

WHAT'S GOING ON? AFRICA NEWSLETTER

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DREAMS OF AFRICA



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Sudan Arrest Warrant Issued

The 4th March of this year saw the International Criminal Court issue an arrest warrant for Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, they decided that there was insufficient evidence to support the charge of genocide. The ICC does not have a police force, which essentially means Mr Bashir must give himself up. Sudan's foreign ministry said President Bashir would ignore the warrant, in fact the President said the charges only reflect western hostility towards Sudan.

Hours after the announcement, thousands of protesters took to the streets of Khartoum, Sudan's capital, shouting "We love you President Bashir". Sudan also expelled six foreign aid agencies hours after the announcement, with no reason given. This did nothing to cease growing concerns that the historic move will only

increase tensions in the country.

Mark Warren

Ghana: A Beacon of Hope

Although it received little mention on these shores, Ghana had its presidential election in December 2008. In a run-off election, John Atta Mills, of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), garnered about 50.23% of the votes cast. Nana Akufo-Addo, of the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP), won about 49.77%. Akufo-Addo had narrowly won the most votes in the general election, but his failure to gain a majority amongst the eight candidates led to the two men having the run-off that Mills won. It was so tight that every one of Ghana's 230 constituencies had to be checked before a winner could be declared.

Mills was sworn in as President of Ghana on January 7, replacing John Agyekum Kufuor, who had served the maximum of two four-year terms. The candidates were not merely populist choices, but

people with full understanding of constitutionality and the rule of law. Dr Mills (with a Ph.D from SOAS in London) had been a Law professor, served as Vice President from 1997 to 2000, and lost to Kufuor in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. His rival Akufo-Addo is a lawyer, who had served some time as Ghana's Attorney-General.

While this election may seem insignificant to those outside Ghana, it shows the world that democracy does work in Africa. Despite the tight elections, there was an orderly transition for a second time, as Kufuor had also come to power from being in the opposition. Both the President and the defeated candidate accepted the result without calling for their supporters to challenge the result, and they even attended the inauguration of Dr Mills.

However, there were some reported problems with the election, with about 200,000 rejected ballots in the first election. This may have been due to voters using the incorrect finger to print in ink on the ballot paper. Long and

slow queues were also reported in the first round, but this led to more polling stations for the run-off. That being said, even the USA has had problems both with rejected ballots - in Florida in 2000 - and long queues - for the recent Presidential election. The result did have to wait on the final constituency, holding its poll a few days late due to logistical reasons, but this was only an issue due to the tight margin between the candidates. Indeed, some constituencies in the UK do not have their results collated on election night, but it is not a problem because our elections have not been so tight. While complaints came from the NPP over the results in the final constituency, these have come to nothing. The Electoral Commission and judiciary have both been truly independent too. Therefore, such issues do not undermine the authenticity of the results or the system. Independent observers certainly approved of the peaceful and transparent elections.

If Africa is featured in the news, it is often for its political problems. The news medium in

the Western World often looks to paint a wholly negative portrayal of democracy in Africa, as a futile effort. Indeed, Ghana was once seen like this. A former British colony, Ghana in 1957 was one of the first African countries to gain independence. Kwame Nkrumah, the man who led Ghana to independence and its first President, was overthrown by a coup in 1966. This is believed to have been CIA-sponsored due to his sympathy for Soviet policies. A number of coups and governments followed until Jerry Rawlings took power in 1981. From starting as a dictator, he eventually turned Ghana into a democratic multi-party state in 1992 – making 2008 Ghana's fifth set of elections. After celebrating its jubilee anniversary in 2007 and hosting the African Cup of Nations football tournament in 2008, Ghana now stands as a beacon of optimism for Africa. Arguably, Ghana is in a more mature stage of development than its African neighbours, and thus could be a sign of what is to come from more of Africa.

Formerly known as the Gold Coast, Ghana is the world's second-biggest gold and cocoa producer. It has had GDP growth around 6% in 2007 and 2008 (compared to 3% then less than 1% in the UK). In 2007, the discovery of off-shore oil was announced too, with production expected from 2010. While oil revenues have corrupted some governments around the world, it is realistic to expect that Ghana will continue its free and fair democracy. The stakes were at their highest in this election and yet the incumbent NPP allowed a free election and a handover of power. It is hoped that the oil revenues will stay in Ghana rather than going to foreign companies, and that it will help to develop national infrastructure rather than fund government profligacy.

Although there is poverty, there are power shortages, and infrastructure is far behind the standard of a developed country, Ghana fails to get the recognition for how far it has developed. Instead the images people associate with Africa are from Zimbabwe and Sudan. Yet anyone who visits the

capital Accra may be in for a shock with regard to its high level of development. Likewise, civil war and fixed elections are not present in Ghana. While some may feel that the country is an anomaly, and may become corrupted by petrodollars, the aim is for Ghana to again prove the sceptics wrong. Hopefully the West will this time give greater recognition to an African success story, rather than ignore it.

