opposition groups had agreed to take the 11 seats reserved for them in the 27-member cabinet.

Mr Ouattara also said the opposition was "suspending all demonstrations".

Fraud accusations

The move comes two days after a new unity government was announced - the previous one had been sacked along with the electoral commission.

Voter registration has been at the heart of the dispute.

The presidential camp accused the previous electoral commission head, Robert Mambe, of fraudulently trying to add 429,000 names to the electoral roll.

The BBC's John James in Abidjan says that for the opposition, the selection of the commission's head was key to bringing stability after protests in which at least seven people were killed.

Mr Mambe came from the opposition Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI).

However the new head, Youssouf Bakayoko, also comes from the PDCI, though he will now have to abandon all political activity.

The new government includes almost all the same names as the previous government, and the independent electoral commission remains much the same, our correspondent says. No new date has been set for elections - although officials hope they can be held in April or May. Polls to end the crisis sparked by the 2002 civil war have been delayed six times.

- Ivory Coast announces new electoral commission.....H1

ABIDJAN, - Ivory Coast announced the formation of a new electoral commission on Friday, a key step towards resolving a political crisis in the top cocoa producer that provoked days of violent street demonstrations.

The new commission told a news conference its president was Youssouf Bakayoko, an opposition PDCI party member.

The members of the commission were chosen in a deal cut between Ivory Coast's political parties. They then elected Bakayoko and his management team to run it. "The result will be to organise elections that are just, transparent and have results acceptable to everyone," Bakayoko, a former foreign affairs minister, said in a brief statement after his election.

The opposition had vowed to continue protests against President Laurent Gbagbo until he reinstated the electoral commission he dissolved, along with the government, this month. Gbagbo disbanded them on Feb. 12, after accusing former electoral commission chief Robert Mambe, also a PDCI member, of illegally adding names to the voter register in a boost the opposition. Mambe has denied trying to add the names.

That decision has delayed a poll that was already years overdue when it was scheduled for March, sparking a public outcry that led to bloody street protests. "Our institution had certain difficulties last time," Bakayoko said. "We are going to try to surmount these difficulties so that the hopes placed in us can be realised."

Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, a former rebel during the 2002-3 civil war, announced a new government on Tuesday night, with places for both opposition parties, after a compromise mediated by Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore.

The number of ministries has been cut to 27 from 32, with the opposition getting a similar proportion to before.

Only 16 of the ministers were named, most of them retaking their old jobs, as the opposition did not put forward names.

OPPOSITION BACK IN?

The main opposition coalition had said it would only join the newly formed government once the electoral commission was re-established, so the announcement paves the way for them to rejoin.

However, getting the electoral commission back on track is regarded as far more important than the government, which has in any case been transitional since its mandate expired in 2005.

Elections are seen as the only way of restoring legitimacy to the government and ending the crisis in Ivory Coast, which has persisted since the war split it in two.

Public anger is raging after years of delays. The military has opened fire on protesters in the past few days, killing some. Cocoa output, however, has been largely unaffected.

Once the commission is in place, it still has to finish the laborious job of drawing up a final voter list, first by dealing with all the contested names on the provisional list.

Some 6 million voters registered for the poll, but around a million were contested on grounds of nationality, a divisive issue that started the civil war in the first place. Frequent setbacks to the country's fragile peace process have left many Ivoirians cynical about politics and their leaders.

"If it means peace can come back to our country then I guess that's good," said fruitseller Odette Brou, 30, on hearing of the new commission. "We're really tired of all this."

Guinea- Conakry:

- Guinea PM Pleads For Election Funds.....H1

Guinea urgently needs funds to be ready for an election due later this year, the prime minister has told the BBC.

"We need to have money...

[but] we will try to do our best to be ready," said Jean-Marie Dore.

Election officials announced on Sunday that a vote would be held on 27 June - part of a deal brokered to secure a return to civilian rule.

The military took over the country in December 2008, following the death of long-time leader Lansana Conte.

Junta leader Capt Moussa Dadis Camara was shot and wounded in December, prompting crisis talks during which the military agreed to organise an election within six months.

But Mr Dore told the BBC's Network Africa that the country had no funds for election materials or to conduct a census of Guineans living abroad.

He said the government was working with international organizations such as the European Union, United Nations and regional body Ecowas.

"We are looking forward together the best way to organize fair elections," he said.

