



(South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki Friday joined government officials in denying allegations that the country paid bribes to secure the right to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup.)

BURUNDI :

Elections au Burundi: l'Union européenne jette l'éponge

Par RFI /29-05-2015

Au Burundi, après avoir versé près de six millions d'euros à l'ONU pour organiser des élections et après un mois de travail de ses observateurs, la mission d'observation des élections de l'Union européenne décide de plier bagage estimant que les conditions pour la tenue d'élections démocratiques crédibles le 5 juin prochain pour les législatives et ensuite pour la présidentielle, ne sont pas réunies. Un avis que semble partager le reste de la communauté internationale et l'Eglise catholique qui annonçait également jeudi son départ du processus électoral au Burundi.

Dépités, les observateurs de l'Union européenne seront dans l'avion dès ce vendredi. Après un mois de travail et de crise au Burundi, la conclusion de leur chef adjoint José Antonio de Gabriel est sans appel : impossible d'organiser des élections libres et crédibles aujourd'hui au Burundi.

« Il existe une atmosphère de peur et d'intimidation généralisée, explique-t-il. Il faudrait organiser la démobilisation des milices et notamment je parle des Imbonerakure, et il faudra aussi créer des conditions pour que le droit de manifestation soit respecté. Le parti au gouvernement [CNDD-FDD, ndlr] seulement, avec d'autres dans les sphères du parti au pouvoir, ont fait campagne jusqu'à présent. Il y a un problème grave qui est la fermeture de médias indépendants. Cette fermeture a coupé les voies de communication naturelles pour la campagne électorale dans un pays comme le Burundi. »

Une opposition qui n'a pas pu faire campagne en raison de l'insécurité. Des médias indépendants interdits d'antenne ou limités intentionnellement, selon l'UE, à la capitale, avec des journalistes menacés ou en exil à l'étranger. Des manifestations interdites et lourdement réprimées. Et l'assassinat samedi de l'opposant Zedi Feruzi. Pour l'UE, la situation est intenable.

L'Eglise quitte la Cén

Jeudi, l'Eglise catholique, principale force religieuse du pays, a elle aussi annoncé son départ de la Cén, la Commission électorale nationale indépendante, lors de la conférence des évêques, expliquant ne pas pouvoir cautionner une élection pleine de lacunes. De nombreux prêtres occupent des postes importants au sein des commissions électorales au niveau des communes et des provinces.

Ce retrait est donc un nouveau coup dur pour le pouvoir. Tout cela après les pressions internationales comme celles de la Belgique, premier bailleur du Burundi, menaçant de couper son aide si le président Nkurunziza s'entêtait à briguer un troisième mandat, isolant encore un peu plus le pouvoir burundais à l'international.

Mais qu'à cela ne tienne, la Commission électorale persiste et signe. Elle continuera à préparer les échéances électorales, explique son porte-parole Prosper Ntahorwamiye :

Le processus électoral continue avec ou sans la participation des prêtres catholiques. Cela ne va rien perturber.

Burundi: la protestation contre le troisième mandat de Nkurunziza s'affirme

Marie-France Cros (avec AFP)/le jeudi 28 mai 2015

International

Docteur en droit et chargé de cours à l'Institut de politique de développement de l'Université d'Anvers, Stef Vandeginste s'est spécialisé sur le Burundi. Nous l'avons interrogé sur l'arrêt de la Cour constitutionnelle de ce pays, qui a établi, le 4 mai, que le président Pierre Nkurunziza pouvait se présenter à un troisième mandat, après que le vice-président de la Cour eut fui le pays en affirmant que les juges opposés à cette interprétation avaient été menacés.

Le Dr Vandeginste souligne que, légitime ou non, cet arrêt ne peut faire l'objet d'aucun recours et est devenu source de droit constitutionnel au Burundi. Mais il conteste une partie du raisonnement de la Cour pour arriver à ses conclusions.

RWANDA :

Rwanda to Debate Constitutional Change to Keep President in Power for Third Term

By Matthieu Jublin/news.vice.com/May 28, 2015

Rwanda's parliament announced Wednesday it would debate modifying the country's constitution in order to allow President Paul Kagame to stand for a third term in the 2017 presidential elections. The debate, which will take place over the summer, was triggered by petitions signed by nearly 2

million Rwandans who say they are in favor of changing the East African nation's constitution.

The head of Rwanda's chamber of deputies, Donatilla Mukabalisa, told AFP that parliament had "received 2 million requests" from people — amounting to roughly 20 percent of the population — to amend article 101 of the constitution, which currently limits the number of terms to two. Mukabalisa said that both chambers of parliament would debate the matter between June 5 and August 4.

By many measures, Rwanda in the last 20 years is a success story: Its economy is one of the fastest growing in Africa, life expectancy has increased, malaria deaths are down, infrastructure investment is up, education has improved -- all under Kagame. But it may have come at a price.

"Given the highly authoritarian exercise of power practiced by the president and his team, there are strong doubts over the authenticity of these signatures," said French historian Gérard Prunier, an expert on East Africa. Speaking to VICE News on Thursday, Prunier conceded that, despite his suspicions over the legitimacy of the petitions, "Paul Kagame will probably have no trouble holding on to power."

No repeat of Burundi

Kagame — who has been described as a strongman for his oppressive brand of governance — has been at the forefront of Rwandan politics since 1994, when his party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), put an end to the genocide by Hutu extremists that left 800,000 people dead. After serving as vice president and defense minister, Kagame won two presidential elections with overwhelming majorities: one in 2003, with 95 percent of votes, the other in 2010, with 93 percent.

Rwanda's opposition has accused Kagame of crushing dissent and muzzling the opposition since coming to power. The ruling RPF party dominates both chambers of parliament and seems unwilling to relinquish power despite the two-term cap on the presidency. "Kagame's political base is very powerful. He controls all state institutions and the RPF has a strong presence throughout the small national territory," Prunier told VICE News.

But despite the president's political ambitions, Prunier thinks Rwanda is unlikely to tread in the footsteps of its neighbor Burundi, where the incumbent president's bid for a third term has led to mass protests and a coup attempt. "Unlike Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza, who is also after a third term, President Kagame is being much more canny and will probably avoid a popular uprising," said Prunier.

Assassination of Opposition Figure in Burundi Derails Talks Between Protesters and Government

Waves of refugees have recently crossed over the border from Burundi into Rwanda, fleeing the ongoing political crisis and outbreaks of violence in Burundi. According to the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR), some 25,000 people have left Burundi for Rwanda, which is already home to 70,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2 million signatures

Speaking to AFP Wednesday, London-based Rwandan exile and activist René Mugenzi said the 2 million signatures were nothing more than "a show" aimed at lending credibility to the idea that "constitutional change has been requested by the people." According to Mugenzi, many Rwandans are forced to sign petitions to hold onto their jobs and to prevent social exclusion.