Rose Bewick

Unrest in Madagascar

Madagascar is the world's fourth-largest island. As well as being a new destination for tourists it also draws foreign companies searching for oil, gold, cobalt, nickel and uranium.

The President, Marc Ravalomanana, is widely praised for his energy and commitment to economic reform, but analysts question his authoritarian tendencies. He is accused by his opposition - the sacked Antananarivo Mayor Andry Rajoelina - of

mispending public money and being a dictator, which the President denies.

Rajoelina has recognised the wide spread frustration with the government in Madagascar and has said he would set up a transitional administration unless the president steps down.

Who is Ravalomanana?

The current President of Madagascar began his working life selling home-made yoghurt from the back of his bicycle, his dairy and oil products business is now the largest non-foreign-owned company in Madagascar.

He began his political career in 1999 when he gained a huge following in Antananarivo and later became mayor of the capital.

In 2002 he became President and instigated free-market reforms in his first term, which led to increased aid and the cancellation of foreign debt. Despite this, poverty remained endemic. Today the life

expectancy is 58 for men and 61 for women. According to the World Bank in 2007, the GNI per capita is \$320.

His second term saw the launch of the Madagascar Action Plan, which aims to cut poverty levels by 50% over 5 years. He described the private sector as the engine of economic growth and said relations with the international community and donors were the keys to development. According to 'Travel Invest South Africa' the island is already projecting a 7% growth rate for 2009.

When Rajoelina – who is engaged in a power struggle with the President – was dismissed in January of this year, there was a series of anti-government protests in the capital city, Antananarivo. Dozens of people were killed when the unrest led to rioting and looting.

After an opposition demonstration of 20,000 people on February 7th of this year, 28 were left dead and more than 200 wounded, when the police opened fire on the crowd. This

is despite the fact that all reports claim the protest was a peaceful march towards the President's compound; and that no one was armed.

Ravalomanana claims that Rajoelina "...led people to take the presidential palace by force and didn't know how to control them."

Following the protest and the subsequent needless killings, Madagascar's defence minister resigned on Monday the 9th, when up to 5,000 people held a memorial for the dead protesters in the capital. She released a statement in which she said that her conscience could not endure the bloodshed. "As a mother, I do not tolerate this violence. It was agreed at government level that the security forces were meant to protect the population and its property."

In an attempt to calm tensions in the country, President Ravalomanana and the opposition Rajoelina met for the first time on the 21st February. According to the Council of Christian Churches in

Madagascar (FFKM), which hosted the talks, the meeting was marked by "respect, cordiality and calm" on both sides.

They agreed to put an end to provocative statements and the spreading of false information, to stop violence, looting, public meetings and arrests 'of a political nature.'

Analysts say a power-sharing unity government is a likely option for Madagascar now.

Ashley Burton-Lynch

Deal or No Deal? – Zimbabwe's Future at Stake

On February 11th 2009 Morgan Tsvangirai was sworn in as Zimbabwe's Prime Minister and thus the power sharing deal agreed in September last year began to come into effect, but it did not always seem as if this deal would come into being. Problems arose right from the start of the deal's inception. Two weeks after the agreement was signed progress was

stunted by Mugabe's Zanu PF party not wanting to give up any key ministries including the Defence Ministry which controls the Army and Central Intelligence Organisation, and Home Affairs which controls the police. Though Mugabe on the international scene mouthed his commitment to the deal, saying at the UN General Assembly on September 24th 2008 that his "Zanu (party) will abide by the letter and spirit of the agreement to which we have appended our signature". It would seem his real feelings on the matter are very much the opposite, appearing wholly unwilling to enter into the full spirit of the deal by saying in a televised speech that he and his party would still call the shots and "would not tolerate any nonsense from our new partners".

Another stumbling block came in November with Mugabe demanding the unilateral right to cancel the power sharing deal be put in the constitutional amendment needed before the unity government with the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) could be legalised. The implication being that Mugabe

would only have to declare a proclamation to that effect and all changes brought in by the power sharing deal would be rendered null and void. Unequivocally providing further evidence of Mugabe's clear disdain for the power sharing process as no stipulations or checks were specified in relation to the proclamation in the draft.

The MDC seemingly faced with the prospect of joining a government still very much controlled by Mugabe, attempted to put in its own desired input into the new constitution. The MDC's proposed version looked to offset the controlling influence of Mugabe by increasing the power of the Council of Ministers a body which contains the PM but not the President. The desired effect being that by implementing checks and balances in the executive, a more democratic government would take shape.