Source: Daily Guide -

Mali:

- Mauritania-Mali row over al-Qaeda.....H1

Mauritania has temporarily recalled its ambassador to Mali, angered over the release of four militants from al-Qaeda's North African branch.

Nouakchott said the release of the fighters - one of whom is Mauritanian - violated security pacts.

Mali freed the men weeks after al-Qaeda militants demanded their release, threatening to kill a French hostage.

The authorities insisted they had not given into al-Qaeda's demands, saying that the men had served their time.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, as the group is known, snatched Frenchman Pierre Camatte from his hotel in Menaka, near Mali's border with Niger, on 25 November.

It is thought he is being held in the northern Mali desert, along with three Spanish hostages and an Italian couple.

The other hostages were kidnapped in neighbouring Mauritania last November.

Security sources in Mali told AFP news agency Mr Camatte could be freed within days.

But Mauritania's Foreign Ministry made clear its displeasure in a strongly worded statement.

"This non-cordial measure taken by the Malian authorities harms age-old relations between the two countries," the statement said.

"Above, all it's a flagrant contradiction of judicial co-operation accords and security co-ordination agreements."

According to local newspaper reports, two of the men were Algerian, one was Mauritanian and the fourth was from Burkina Faso.

The four were apparently convicted of illegal possession of firearms and given nine-month sentences - the exact time they had already spent on remand.

Analysts in the region claim that the Malian authorities were pressurized to release the men by the French government - allegations Bamako has repeatedly denied.

- Freed French hostage speaks of al-Qaeda ordeal in Mali...H1

A French aid worker who was held by al-Qaeda's North African wing in Mali says he was beaten and that his captors tried to convert him to Islam.

Pierre Camatte, 61, was released on Tuesday in a prisoner swap after three months in captivity. He made the comments after arriving on French soil.

"They tried time and time again to convert me. They want to Islamise the whole world in their own way," he said.

Mr Camatte, who spent 15 years in Mali, called his captors "dangerous fools".

The Frenchman was abducted from a hotel near the border with Niger on 25 November and handed over to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the North African wing of the militant movement.

Mr Camatte said his kidnappers "beat him up" when he tried to resist.

Ransom denied

"They are fanatics, dangerous fools. They are certain that they hold the truth. And they want, through coercion, to make the world admit their vision," he told reporters at Paris's military airport.

The group is also believed to be holding three Spanish hostages and an Italian couple.

Mr Camatte was freed in exchange for four Islamist prisoners held by Mali - a move that angered Algeria and Mauritania.

On Wednesday, French President Nicolas Sarkozy met Mr Camatte in the Malian capital Bamako and promised support for Mali's fight against terrorism.

France has denied paying a ransom for Mr Camatte's release.

- Deadly crush at Timbuktu mosque.....H1

Twenty-six people, mostly women and children, have been killed in a crush at the famous Djinguereber mosque in Timbuktu, sources have told the BBC.

The stampede happened during the Mouloud festival to mark the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, when people walk around the mud mosque in northern Mali.

The worshippers had to use a different path than usual because of renovations to the 14th Century building.

Timbuktu, in the Sahara Desert, was once a centre of Islamic learning.

Initial reports said that 16 people had died but local officials have subsequently told the BBC that a further 10 bodies were recovered at the scene and buried by their families without going to hospital.

According to Muslim tradition, people should be buried within 24 hours of their death.

Local tour guide Halif Mohamed al-Hassan told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme that up to 25,000 people converge on the mosque each year and walk around it three times to mark the prophet's birthday.

He says the people were killed after an elderly woman fell down and others were trampled to death.

Some 40 people were injured, the police say, according to Reuters news agency.

"I lost my sister. She was 16 and had gone to pray," said local resident, Ali Kounta, reports the AFP news agency.

The Djinguereber mosque is the largest in Timbuktu.

The once wealthy city helped spread Islam across West Africa.

Its fortunes declined after the 16th Century, as the region's main trade routes switched to the Atlantic Ocean, instead of the Sahara Desert.

Niger:

- First Steps towards the Restoration of Democracy....H1

NIAMEY, - As its promised transition to democratic rule begins, the military junta that overthrew Nigerien president Mamadou Tandja on February 18 has named a former information minister, Mahamadou Danda, as the new prime minister while retaining legislative and executive powers for itself.

Danda, 59, is seen as unaffiliated to any political party, was appointed on Feb. 23 by the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (known by its French acronym, CSRD).