Mukabalisa has denied the allegations, saying that, "This is an initiative by the people [...] they have not in any way been forced."

The current regime has taken much credit for the country's economic growth since the genocide. "Paul Kagame is a very good manager and has drawn extensively on the country's resources," explained Prunier, "even though only a minority of people benefit from the economic benefits, and even though the so-called 'Rwandan Miracle' is partly financed by foreign investors."

With a GDP growth somewhere between 5 and 10 percent over the last 20 years and a high level of political stability, Rwanda has emerged as one of Africa's most attractive economic markets in recent years.

RDC CONGO :

RDC : le groupe kenyan Equity Bank rachète 79% d'actions dans ProCredit Bank
le 28 mai, 2015/radiokapi.net

Le groupe kenyan Equity bank a racheté 79% d'actions dans ProCrédit Bank Congo. L'accord entre les deux entreprises a été signé mercredi 26 mai à Kinshasa. Equity inscrit ce rachat dans le cadre de son programme d'expansion à travers dix pays africains.

Cet accord est pour l'instant soumis à l'approbation des banques centrales du Congo et du Kenya. Cet assentiment donnera alors à l'effectivité de la transaction au terme de laquelle, Equity deviendra le plus grand actionnaire de Procréait Bank avec 79 %.

Ces actions étaient détenues avant la vente par la société belge d'investissement pour les pays en développement et la fondation Doen d'Allemagne.

Pour le directeur général de ProCrédit Congo, sa banque a dans ses livres plus de 170 000 comptes actifs à ses clients.

Ce changement d'actionnaire n'aura non plus d'influence sur le personnel de la banque, a-t-il précisé.

Il a ajouté que la banque continuera à fournir le service de qualité tel que voulu par les clients.

La kényane Equity est déjà active en Tanzanie, en Ouganda, au Rwanda et au Soudan du Sud. Son intention annoncée est de consacrer près de 200 millions d'euros pour s'installer dans 10 nouveaux pays d'Afrique.

Peu bancarisée et fortement peuplée, la RD Congo sera, à en croire le directeur général de ProCréait bank, la première marche de ce programme d'expansion.

UGANDA :

Fraud and deceit at the heart of Uganda adoptions to United States
By Reuters/29 May 2015

By Tom Esslemont and Katy Migiro

LONDON/KAMPALA, May 28 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Ugandan families have been bribed, tricked or coerced into giving up their children to U.S. citizens and other foreigners for adoption, a Thomson Reuters Foundation investigation has found.

Leaked documents, court data and a series of exclusive interviews with officials, whistleblowers, victims and prospective adoptive parents has revealed:

- a culture of corruption in which children's birth histories are at times manipulated to make them appear as orphans when they are not
- a lucrative industry in which lawyers acting on behalf of foreign applicants receive large payments
- a mushrooming network of unregistered childcare institutions through which children are primed for adoption
- an absence of reliable court data to counteract allegations of negligence or fraud by probation officers involved in the adoption process

Across Uganda church-backed orphanages and private child care institutions are springing up.

"Fifteen years ago there were just two dozen orphanages, now there are as many as 400 such institutions," said Stella Ayo-Odongo, executive director of the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network.

"But this is steeped in problems. Intercountry adoptions constitute a booming industry in which child traffickers are profiteering," she said.

According to Ugandan law, foreigners are required to spend at least three years in the country before adopting, but they can acquire a legal guardianship days after arriving and complete the process back home.

Data from the U.S. State Department shows that 201 children were adopted from Uganda by U.S. citizens in 2013/2014, making it the third biggest source country in Africa. In all, Americans adopted 6,441 children from around the world last year.

Uganda's parliament is expected to pass tighter legislation that would ban legal guardianships, with a view to signing an international treaty, the Hague Adoption Convention, but corruption and bureaucracy have stalled the process, critics say.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia, two of the biggest source countries for adopted African children last year, have taken steps to restrict overseas applications.

"Uganda must ratify the Hague Adoption Convention urgently," said Ayo-Odongo. "It was previously not an issue, but now, with levels of child trafficking at such a high level, it should be a priority."

Ugandan children regularly pass through Kampala's Entebbe international airport.

On a given day they can be seen hand-in-hand with white adoptive parents at the departure gate.

Many of these adoptions will lead to successful unions between the child and his or her adoptive parents.

But others will never make it this far.

In Uganda, a lack of available documents makes it impossible to determine how many adoptions involve fraud, but four government officials told the Thomson Reuters Foundation the problem was widespread.

"Some lawyers lie about the birth history of the child," said Stella Ogwang, an official in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, which oversees child welfare.

Another senior government official, who did not want to be named, described Uganda's adoption system as "a racket".

One of the lawyers known for handling intercountry adoption cases denied involvement in fraud, saying that the cases she handled involved orphans abandoned by their families.

Another lawyer, Peter Nyombi, said he was not aware of any fraud in the adoption cases he handled.

"We carry out extensive investigations into the background of the children," said Nyombi, who is a former attorney general.

BIRTH HISTORY

Data shows that a large proportion of the children put forward for adoption have surviving relatives.

A leaked study into foreign adoptions in Uganda, overseen by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, found only a fifth of all adopted children it surveyed were orphans who had lost both parents.

The report, funded by the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF and yet to be published, also found that biological parents and relatives gave up their children in the belief they would receive financial incentives from adoptive parents and children's homes.

Many of them, the report finds, come to learn that their child's identity has been changed fraudulently while in the institution, without their knowledge.

The report's author, Hope Among, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that securing access to court files took several months and certain files were withheld by the judiciary.

A court registrar, Muse Musimbi, declined to say why this was the case and said he could only discuss the matter with the court files in front of him.

"Before an application [for guardianship] comes to court, the child's identity may have been changed several times by the lawyers or those acting for them in the child care institutions," said the Ministry of Gender and Labour's Ogwang.

Intercountry adoption is widely believed to be a lucrative business. Officials estimate a Ugandan lawyer can earn \$30,000 during the adoption process.

Two lawyers involved in the process refused to comment on their earnings. Another lawyer, who did not want to be named, said he earns \$4,000 for each case he handles.

Peter Nyombi said he earned less than \$10,000 per legal guardianship.

"Thirty thousand dollars? I would be a very rich man if I were charging that amount," said Nyombi, laughing.

Uganda's per capita GNI (Gross National Income) was \$600 in 2013, according to the World Bank, well below the average for sub-Saharan Africa.

'FRAUD'

A former High Court registrar said that some probation officers, on instruction from lawyers, were in the habit of fraudulently copying and pasting information from old documents to ensure the application would be rubber stamped.

"Some of our lawyers have gone to the extent of confusing parents and relatives of the victims to present forged information. They tell the parents to lie, to pretend to be dead, in return for small payments," said Moses Binonga, coordinator of the anti-human trafficking task force at Uganda's Interior Ministry.

The task of protecting children is made harder by the high levels of deprivation.