With the two parties' proposals diametrically opposed to one another, an agreement was looking highly unlikely, a scenario the MDC was well aware of. The MDC

spokesperson Nelson Chamisa stated that it was "better to have a longer gestation period and a healthy baby than an inducement that ends in abortion", a realisation of the magnitude of the deal for Zimbabwe's future.

Yet, it would seem that cautiousness has given way to expediency with Zimbabwe's dire economic and humanitarian situation driving Tsvangirai to agree to join the government in order to effect change from the top. This move is not without its critics as inside and outside the country there exists serious doubts about the potential effectiveness of Tsvangirai in his job. Wellington Chibhebhe, secretary general of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions said that he believed the power sharing agreement in its current state only gave the MDC "administrative work" with real power still lying with Mugabe and the Zanu party. Perhaps telling as to the real power Tsvangirai holds is revealed by the fact that at no point will he get to chair cabinet meetings in Mugabe's absence as one of the two vice-presidents will step

in as acting president. Arguably an even more damning indictment of Tsvangirai's power is delivered in the reasoning that if Mugabe felt he had real power to threaten him he would have without question insisted on a Zanu representative in the office of PM but this has not been the case.

So the question is who governs? Whilst Mugabe will undoubtedly still command great power and sway as President and chair of the cabinet meetings, Tsvangirai as Prime Minister has day-to-day control of the government, as well as heading up a Council of Ministers. Arguably, Tsvangirai in charge of the daily running of government will be in a position to effect change in the lives of Zimbabweans especially if he is able to utilise political instruments such as the finance ministry which funds the budgets of all other ministries. In effect though, the deal represents a major gamble by Tsvangirai with the future make-up of Zimbabwe's political landscape at stake. The gamble revolves around Tsvangirai believing he can effect greater democratic

change inside government, by doing a deal with the devil so to speak, than from outside. It is quite a risk, as no doubt Mugabe will be betting on his ability to neutralise the political momentum gathering behind Tsvangirai's MDC by looking to thwart his reforming efforts at all turns and thus facilitate a perception of the MDC in the eyes of the people as wholly ineffective in government. But in Tsvangirai's eyes the wheels of change have been put in motion, with the power sharing deal anything but ceremonial, it shows Mugabe's stranglehold on Zimbabwe has weakened in being forced into making concessions he never would have made at the height of his power.

That being said, the challenges facing Tsvangirai should not be underestimated. The economic crisis looms large over the unity government, and Tsvangirai's ability to counteract it and at least provide Zimbabweans with the means to meet the basic needs of survival will be all important. Hyperinflation has crippled the country, at the end of last year the Cato Institute calculated the annual

rate of inflation at 516 quintillion per cent. The effect on Zimbabweans has been devastating, with domestic production failing and wages desperately lagging behind the continual rise in prices, the availability of necessity goods has been scarce and hard to avoid.

Moreover, in looking to change the fundamentally violent and corrupt character of the political system and re-establish the rule of law, Tsvangirai must engage with a thoroughly hostile and formidable power structure in the form of the Joint Operations Command. Its constituents being the heads of the army, air force, police, intelligence and prisons. The five man group commands arguably the greatest power in the Zimbabwean regime and is wholly opposed to Tsvangirai's bid to reform the political set-up. They signalled this intent by orchestrating the arrest of the MDC's deputy agriculture minister Roy Bennett, a former white farmer, shortly before the Cabinet was sworn in.

Compounding these problems is the despairing cholera crisis which in infecting 60,000

people and killing a further 3,000 people, according to World Health Organisation figures since August 2008, has brutally exposed how the debilitating political and economic situation has eroded Zimbabwe's infrastructure especially its health system. According to Medecins Sans Frontieres' report 'Beyond Cholera: Zimbabwe's Worsening Crisis', the 'reasons for the outbreak are clear: lack of access to clean water, burst and blocked sewage systems, and uncollected refuse overflowing in the streets, all clear symptoms of the breakdown in infrastructure resulting from Zimbabwe's political and economic meltdown'. The severity of the situation is laid out in no uncertain terms by Manuel Lopez, head of MSF's mission in Zimbabwe, who said "there has been a devastating implosion of Zimbabwe's once-lauded health system...public hospitals are turning people away, health centres are running out of supplies and medical equipment, there is an acute lack of medical staff, patients can't afford to travel to pick up their HIV medication or to

receive treatment". How Tsvangirai responds to MSF's call for the government to ease bureaucratic restrictions in order to create a greater 'humanitarian space' in which programmes run more effectively, will provide an indicator for his capacity to implement change in governmental practice.

Ultimately, the goal for Tsvangirai has got to be to oversee a new democratically minded constitution followed by elections in the next couple of years to force Mugabe out once and for all.

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DREAMS OF AFRICA

Mission Statement:

The 'What's Going On' newsletter is presented by DREAMS OF AFRICA as a means of raising awareness amongst the student body about the socio-economic plights and political events affecting Africa.

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