In a declaration broadcast nationally the previous day, CSRD head Djibo Salou was announced as head of state and the government; the junta will, for the moment, have the final word in governing the country.

Marou Amadou, president of a coalition of groups opposed to the ousted president known as the United Front To Safeguard Democratic Gains (FUSAD, after its French acronym, FUSAD) believes this first decree provides further guarantees of the junta's intention to return power to civilians.

"The length of this transition will be decided after the consultations with all political and social stakeholders in the country announced by the junta," Amadou told IPS. He hopes the transition will be neither too slow, nor overly hasty.

This opinion is shared by a wide spectrum of political and social actors in the country.

"It would be pointless to botch the transition and end up in the same political quagmire faced in recent months. The junta will need time to reorganise and create conditions for sustainable democracy," Hadjio Issa, a teacher in Niamey, said in an interview with IPS.

Tandja's attempt to remain in power beyond the end of his maximum two terms as president led to political deadlock in 2009, ultimately paving the way for February's coup d'état.

For Daouda Hamani, one of the leaders of the Coordination des forces pour la démocratie et la République, a Niamey-based coalition of political parties and civil society organisations, "the junta has the internal and external support necessary to conduct a smooth transition."

During the transitional period set out by the junta, a constitution and electoral law will be developed, said Boureïma Idrissa.

"However (the Feb. 22 decree) doesn't provide any details as to the type of government that will be created. The only information is that its members are appointed by decree by the Head of State," Idrissa said.

A source close to the junta, who requested anonymity, told IPS "the team will be composed mostly of civilians, but most importantly people with integrity and skills."

"Our intention is not systematic exclusion, we want to create the conditions to return to a viable and sustainable democracy," the source told IPS.

The issue of exclusion is of particular concern to supporters of the ousted president, who fear the junta will launch a "witch hunt" in response to persistent demands from Tandja's opponents.

"The CSRD has promised to involve all components of the nation in the process, and should not let itself be carried away by a wave of political settling of scores," said Abdoulaye Boubacar, a supporter of Tandja's government.

"These are basically the same players - that led President Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara to his death - who today pushed Tandja out. There must be sanctions against them to avoid another interruption of our democratic process in a few years," Maria Amadou, a female board member of FUSAD, told IPS.

Maïnassara himself staged a coup in 1996, again intervening in a civilian struggle for power; he presided over the drafting of a new constitution by May, was himself voted in as president in a contested poll in July, and ruled until his assassination in 1999.

Tandja is being held in a military barracks. Six other members of his government are also in detention, including the former ministers for the interior, the economy, mines and energy, and the prime minister, Ali Badjo Gamatié. IPS's source close to the junta did not provide any reason why they were still in detention, despite the CSRD's promise to release them.

"These ministers will be released later," the source said.

Marches demonstrating popular support for the junta in Niamey and various places in the interior have provoked some concern from state employees, among them Ousseini Diori, secretary general of the teachers' association in Niger.

"The junta's strong internal support should not serve as a pretext to shirk its duties, such as the regular payment of wages," he said.

"We still remember the sad experience of the military transition of 1999 when no wages were paid to workers for nine months. We are not willing to live through that sacrifice again," Diori told IPS.

Charles Fromm adds from Washington: U.S. officials called for an expedited transition to democracy as hundreds of supporters rallied behind military leaders in the wake of a coup in the central-african nation of Niger.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William Fitzgerald said the coup may well launch a democratic turn for Niger, which saw the majority of its international aid frozen and sanctions imposed last year after President Tandja dissolved parliament in a bid to extend his rule.

"The U.S. position is clear: (the junta) have got to show as soon as possible that they are genuinely seeking to restore the constitution and to move to a return to democratic and civilian rule," Fitzgerald said in an interview with Reuters over the weekend.

State Department official Philip J. Crowley, told reporters the U.S. does not "in any way, shape, or form, defend violence of this nature. But clearly, we think this underscores that Niger needs to move ahead and – with the elections and the formation of a new government," in reference to the military junta.

Earlier in February, the United Nations pledged to provide the impoverished West African state with supplementary funding to avoid food shortages. More than half Niger's population, 7.8 million people, is projected to face moderate to severe food insecurity in the coming year.

"It is imperative to support the Government in its efforts to mobilise the resources to satisfy the food needs of the most vulnerable," resident UN Humanitarian Coordinator Khardiata Lo N'Diaye said.