Twenty-four percent of Ugandan children under five live in extreme poverty, according to a 2014 UNICEF report.

One lawyer involved in the adoption process said this makes determining a child's origins all the harder.

"Many of the children who are the subject of guardianship come from very disadvantaged backgrounds ... where members of the family may not be educated and have records on the dates of birth or death of a parent," said the lawyer, who did not want to be named.

Staff at some of Kampala's child care institutions told the Thomson Reuters Foundation that many of the children are abandoned by poor family members who say they can no longer afford to care for them.

It was in one children's home that a former social worker, who wishes to remain anonymous, first encountered what he believes was fraud.

He lost his job after accusing colleagues of falsifying documents in the files of three children.

"It was the job of the social worker to document the background of a child," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Sometimes my colleagues would change those files, so that the children could be sent out [for adoption by foreigners]."

On one occasion the social worker said he noticed paperwork showing that the three children had surviving biological parents or relatives. He believes the documents were removed while his back was turned.

"When I got back from holiday, the three children were gone," he said.

The former employee said he tried to raise the alarm.

"The probation officers told me it was too late to intervene. That was when I realised I had made enemies inside the orphanage," he said.

'TRAFFICKING'

Moses Binonga, from the anti-trafficking task force, said corruption in the adoption system is widespread, but believes the American system is at fault.

"There are cases where we have discovered fraud in the adoption process. When we have complained to the U.S. government they have not returned those children [from America]; they say they are American citizens and cannot be brought back," Binonga said.

"It makes us think there is a hidden agenda. The Americans are quiet on this," he said, adding that the current system exposes children to child trafficking.

An official from the U.S. State Department said this was an "imprecise and misleading" description, because trafficking involved "intent to ultimately exploit the victim."

But campaigners also point to a lack of transparency or follow-up of cases of intercountry adoptions which do not work out.

U.S. government figures for 2013/2014 show 91 out of 6,441 children adopted from overseas were abandoned or relinquished by their adoptive parents in America, ending up in state custody.

The Dutch government suspended intercountry adoptions from Uganda in 2012, because of what it perceived to be a lack of transparency in the procedure.

The U.S. State Department said it is not considering a ban on intercountry adoptions from Uganda.

"The Department of State believes intercountry adoption can provide permanent, loving homes to children in need when children cannot be cared for in their country of birth," the State Department official said.

U.S. AGENCIES

More than 200 U.S.-based adoption agencies, of which a number work in Uganda, assist American applicants to complete adoptions in their home state, but in a number of cases, the process stalls.

"America's regulatory approach has proven short-sighted, for the failure to provide sufficient safeguards has created a system designed and destined to fail," says David Smolin, Professor of Law at Samford University, Alabama.

"Under this 'slash and burn adoption' ... too many adoption agencies with too much money to spend descend upon vulnerable developing nations, leading to abusive practices, corruption, scandals, and then closures," Smolin said.

He speaks from experience.

Smolin adopted two girls from India in 1998 only to find they had been kidnapped by an orphanage and their mother was searching for them.

He says the problem is perpetuated by the fact that "adoptive parents are sometimes reluctant to report abusive practices to the State Department, based on fears of their agency, peer pressure from the adoption community, and fears that the child might be forcibly sent back".

Adoption agencies take a different view.

"Legal guardianships are recognised by the United States, they are recognised by its embassy in Uganda, so we are thinking if there is an opportunity to save the children, we can," said Tendai Masiriri, vice president, Bethany Christian Services adoption agency, which has operated in Uganda since 2011.

"Children are suffering in orphanages, right?" he said.

Those involved in Uganda's child welfare reforms blame the orphanages for what they see as their failure to investigate cases.

"Orphanages have their own agenda. They make up stories about children and cannot always verify information because they are not involved from the outset," said Ogwang of the Gender and Labour Ministry.

Ogwang, an opponent of intercountry adoptions, believes the state shares responsibility for what she sees as deep seated corruption.

"The problem is with the system, you cannot blame the biological parents."

(Editing by Belinda Goldsmith, Katie Nguyen and Tim Pearce)

SOUTH AFRICA :

Thabo Mbeki denies FIFA World Cup bribe claims

AFP | 29 mai, 2015

South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki Friday joined government officials in denying allegations that the country paid bribes to secure the right to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Mbeki was president when South Africa won the bid in 2004, becoming the first African country to host the event.

"I am not aware of anybody who solicited a bribe from the government for the purpose of our country being awarded the right to host the World Cup," he said in statement, adding "no public money was ever used to pay a bribe."

He stated that his government would "never have paid any bribe even if it were solicited."

This week a damning indictment by US authorities alleged bundles of cash in a briefcase were

handed over at a Paris hotel as a bribe by a "high-ranking South African bid committee official".

The name of the South African official has not been revealed.

The indictment also revealed that the South Africa government agreed that \$10 million that was due to be paid to South Africa to run the World Cup was instead transferred from FIFA's funds to pay bribes to former FIFA vice president Jack Warner.

This week, several high ranking FIFA officials were arrested in Zurich in dawn raids by Swiss police acting at US request in what has become the biggest corruption scandal to rock the football governing body.

They face a range of charges including racketeering and money laundering, spanning 24 years.

On Wednesday South Africa's Minister of Sport Fikile Mbalula rejected the corruption allegations, criticising the US for acting without consulting with South Africa.

FIFA allegations unlikely to resonate in South Africa

dw.de/28.05.2015

As South Africa becomes the latest nation to face corruption allegations can FIFA President Sepp Blatter count on the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to save him for his reelection? Sertan Sanderson reports.

In football, or at least in elections for FIFA's presidency, Africa has a voice. With 54 voting members, out of a total of 209, the continent's CAF is the best represented in the sport. Every vote counts the same, and until very recently, Asian and African members looked guaranteed to carry incumbent Sepp Blatter to re-election.

Traditionally, CAF has held FIFA President Sepp Blatter in high regard on account of his personal support of African football, facilitating more than just soccer with his involvement in Africa's developing nations. But could that balance of power possibly change?

With UEFA in a longstanding and open revolt against Sepp Blatter and the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) now taking a critical stance on the 79-year-old incumbent president, CAF's reluctance to have FIFA's election on Friday postponed may speak volumes by itself. On Wednesday, CAF was unequivocal in its continuing support for Blatter, and little seems likely to have changed after these latest allegations.

South Africa, one of Africa's biggest footballing nations, took center stage in the new inquiries looking into FIFA's current corruption scandal. One banner headline from US Attorney General Loretta Lynch was the allegation that a leading South African bid committee member handed "a briefcase containing bundles of US currency" to a family member of Jack Warner. Warner, a former FIFA vice president, is among the prime targets in the FIFA sting, seemingly after investigators managed to secure his sons' cooperation.

South Africa denies corruption allegations

The South African Football Association (SAFA) on Thursday rejected allegations that it had paid \$10 million in bribes to Warner. SAFA spokesman Dominic Chimhavi said that everything was done by the book when South Africa placed its proposal and won the bid.