- Niger junta bars itself from future elections.....H1

Members of Niger's military junta and the interim administration it is setting up will not be allowed to run future democratic elections.

Junta spokesman Abdoul Karim Goukoye reiterated that the coup leaders' priorities were to hold transparent polls and restore democracy.

President Mamadou Tandja was overthrown a week ago after a decade in power.

Col Goukoye said that Morocco had offered to shelter Mr Tandja, but this was denied by Rabat.

Mr Tandja and several of his ministers are still under house arrest.

Niger's main opposition party has called for Mr Tandja to be tried for high treason because of his decision last year to scrap limits on the presidential term in office, which went against a ruling by the Supreme Court.

Earlier in the week Mahamadou Danda was named as a civilian prime minister to oversee the transition to democracy.

The junta has not set a date for the new polls.

"I have asked for the necessary guarantees to be sure of committing myself in the process leading to a real restoration of democracy," AFP news agency quotes Mr Danda as saying in his first public comments since his appointment.

Niger has experienced long periods of military rule since independence from France in 1960.

But Mr Tandja's supporters argue that his decade in power brought a measure of economic stability to the poor West African nation.

- Social Context and Human Resource Development....H7

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a strong feminization of poverty. The 2007/08 Human Development Index (HDI) ranks the country 174th out of 177. Extrapolating from current trends, the only Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that might be reached by 2015 are those related to the reduction of infant mortality and to access to drinking water.

In response to these challenges, the government adopted an Accelerated Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (SDRP) covering the 2008-12 period, in which existing sector policies and programmes and/or those being developed will serve as an operational framework. The SDRP aims at promoting strong growth (7 per cent on average annually) favouring the most disadvantaged as well as sustainable human development.

Poverty fell during the 2005-08 period: it contracted by 2.6 points, falling from 62.1 per cent in 2005 to 59.5 per cent in 2007/08. This fall was accompanied by an improvement in households' living conditions, particularly in terms of access to drinking water, electricity and better housing. The share of the population benefiting from electricity rose from 7.3 per cent in 2005 to 10.7 per cent in 2008. The fall in poverty was more marked in urban areas than in rural ones.

This fall has enabled a reduction in inequalities in Niger. The Gini index declined from 43.7 in 2005 to 36.3 in 2007/08 and the Atkinson index from 43.7 in 2005 to 31.7 in 2007/08. Still, even though poverty indicators have improved, the number of poor people increased significantly due to strong demographic growth.

The objective of reducing poverty by half, which is one of the MDGs, may not be reached in 2015. Despite all of this, Niger continues to make progress in education. According to national sources, the education enrolment ratio was estimated at 106 per cent in February 2009, with a resulting gross enrolment ratio of 63 per cent in 2008, as against 50.6 per cent in 2007, or a 6-point increase, as against a 2.3-point increase for the 2003-07 period. The gross enrolment ratio in the first year of primary school increased from 64.7 per cent in 2007 to almost 77 per cent in 2008, which represents a 12.3-point improvement. The gross primary enrolment ratio for girls was estimated at more than 72 per cent, as against 57 per cent in 2007, or a 15-point improvement. The gap between girls and boys was reduced by 3 points.

The proportion of illiterate adults was estimated at more than 70 per cent in 2007. Women are more affected than men (84 per cent versus 56 per cent). Despite inadequate financial, material and human resources, efforts have been made and noticeable improvements have been obtained in non-formal education. The total number of students went up from 39 880 in 2003 to 76 369 in 2007. The completion rate also increased from 49 per cent in 2003 to 60 per cent in 2007. But the drop-out rate, which was 18 per cent in 2003, rose to 34 per cent in 2007.

The government drew up a national literacy and non-formal education policy, which was approved in June 2008. This policy document lays out the choices, directions and policy measures necessary for the development of the sub-sector. It relies on a strategy of letting local partners do the job (*faire-faire*) as the main way of dealing with illiteracy and adult-education programmes, as well as on setting up support funds for literacy and post-literacy programmes, and on adding a literacy component to every development programme and/or project.

According to national sources, the number of unemployed persons was 637 525 out of a labour force of 4 008 486, which puts the unemployment rate at 15.9 per cent. This is higher in urban centres than in rural areas (19.4 per cent versus 15.2 per cent).