"The bid was made by people with high integrity, including the late Nelson Mandela and [former president] Thabo Mbeki," Chimhavi added. "We are disappointed at the baseless and untested allegations, and request proof from anyone who has contrary evidence."

Minister of Sport Fikile Mbalula said that all 2010 FIFA World Cup funds had long been accounted for and audited, and that the South African government had not received any official indictments from US prosecutors in the case to date. He called those who actually were involved in FIFA corruption scandal "criminals," and yet described allegations against the 2010 bid as "reckless at best."

"I've stated that it's clear and categorical: we have not transferred any money to any individual of that sort."

Corruption all-too-familiar across South Africa

Heather Walker, former editor of the weekly newspaper "The South African," did not expect major domestic fallout, despite the allegations.

"People are up in arms about Russia and Qatar, but the World Cup in South Africa five years ago was really successful by all accounts. In a place like South Africa, you're just likely to hear a lot of 'so what?' when it comes to such small-time corruption claims, which, if they did happen, actually helped the country in the bigger picture," she told Deutsche Welle.

South Africa is indeed no stranger to corruption. The release of various reports since 2014 on President Jacob Zuma's private residence at Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal Province has been staining the reputation of the country's post-apartheid success. Thursday's final police report cleared the president of paying back costs accrued in adding a swimming pool, a chicken run, an amphitheater and a visitors' center to his homestead - mainly on account of "security concerns." South Africa's collective attention may have been dedicated to a different corruption scandal altogether.

Legacy of the 2010 World Cup

But Nkandla has commonly been regarded as just the tip of an iceberg leading from top government officials down to the local police in most townships.

When the 2010 FIFA World Cup arrived in South Africa the world turned its focus to the legacy of Nelson Mandela's new South Africa, showcasing how the nation had overcome the shadow of apartheid. New infrastructure - from several football stadiums to public transportation links - was built from scratch, involving tenders for building contracts reaching from the Cape of Good Hope to the waters of the Indian Ocean. It was regarded as South Africa's moment to shine and widely hailed as a success.

In the five years since the 2010 World Cup, South Africa has attracted record numbers of tourists - a lasting legacy of the World Cup itself. Publications like the "New York Times" and the "Daily Telegraph" have repeatedly ranked the country as one of the most desirable places to travel to - if you overlook its crime and corruption.

When compared to other domestic allegations of corruption, perhaps some realist South Africans, like Heather Walker, might consider bribes towards Africa's first ever World Cup money relatively well spent. The 2010 World Cup's success might also prove an excellent investment for Sepp Blatter's re-election bid on Friday.

'Untouchable' Jacob Zuma Shrugs Off South African Scandals

bloomberg.com/2015-05-29

South African President Jacob Zuma is proving to be an ultimate political survivor.

Implicated in scandal after scandal throughout his political career, he's batted them all away.

He appeared to overcome the latest controversy on Thursday when the police minister absolved him of any blame for the squandering of taxpayers' money in a 215-million-rand (\$17.7 million) upgrade of his private home. Prior to that, he escaped trial on charges of taking more than 700 bribes from arms dealers, was acquitted of rape charges and admitted he fathered a child out of wedlock with a friend's daughter.

The formula for his success is simple. Zuma dominates the ruling African National Congress, and the ANC controls South Africa. He has appointed allies to key posts and shored up his popular support by extending welfare grants to more than 16 million people, a quarter of the population.

"He is untouchable," Mzukisi Qobo, a politics lecturer at the University of Pretoria, said by phone on Thursday. "Those who have positions in government will remain silent because they will not want to lose the patronage they have. It's a vain hope to think that any leader or member of the ANC will stand up to him and not suffer consequences."

The ANC, which is still widely credited with ending white minority rule, has won more than 60 percent support in every election since the first multiracial vote in 1994. Zuma, 73, won a second and final five-year term in May last year, after the ANC won 62 percent.

Economy Struggles

Africa's second-biggest economy is struggling to recover from the slowest growth last year since a recession in 2009 as rolling blackouts by state-owned utility Eskom Holdings SOC Ltd. limit production. Gross domestic product grew an annualized 1.3 percent in the first quarter as factory output contracted 2.4 percent. The rand has weakened 14 percent against the dollar in the past year and traded at 12.1474 per dollar at 8:24 a.m. in Johannesburg.

The day before Police Minister Nkosinathi Nhleko cleared Zuma of misspending on his home in Nkandla in eastern KwaZulu-Natal province, the president stood at the podium in the National Assembly and mocked opposition party members who demand that he repay some of the money.

"Some people who could not pronounce Nkandla, they have now learned Nkandla, Nkandla, Nkandla," Zuma said giggling. "They have no substantive political issues to raise. It emphasizes the poverty of politics in our opposition parties."

Swimming Pool

While Public Protector Thuli Madonsela found that Zuma unfairly benefited from his home upgrade, Nhleko said the construction of a swimming pool and enclosures for his cattle and chickens were necessary security features.

Government officials and contractors were liable for misspending and cost overruns, Nhleko said, echoing the findings of a panel of ANC lawmakers.

"The fact is that a private residence has been turned into a state residence because the president

does some state business from it,” Ben Turok, a veteran ANC member and former chairman of Parliament’s ethics committee, said by phone from Cape Town. “I am at a loss for words.”

Opposition parties rejected Nhleko’s findings and said they wouldn’t allow Zuma to get away with what they considered the theft of public funds.

Zuma’s Responsibility

“The minister’s report demonstrates that President Zuma’s henchmen will do anything to shield the president from his responsibility,” Mmusi Maimane, the leader of the main opposition Democratic Alliance, told reporters in Cape Town on Thursday. “This battle is far from over.”

Yet with the ANC’s overwhelming majority in parliament, opposition parties have failed twice to pass motions of no confidence in Zuma. Armed police threw lawmakers of the Economic Freedom Fighters out of the National Assembly when they disrupted Zuma’s annual state-of-the-nation speech.

“It shows the weakness of a political system when a party spends too long in power,” Aubrey Matshiqi, a researcher at the Helen Suzman Foundation in Johannesburg, said by phone. “It becomes comfortable of its support base and its leadership become inured to the need of the ordinary citizens.”

TANZANIA :

Bus crash in Tanzania kills Peace Corps volunteer from Minnesota

05/28/2015/twincities.com

The Peace Corps is mourning the death of a Minnesota volunteer, who died last weekend in a traffic accident in Africa, where he was stationed.

The international development agency said Robert "Robbie" Lehman, 23, of Minneapolis was killed Sunday when the bus he was riding in crashed near the city of Mbeya in southwestern Tanzania. Local media reported that two other people died and two dozen were injured in the crash, which happened when the bus tried to pass a truck but instead crashed into a river.