In terms of health, some forms of health care were made free in 2008: that for children under five years old, caesarean sections, and treatment of female cancers. Niger faces meningitis, cholera and malaria epidemics every year. In 2008, following a meningitis epidemic that hit the country, a combined total of 3 492 cases and 225 deaths were recorded, giving a mortality rate of 6.4 per cent. For cholera, this total was 948 cases and 70 deaths between January and October 2008, or a lethality rate of 6.4 per cent. For malaria, which is the largest public-health problem in Niger, a combined total of 1 621 003 cases and 2 093 presumed deaths were notified nationwide. Malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea are responsible for almost 60 per cent of deaths of children under five years old.

Despite the national measles-immunization campaign conducted in January 2008, the number of children affected by this disease has not declined: 2 200 cases were recorded between 1 January and 23 March 2008 throughout the country. To combat this outbreak, teams from the organisation Doctors without Borders conducted vaccination campaigns for children 6 months to 15 years old in the Zinder and Maradi regions.

Every year, a significant part of the rural population is forced to migrate temporarily to border countries in search of work. They are thus exposed to an increased risk of infection from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Data for 2007 indicates a 1.1 per cent HIV/AIDS infection rate for persons between the ages of 15 and 49. The number of pregnant women infected by HIV/AIDS was estimated at 3 300 in 2007.

The government intends to decrease morbidity and mortality rates by using several tools: a health-development plan (2005-09), a national framework strategy for combating STDs and HIV/AIDS (2007-10), and a national programme to combat tuberculosis (2007-10).

Since the last food crisis in 2005, the overall acute under-nutrition rate declined from 15.3 per cent in 2005 to 10.7 per cent in 2008. In 2008, however, four regions still had under-nutrition rates above 10 per cent. In addition, 49 zones out of 147 (35 per cent) were identified as vulnerable in terms of nutritional security. From January to October 2008, health centres recorded 157 588 cases and 351 deaths due to malnutrition. The government, UNICEF and non-governmental partner organisations air radio programmes in local languages to explain how to detect and treat malnutrition. Community health agents tour the villages to spread messages on health and nutrition. They are working in co-operation with community teams to identify under-nourished children and send them to treatment or feeding centres.

- Over 7 million people in Niger facing food insecurity owing to bad harvest, warns UN....H6

More than 7 million people in Niger, which last week saw its Government overthrown in a coup d'état, are facing food insecurity, the United Nations health agency warned today.

Some 2.7 million, or one in five households, were severely food insecure and another 5.1 million were moderately food insecure, Paul Garwood of the World Health Organization (WHO) told reporters in Geneva.

More than half the population [of 7.7 million] was estimated to have less than two months worth of food stocks to survive until the next harvest in October, he stated.

Mr. Garwood added that in the first weeks of 2010, nearly 29,000 cases of global acute

malnutrition had been reported. In response, Niger's authorities had recently launched a support plan to improve food safety and prevent malnutrition and to treat cases of malnutrition of children aged under five.

Acute malnutrition affected more than 12 per cent of children in this age group in Niger, he noted, adding that WHO is seeking around \$659,000 for emergency nutrition intervention for children under five.

In addition, WHO is supporting the training of seven trainers in Agadez on the new protocols on the treatment of people with acute malnutrition, and these trainers will in turn train almost 80 people.

Meanwhile, the UN is working closely with its partners, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), to help resolve the crisis in the country which began when renegade soldiers stormed the presidential palace last Thursday with the stated aim of returning Niger to democracy.

Source: UN

Senegal:

- Illegal migration - the Senegal experience and plans....H5

In the last decade there has been a sharp increase in the migratory flux from Senegal to Europe and with the reinforcement of the terrestrial border control system, Senegal became one of the first African countries of origin and transit for illegal migration.

Forty-six percent of Senegalese migrants seek to reach the European lands, Spain and Italy having particularly experienced a growth in the number of immigrants (Van Criekinge, 2008). Migration from Senegal towards Europe was characterised during recent years by illegal means, with the two main options being ocean or terrestrial (through the desert) routes. From 2005 to 2007 over 50 000 people migrated illegally, resulting in the turning back of more than 4 065 people by air, and more than one thousand by land (Tandian, 2007). The data on those who perished during this dangerous journey is even more difficult to establish.