In announcing Lehman's death, Peace Corps director Carrie Hessler-Radelet said in a statement that "Robbie dedicated his life to serving others.

"He cared deeply for those around him, whether they lived across the street or around the world. He knew no boundaries and was willing to take on anything. The entire Peace Corps family is devastated by this tragic loss, and our thoughts and prayers are with the Lehman family."

Lehman was a 2010 graduate of Edina High School. In 2014, he graduated from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., where he majored in biology and earned a merit scholarship.

The Peace Corps said Lehman was serving as a community health volunteer in Tanzania. He prepared for his service by working with those living with HIV/AIDS in his community and learning Swahili on his own.

The agency's statement added:

"Robbie lived a life of service. He traveled with his church youth group to underserved communities around the United States, helping at local food pantries, day care centers and thrift shops.

In his home state of Minnesota, Robbie taught elementary school students about environmental protection, volunteered with patients in the emergency room, and was part of a mentorship program for local youth.

"Prior to his Peace Corps service, Robbie wrote that the "golden rule: treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself" was the "simplest yet most powerful advice I've ever received," saying "it leads to a selfless life." He wrote that "at an early age I understood the importance of giving from my parents" and that "the act of helping others is contagious."

He is survived by his parents, Dr. Gregory T. Lehman and Dr. Dawn L. Martin, and sisters Sarah Lehman and Laura Lehman.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday at Judson Memorial Baptist Church, 4101 Harriet Ave. S., in Minneapolis.

A rush to help Burundi's refugee children in Tanzania
unicef.org/29/05/2015

By UNICEF Tanzania

As violence continues to force Burundians to flee their homes, UNICEF and its partners are working urgently to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to thousands of refugee children in neighbouring Tanzania, including many who have arrived on their own.

KIGOMA, United Republic of Tanzania, 28 May 2015 – It has been more than a week since Mariama Kwizera and her two siblings fled Burundi and crossed the border into Tanzania. For the past two years, Mariama has been taking care of her brother and sister without external support.

"Seven years ago, I came home to find both our parents killed by the militias," recalls the 16-year-old. "Our uncle then took care of us, but he died two years ago."

With the escalating violence in Burundi, Mariama and her family were forced to make a decision. "We felt threatened," she says. "The security situation in our country was getting worse every day. We had no parents and nobody to protect us... People were being killed or beaten up – that's the reason why we decided to leave, the whole family."

At great risk

Amid the chaos of conflict, children like Mariama and her siblings are at great risk. Locating these children and protecting them is a high priority for UNICEF.

More than 80,000 people, the majority of them children, have fled violent clashes in Burundi to neighbouring Great Lakes countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania. This number is expected to rise, as the situation in Burundi remains volatile.

Nearly 47,000 refugees have arrived in Tanzania alone. Most have been gathering at the Kagunga

reception area, on the border with Burundi. From there, they are being transported to the Nyarugusu camp by boat, then bus.

According to UNICEF Tanzania Representative Dr. Jama Gulaid, it is largely a crisis facing children. “Eighty-three per cent of the population on the move that has been registered in Tanzania are children...[W]e have at least 1,200* children who have been screened here at the [Kigoma] stadium, who are unaccompanied or separated from their parents.”

Indeed, as Burundians have fled to Tanzania, a sizeable number of children have been forcibly separated from their families, through a variety of causes. They are exposed to further confusion, and stress, and are at greater risk of violence and abuse.

UNICEF Tanzania Chief of Communication Sandra Bisin explains that efforts are being undertaken to address these issues. “As an immediate response, UNICEF is deploying on the ground 30 social welfare officers that have been trained in child protection for identification, the documentation and identification of alternative care options for these children, as well as referral to adequate services,” she says.

Outbreak of cholera

A new threat looms for children who have fled the violence. Over the past few days, there have been reports of nearly 4,000 cases of diarrhoea, including 32 deaths. About 39 per cent of those admitted to the cholera treatment centre in Nyarugusu have been children under 5 years old.

There is considerable concern that rapid spread of the disease could lead to a larger outbreak that already overburdened relief efforts may not be able to contain.

UNICEF Burundi Chief of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Amah Klutse reported from Kagunga reception area that, “For us, it’s very important to solve the situation of sanitation here on the site by providing support to treat the cholera cases [and] also to support in terms of water supply and sanitation.”

UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Government, the Tanzania Red Cross Societies and other partners have rushed relief supplies to Tanzania’s north-western border with Burundi. Obstacles are many. There have been nearly 20,000 refugees gathered just at Kagunga, a village on Lake Tanganyika three hours by boat from the regional capital of the Kigoma region. Getting supplies to Kagunga, which has a village health post ill-equipped for such an outbreak, was a race against the clock.

UNICEF has dispatched protective equipment to the camps: a cholera treatment unit able to treat 100 cases of cholera, cholera beds, oral rehydration salts, zinc and antibiotics, jerry cans and buckets. In addition, UNICEF has mobilized nutrition supplies for children, including Vitamin A and high-energy food supplements.

UNICEF and partners are working hard to provide the burgeoning refugee population with the protection they need and the water, sanitation, health and nutrition supplies that will brace them for what lies ahead.

What lies behind, Mariama fears, is the life her little family knew. “I made the decision to leave because of my siblings,” she says. “I fear for their safety. Whether we get peace or not, I would rather stay in Tanzania because I am sure that whatever we left behind is gone.”

*As of 26 May 2015, the number had risen to 1,600.

KENYA :

Kenya Airways gets Sh4.2b Treasury bailout

BY Paul Wafula/standardmedia.co.ke/Friday, May 29th 2015

NAIROBI: National carrier, Kenya Airways, has gotten a critical lifeline after the Government gave it a Sh4.2 billion loan to help run its operations.

“Kenya Airways is facing challenges because their revenues have gone down due to the Ebola epidemic and the slump in tourism, therefore the carrier has been given a loan of Sh4.2 billion through the supplementary estimates,” the statement to Parliament read in part. The airline has been having difficulties paying its staff and meeting the day-to-day costs of running its operations after a slump in tourist numbers hit its bottom-line. Its financial position had been worsened by the fact that capital expenditure to pay for new planes coincided with its current cash crunch position.

Kenya has been hit by a series of terror attacks, with the latest being the attack at Garissa University College which saw 148 people among them students and policemen killed by the Al-Shabaab terror group. This has seen several countries, among them the United Kingdom and the United States, issue travel advisories, which have impacted negatively on Kenya’s tourism industry. Europe and the US are a key source tourist market.

The airline says it has been destabilised by a combination of factors among them fuel price volatility, intense competition and more recently, the threat of terrorism and epidemics that have had an adverse impact at the global travel.

Trouble for the airline started last year, marked by a Sh10.4 billion net loss in the six months to September 30. This was a dip from the Sh384 million in net profit made over a similar period last year. And the airline expects to make another loss this year, which would make it the third loss in a row. Kenya Airways, which says it bleeds every time the Kenyan brand is battered, issued a profit warning for its full-year earnings last week.

ANGOLA :

New Charges Against Angolan Journalist a 'Mockery of Justice'

28 May 2015/telesurtv.net

Marques found that the top Angolan generals prosecuting him are responsible for human rights abuses in the diamond industry. Journalist Rafael Marques had reason to celebrate last week after being acquitted of criminal libel charges brought against him by the generals he exposed for complicity in human rights abuses. On Thursday, however, Marques had to return to court in Luanda and got a six-month suspended sentence. Marques was acquitted from charges last week because he conceded that, possibly, the military elite was not informed about the 500 cases of torture and 100 killings carried out in the Lunda Norte province where foreign companies have been generating a billion dollars in profits from diamond mining. In his book “Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola,” Marques found that nine top Angolan generals are responsible for these acts of violence as big shareholders in the diamond extraction and owners of the security company involved in the violations. The generals proceeded to prosecute Marques by bringing a total of 11 charges against the journalist for defamation and libel in 2013.

For charges to be dismissed, Marques also had to concede to no longer publish further editions of his book, which the public prosecutor later considered an admission of guilt. Marques could consequently be convicted for 'malicious prosecution' rather than libel. "The public prosecutor put words in my mouth. He said that I had apologized, and had admitted to have written falsehoods," Marques told Index on Censorship before the sentence. News about the charges brought human rights organizations to strongly condemn Angola for its repression of freedom of expression. "After more than two years of continuous judicial harassment, solely based on Mr. Marques de Moraes human rights activities, this last decision makes yet another mockery of justice in Angola," said Karim Lahidji, President of the International Federation for Human Rights. Marques is reported appeal to the courts to continue his battle.

AU/AFRICA :

Nigeria's president Goodluck Jonathan to hand over to former dictator Muhammadu Buhari
telegraph.co.uk/29 May 2015

Mr Buhari, famous for his 1980s "war on indiscipline", has promised his countrymen a more democratic approach during his second time in office

Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's newly-elected president, will be inaugurated on Friday as his predecessor Goodluck Jonathan steps down from office.

Mr Jonathan has won praise for conceding defeat gracefully in Africa's most populous nation, which has been beset by political violence and never before seen the handover of power from a sitting president to an opposition candidate.

On Thursday, he took Mr Buhari and Yemi Osinbajo, his vice-president-elect, on a tour of the presidential villa, Aso Rock, in Abuja, before submitting the final paperwork for the handover.

Speaking during a public address afterwards, Mr Buhari told his soon-to-be predecessor that his telephone call to him confirming he had lost, by 2.57 million of around 60 million votes cast, had "changed the course of Nigeria's political history".

"If you had attempted to make things difficult, you could have made things difficult and that would have been at the expense of the lives of poor Nigerians, but you choose the part of honour and may God help all of us. Thank you very much, your excellency," Mr Buhari said.

But the transition has not been without acrimony. Mr Buhari's All Progressives Congress party has accused Mr Jonathan's camp of seeking to "sabotage" his takeover by orchestrating a fuel crisis which grounded planes, closed banks and broadcasters, and interrupted mobile phone signals when wholesalers withheld their wares citing government debt.

"While we are ready, willing and able to begin to address the mammoth challenges facing us as a nation as soon as we assume office, we will not hesitate for a second to keep Nigerians informed of how we have been brought to this sorry pass, with a view to avoiding such a tragic turn in the future," Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party's secretary, said in a statement.

Mr Buhari, a gap-toothed former military dictator who ruled Nigeria in the 1980s, was known for a paternalistic approach which saw civil servants who were late for work made to do frog jumps and

people whipped by soldiers for failing to queue at bus stops.

He was selected over Mr Jonathan who was perceived to have been weak at handling an insurgency by Islamic extremists and soft on corruption.

In a statement this week, Mr Buhari told Nigerians to expect "no more business as usual".

"Nigeria has indeed entered a new dispensation," he said in a statement reported by the local Premium Times news website. "My administration does not intend to repeat the same mistakes made by previous governments."

He has made pledges to boost defence spending, cut corruption and track down the more than 200 schoolgirls abducted from the village of Chibok last year by Boko Haram, the Islamic militants whose name means "Western education is sinful".

The group has claimed at least 15,000 lives since 2009 but has been beaten back in a recent military drive.

With a broad shopping-list of demands from electors, Chris Ngwodo, a Nigerian political commentator, said Mr Buhari's first priority would be to assemble a good PR team to "manage expectations".

"He has to be able to temper the level of expectation but without being a damp squib. It has to be skilfully managed," he said.

Heads of state, including South Africa's Jacob Zuma, and Western dignitaries such as US secretary of state John Kerry, are to attend Friday's inauguration, which starts at 9am. After Boko Haram attacked the 50th anniversary of Nigeria's independence celebrations in 2010, security is expected to be tight.

David Cameron is not expected to attend but received a visit from Mr Buhari in Downing Street this week, in which he promised technical assistance in fighting corruption and further training for Nigerian troops fighting Boko Haram.

The promises were made in return for a pledge from the Nigerian president-in-waiting that he would seek to secure Nigeria's borders and slow the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean.

Le Nigérian Akinwumi Adesina nouveau président de la BAD

Par RFI /29-05-2015

Opération élection rondement menée à Abidjan. En une journée et comme prévu, le nouveau président de la Banque africaine de développement a été élu lors de l'assemblée annuelle de l'institution financière. Le nouveau patron de la BAD s'appelle Akinwumi Adesina.

Il va falloir désormais retenir le nom d'Akinwumi Adesina sur la scène économique africaine. Agé de 55 ans, ce Nigérian était tout sourire ce jeudi soir sur le plateau du palais des congrès à l'hôtel Ivoire où le président du conseil des gouverneurs, l'Ivoirien Albert Mabri Toikeusse, a annoncé son élection à la tête de la BAD.

Une élection nette et sans bavure. Au terme du dernier tour de scrutin, Akinwumi Adesina a remporté la majorité des suffrages avec 58,10 % des voix, loin devant le Tchadien Bedoumra

Kordjé, 30 %, et la Cap-Verdienne Cristina Duarte qui n'aura obtenu que 10 % des votes.

Lors de son discours, le nouveau patron de l'institution financière africaine de développement a rendu un chaleureux hommage à son prédécesseur, le Rwandais Donald Kaberuka qui lui passera le relais en septembre. Il a également salué la ministre des Finances du Nigeria, sa compatriote Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, qui l'a soutenu activement durant toute la campagne qui a précédé l'élection.

A présent, le plus dur reste à faire pour Akinwumi Adesina que l'on dit aussi compétent sur les questions de finances que d'infrastructures ou d'agriculture. C'est d'ailleurs sur ce dernier chapitre que cet agronome s'est illustré dans son pays en permettant au Nigeria d'accroître considérablement ses rendements agricoles. C'est aussi sur les rendements du continent que l'on observera à présent les options de financement qu'il prendra au nom de la BAD.