The youth aged 15 to 34 constitute the largest number of Senegalese migrants (Van Criekinge, 2008). The study undertaken by Caritas (a Senegal YMCA partner NGO) in September 2008 among 50 returned illegal immigrants reveals that the majority were young people between 20 and 29, of which 96% were male. According to the data of the International Programme on Migration (ILO, 2006) which indicates that 49.6% of all migrants come from Dakar and Saint Louis, the departure points include Dakar, Saint Louis, Kayar (Thies) and Ziguinchor (Casamance).

High-level panel meetings, forums and workshops undertaken by the Senegal YMCA and Caritas of Dakar with several stakeholders, focused on the increasing phenomenon which

primarily affects the youth. A number of issues were highlighted:

Lack of information among potential young migrants and their families on the risks of the illegal migration as well as about the illegal migrant living conditions in Europe. Lack of information and support on youth opportunities to emigrate in a legal way eg. obtaining a European visa, etc.

Negative views about migration, including the high level of stigmatisation of returned migrants.

The solutions recommended by the State and NGOs as alternatives to youth migration do not meet the appropriate needs of young people and are not well known by the youth.

A lack of coordination between civil society, the private sector and the government in developing and implementing effective solutions to reduce illegal migration and promote the socio-economic reintegration of returned migrants.

Limited data/statistics on illegal migration of youth and minors from Senegal to Europe.

The results of these meetings led to the civil society identifying specific areas of reintegration support to returned migrants and to providing information on the risks of illegal migration among the youth and minors.

Efforts made by international agencies such as the International Migration Organisation (IMO) to help the Senegalese government to reduce illegal migration had an impact on the decrease of the migratory flux from Senegal. But the 2009 orientation priorities stressed care and capacity building in the management of migration issues. Among the programmes implemented by the Senegalese government to deal with illegal migration and promote the reintegration of the returned migrants was through the Retour Vers l'Agriculture/Back to agriculture (REVA) plan. A study carried out by the Senegal YMCA in 2008 revealed though, that civil society was not significantly involved in the designing of this initiative and that many young people did not seize this opportunity. This was due on the one hand to the lack of information, but it can also be surmised that such programmes did not effectively meet the needs and aspirations of most of young people.

The Senegal European Commission country document for 2008-2013 declares that the Government of Senegal must make illegal migration one of its main priorities.

The Senegal YMCA has, since 2008, taken initiatives, in accordance with its mission, by organizing workshops in partnership with Caritas Dakar, to do an in-depth situational analysis and search for solutions for tackling the problem.

The results of these workshops have steered the Senegal YMCA in the fight against illegal migration through the following actions:

The development of Youth Rural Entrepreneurship to reduce rural exodus, which is the

starting point of illegal migration. Currently research is being undertaken to evaluate the potential of certain rural communities, to discuss with the young people and the authorities to identify actions to socially and economically empower young people. We also plan to organize youth to take part in the management of their area and to lobby for the development of good youth policies by the local and government authorities. A project proposal will shortly be submitted to financial partners in this regard. Currently, through the 'HIV/AIDS and socio-economic integration of youth and women' programme, youth of Mbadakhoune rural community, Fatick Region, are to be trained and supported in the development of rural entrepreneurship activities.

Coaching the Kayar Returned Young Migrant Association, providing them with technical and organizational support for the development of fundable projects. We plan with this association of over 200 members, to organize actions of capacity reinforcement and sensitization about illegal migration. These returned young migrants will be the main actors of the sensitization actions.

Submission of a project proposal to:

1. prevent the illegal migration of Senegalese youth and minors to European Union (EU) countries;
2. Implement effective programmes for socio-economic reintegration of returned young Senegalese;
3. Reinforce the capacities and coordinate civil society organisations to better meet the needs of minors and young potential candidates for illegal migration.

In partnership with Y Care International and the YMCA of Spain, this proposal has been submitted to the European Union.

Sierra Leone:

- Tongo, The Smoke Of The Fire.....H1

The decade long war in Sierra Leone officially ended in 2002. That is about eight years ago. By the time our hard-found peace clocks nine years (2011), we would have clocked fifty years as an independent nation.

As we hit fifty, some of us liberally minded Sierra Leoneans have pursued a moment to ask ourselves – Is the war entirely over? The reason why many keep on asking such questions is because we continue to see, hear and feel the very things that provoked a war that had attendant consequences that none of us want to be reminded of.

We continue to be apprehensive every now and then to the point that we are not even sure what is going to befall us the next day or moment. All of us, directly or indirectly tasted the bitterness of war. One way or the other, we all bore the brunt of it.

The guns however went silent, the cutlasses were turned into farming tools, some of the many houses burned have been rebuilt, rehabilitated or refurbished; some of the many unfortunate victims have been consoled and or compensated; reconciliation has, to a greater extent, taken roots and yielded positive dividend; wealth and riches lost in the wake have been considerably recovered, over time. Yet, the war seems to be far from over and peace in the strict sense of the word, seem to be farfetched. Peace has to do with the state of mind and until there is peace of mind there is no peace.

One of our many naturally rich but ironically dilapidated towns in the East of the country, Tongo Fields was turned into a battle field by two groups of Sierra Leoneans who ignorantly think violence is the only way out. Needless to go into what led to the wanton and gratuitous destruction that characterized what was supposed to be a peaceful, small-time election of a Councilor. Many a times, we frown at University students when SU elections almost always end in cataclysm.

The authorities are quick to condemn the reckless act of ill-advised students and even take punitive actions against them. But when those who much is expected of behave in same manner, impunity becomes a sure thing. The Tongo brouhaha was indeed a clear indication that there are certain ill-motivated sects among us who are always hell bent on creating an atmosphere of unrest. Why import thugs in Tongo? Did we really need armed-to-the-teeth personnel for that small-time election of a Councilor? Why were house burned? why fan the embers of tribal conflict? So we really need the services of 'hindo,' 'hindo' or the bawotays? Hogwash. Perhaps one of the things we should not nurture or allow to grow is that thing called "tribalism."

We need to remind ourselves of the Rwanda genocide which saw the mass killing of hundreds of thousands of Rwanda's Tutsis and Hutu political moderates by the Hutu dominated government under the Hutu Power ideology. It is said, "coming event casts it shadow" What obtained in Tongo, except otherwise, is a shadow of the 2012 event.

The question now on the lips of many Sierra Leonean is: If a less important election of a smalltime councilor ended in 'gbosgbos' how is the very important and keenly contestable 2012 elections going to end? Dombolo? May God forbid. But God will only forbid if we are first ready to forbid. Which ever way we take a look at it, the Tongo upheaval was a just a smoke to the 2012 fire if the trend continues unchecked. We wait to see how the Pujehun Councillor election is going to end.

Togo:

- Five Opposition Parties Back Fabre.....H1

Five opposition parties in Togo have thrown their weight behind the candidature of Jean-Pierre Fabre for the 4 March presidential election to challenge President Faure Gnassingbe, who is seen as the frontrunner.

They have come together under the umbrella Republican Front for Change in Power (FRAC), which was presented to the media on Wednesday in the Togolese capital, Lome. Kofi Yamgnane, who was disqualified from contesting the election, is the new body's

spokesperson. Patrick Lawson, the first deputy-chairman of Union of Forces for Change (UFC), was appointed the campaign manager of the Front.

FRAC comprises the Alliance of Democrats for Integral Development (ADDI) led by Aim Tchabour Guogu, the Alliance led by Dahuku Pere, the Socialist Pact for Regeneration (PSR) led by Tchessa Abi, Sursaut-Togo led by Kofi Yamgnane and the Union of Forces for Change (UFC) led by veteran politician Gilchrist Olympio.

In a declaration, the coalition has vowed to achieve the advent of change in Togo and will soon launch its campaign. Togo's presidential election is planned for 4 March.

The campaign began on Tuesday and is expected to end on 2 March.

Seven candidates originally registered to contest vote, including the incumbent president Faure Gnassingbe.

- Gov't Deploys 12,000 Troops for Polls.....H1

Thousands of pro-opposition youths in Togo will have to take it easy vis-à-vis a 12,000 strong force that the government says it will deploy to ensure a riot-free presidential election on March 4.

Togolese Colonel Yark Damehane has accused the 'Movement citoyen pour l'alternance' or Citizens's Movement for Change to which the youths belong of inciting citizens to violence as it vows to use "any means" in order disrupt the polls nationwide.

The movement has recruited youths throughout the country and is in the process of obtaining explosives, Colonel Yark told the press in the capital, Lomé, and vowed not to allow the movement to succeed its plans.

Headed by journalist Fulbert Atisso and an opposition parliamentarian Nicodème Habia of the 'Union des Forces de Changement' or Union of Forces for Change, the movement has as its slogan "change or death, we shall win!".

Since the setting up of the movement, there have been sporadic clashes with security forces in different parts of the country as the electoral process gathered steam.