■ Un parcours sans faute

« Un économiste réformiste, passionné par la lutte contre la pauvreté en Afrique ». C'est par cette profession de foi que cet homme, toujours souriant et portant invariablement des noeuds papillon, se définit dans le portrait qu'il a adressé aux gouverneurs de la banque.

Akinwumi Adesina passe pour avoir été l'homme qui a révolutionné l'agriculture au Nigeria en réduisant notamment le phénomène de corruption dans le domaine des achats d'intrants. L'effet immédiat s'est fait ressentir par une augmentation conséquente de la production agricole dans un pays de 170 millions d'habitants aux besoins alimentaires énormes. « Je ne crois pas en de petits projets isolés qui permettent simplement de gérer des problèmes sans les résoudre, mais plus à des solutions qui marchent à l'échelle de millions de personnes », déclare-t-il pour exposer sa vision pour l'Afrique.

Parfaitement francophone, ayant écrit de nombreux essais et ouvrages sur les questions de développement et ancien vice-président de l'Alliance pour la révolution verte en Afrique, sa carrière se déroule comme un long parcours sans faute. Des arguments et des qualités qui ont visiblement séduit les 80 actionnaires de la BAD puisqu'au fil des six votes successifs qui ont eu lieu jeudi, Akinwumi Adesina a toujours fait la course en tête des suffrages face à ses sept concurrents.

Seul handicap : au cours de son brillant parcours, Akinwumi Adesina n'a jamais approché le monde de la banque ou de la finance.

Early humans left Africa through Egypt, study says

By Joseph Dussault/csmonitor.com/May 28, 2015

New genetic research suggests that humans migrated out of Africa through Egypt, not Ethiopia.

When a group of modern humans began their exodus out of Africa some 60,000 years ago, Egypt may have been the last stop.

By testing the genetic makeup of different African populations, researchers were able to follow humanity's first steps into Eurasia. According to a study published today in the "American Journal of Human Genetics," genetic similarities between Egyptians and Eurasians suggests that Pleistocene emigrants travelled through Egypt.

The "out-of-Africa" theory is the most widely recognized model for the movement of modern humans into Eurasia. It postulates that, at some point after the evolution of the first anatomically

modern humans in Africa, there was a large migration out of the continent. Paleoanthropologists estimate that the move occurred between 125,000 and 60,000 years ago, but disagree on whether there was a single exodus or many. The prehistoric travelers, who may have used land bridges and simple rafts to cross, became the first modern human populations in Europe and Asia. (Fossil evidence suggests that Neanderthals already occupied the continent).

Recent studies have adopted the view that modern humans originated in Ethiopia and left Africa through Bab-el-Mandeb, a strait linking the Horn of Africa with the Arabian Peninsula. But an international study, led by University of Cambridge researcher Luca Pagani, may prove otherwise.

Dr. Pagani and colleagues gathered genetic information from 100 Egyptians and 25 individuals from each of five Ethiopian populations. If the route to Eurasia passed through East Africa, Ethiopians should be more genetically similar to Eurasians than Egyptians are. But according to Pagani, the opposite is true.

“In our research, we generated the first comprehensive set of unbiased genomic data from Northeast Africans and observed, after controlling for recent migrations, a higher genetic similarity between Egyptians and Eurasians than between Ethiopians and Eurasians,” Pagani said in a press release.

In other words, prehistoric humans probably took a northern route out of Africa, traveling through Egypt in the process. If correct, Pagani’s findings could improve the understanding of our evolutionary background, both geographical and cultural. And the genomic data collected by Pagani and his colleagues will be made freely available, benefiting future anthropological and medical studies.

“The most exciting consequence of our results is to have unveiled an episode of the evolutionary past of all Eurasians, therefore potentially improving the knowledge of billions of people on their deep biological history,” Pagani told LiveScience.

Africa rising leaves the poor behind

29 May 2015/Thuletho Zwane/mg.co.za

The continent has shown strong economic growth in the past decade, but poverty has worsened.

The consensus among African leaders at the 50th annual meeting of the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, this week was that, although the continent has shown strong economic growth over the past 10 years, it has not been inclusive.

The leaders were referring to the African Economic Outlook 2015 report, which estimates the economic growth figures will be 4.5% in 2015 and 5% in 2016, both of which are considerably higher than the 3.5% and 3.9% in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

The report forecasts foreign direct investment will reach \$73.5-billion in 2015, with the bulk of it coming from China and South African companies, which have become leading investors in the continent.

But it became clear from the discussions that translating economic growth into economic transformation to create employment, alleviate poverty and reduce inequality has not happened. Globally, human development is lowest in Africa, and the report found that huge inequalities persisted, with the youth and women being worse off than men.

In an interview with the Mail & Guardian in Abidjan on Tuesday, South Africa's finance minister, Nhlanhla Nene, said Africa had seen a lot of growth but poverty had worsened. This was because the policies that supported growth had failed to recognise that economic growth did not trickle down to the poor and most vulnerable in society.

Nene said the policies were chiefly directed at sectors such as finance and information-communication technology, which had benefited from foreign direct investment but were not socially redistributive in nature.

He said policies should be implemented that would ensure that, when the economy grew, the benefits would be shared by taxation, which should be redistributive and progressive, and take care of those who were poor. If that didn't happen, Africa would see more explosive situations such as the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa.

"We learnt a number of lessons through this unfortunate xenophobia we experienced. It is a symptom of a bigger problem. The opportunities we have in the country are not adequate for young people. But we have learned a lesson; we are also looking at the challenges of unemployment and poverty," he said.

South Africa needed to pay more attention to agriculture, and the country needed to take advantage of its young labour force, he said. Innovative technology needed to be introduced to agriculture so that it could attract young people.

Inequality had its roots in history and economic exclusion followed racial lines.

"In addressing that, we introduced BEE [black economic empowerment] and other policies, but these have been viewed as impediments to growth. Impressive growth patterns do not translate into why we are leaving the poor behind. BEE and the transformation agenda are critical to South Africa," Nene said.

He said South Africa's policies were now aimed at promoting industrial development, agriculture, agro-processing and absorbing low-skilled labour. But the focus should also be on the quality of growth.

"It is not about the numbers. If the growth is such that the vast majority are poor and unemployed, we need to shift focus. We need to identify opportunities where we can take part on the next level of the value chain, like manufacturing," Nene said.

UN/AFRICA :

Conflicts displace 3.5 million people in Africa's Sahel region - UN

By: Agence France-Presse/May 29, 2015

GENEVA, Switzerland -- The number of people displaced by conflicts in Africa's Sahel has more than doubled in just over a year to a staggering 3.5 million, the United Nations said Thursday.

At the beginning of 2014, the UN humanitarian agency had reported that around 1.6 million people were displaced across the nine Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

The region is home to some of the world's poorest countries that have long been plagued by food insecurity, malnutrition and epidemics.

But UN Assistant Secretary General Robert Piper, who coordinates the UN's humanitarian work in the Sahel, warned that on top of those chronic crises the region was facing a "very troubling dynamic" in which displacement linked to conflicts was "really escalating dramatically."

Across the region, he told reporters in Geneva, "there is a very big increase in the number of people affected by conflict, who have been pushed from their homes and from their livelihoods as a result."

The violence by Boko Haram militants in northeastern Nigeria, and spilling over into neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger, has spurred much of the displacement.

The Boko Haram insurgency has claimed at least 15,000 lives and forced some 1.5 million people to flee their homes since 2009.

Also fuelling displacement is the continued unrest in northern Mali, which has been dogged by violence from jihadists groups that seized control from Tuareg rebels before being routed by a French-led international intervention in 2013.

Around 150,000 Malians had fled to neighboring countries by the middle of last year, while an equal number were displaced inside the country.

Despite peaceful elections after the French operation, the country remains divided and the north has seen a recent upsurge in attacks that has forced some 31,000 people from their homes in the past two weeks alone, the World Food Program said Tuesday.

'Severe protection crisis'

Conflicts outside the Sahel are also contributing to the displacement in the region, with violence in places like Darfur and the Central African Republic sending refugees fleeing into Sahel countries, Piper said.

The widespread displacement is taking a heavy toll on host communities which are themselves often poor and "extraordinarily vulnerable," he added.

In the southern Niger Diffa region, for instance, where more than half of inhabitants are already food insecure, a flood of Nigerian refugees has doubled the population, putting "tremendous pressure" on food, water and other resources, Piper said.

The violence forcing so many people to flee is also hampering aid organizations' ability to reach and protect the most vulnerable, he said.

On top of this "very, very severe protection crisis," UN operations in Sahel are facing a significant funding shortfall, having so far received only 22 percent of the \$2.0 billion they have appealed for in the region this year.

"This has very practical consequences in terms of what we can and can't do in terms of the numbers of people that we can and can't reach," Piper said, urging donor countries to step up.

US/AFRICA :

Dream of adopting child from Africa becomes nightmare for U.S. couple

Fri May 29, 2015/Reuters

By Tom Esslemont

LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - When Emily and Matt Knudsen began the lengthy process of adopting a child from Africa, they believed they would be saving an orphan in distress.

"Our biggest desire was to meet a need, to adopt a child who truly had no other options," said Emily, at the family's home near San Francisco, California.

Motivated by their Christian faith, the couple signed up with one of more than 200 adoption agencies specialising in matching Americans with children in developing countries.

The agency, Little Miracles, told them about Uganda, where faith-based orphanages and child care institutions have proliferated amid rampant poverty.

The agency, which says it has carried out 31 successful international adoptions of Ugandan children, presented the couple with opportunities to help African children orphaned by, and infected with, HIV.

"We prayed and researched what we thought we could handle and what kind of special needs we thought we were equipped to care for," said full-time mother Emily, 33.

"After lots of research we knew how manageable HIV could be - especially in the U.S." she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in emailed comments.

However, after receiving details about the first child from the agency, the Knudsens quickly became sceptical.

"We ultimately had to say no to [the first] referral, [a baby girl] because we didn't seem to think the information we got matched up," Emily said.

The couple also had to decline the second child they were offered because a member of the child's biological family in Uganda came forward to protest.

The third referral the Knudsens were matched with was a 2-year-old HIV-positive boy, who was in a children's home.

"We were told that he was from a part of the country that was hard to travel to, that his family was poor and could not afford to care for [the boy]," said Emily.

In its response, Little Miracles (LMI) denied the allegations, adding that client confidentiality prevented it from discussing the details of specific cases.

"The first child referred to [the Knudsens] was successfully and without issue adopted subsequently by [another] family," said Lori Scott, executive director of Little Miracles.

Little Miracles said it was unable to disclose the details of the second case, adding it had provided the Knudsens with full information.

After signing the contract with the agency for the third attempt to adopt, the Knudsens said they paid \$15,000 in adoption fees. As they received more information about the boy's background, they detected inconsistencies.

"This is false," said Little Miracles' Scott, adding that the agency had a record of the payments it received. "We do not know where this number originates but this is absolutely not the amount paid to LMI for services," she said.

ROAD BLOCKS

"Many facts presented by the agency differed from what ended up being true, the most important one being that the boy's mother actually, desperately, wanted to keep her son," Emily Knudsen said.

"The biggest thing that got our wheels turning was when [the agency] told us that 'for reasons they couldn't get into' our adoption process was going to be on hold for a while," she said.

"[Little Miracles] told us they had hit some road blocks. When I asked further questions they wouldn't give any straight answers," said Emily Knudsen.

Scott denied the adoption was ever put 'on hold' and said all queries raised by the family were documented and answered.

"The child was no longer eligible for placement, due to circumstances we cannot discuss due to confidentiality," she said.

"We have no context as to what the family is referencing here. We had regular, documented communication with the family until they requested to close out their case with LMI," said Scott.

The Knudsens said some of the money they paid went to the lawyer working on behalf of the agency in Uganda.

The lawyer, Dorah Mirembe, "basically took our money and didn't pay us back anything," Emily said.

Mirembe told the Thomson Reuters Foundation she was paid \$2,300. "We had done part of our work," she said.

"[Dorah Mirembe] was essentially helping us adopt a child who had been trafficked and should never have been placed for adoption," said Emily.

Disputing this, Scott said "birth parents do have a right to change their mind, within the laws of that country, for whatever reason."

Denying trafficking was an issue in this case, Mirembe said all the paperwork, including a child welfare report, was in place when she met the birth parents of the child.

"I talked to them about the intended placement for their child and explained to them the implications of legal guardianship," she said, adding this was a mandatory procedure.

"This particular family (mother and father) seemed to know the implications of the intended placement," said Mirembe.

INVESTIGATOR

At this stage the Knudsens decided they couldn't continue with the adoption process and hired an investigator in Uganda to help reunite the boy with his biological mother.

"Of course, the agency was livid. They threatened us, telling us they wouldn't work with us any more and wouldn't pay us back any of our fees," Emily said.

Scott said Little Miracles' documentation does not show that it was 'livid' about the Knudsens' withdrawal.

"We received an email with their decision, we confirmed receipt of their email, and wrote back that we would close out their case," said Scott.

The Knudsens said Little Miracles mainly communicated with them by phone.

The family, who have four children, two of whom are adopted from Guatemala, said they have learned much with the benefit of hindsight.

"At the end of the day adoption is a lucrative business," said Emily Knudsen.

"It is sad that people have corrupted the adoption world and made it all about themselves," she said.

Scott said families are informed of the risks involved in adoption. "If a biological relative ... makes a decision that they no longer wish to continue an adoption plan for their child, this will take precedence over the adoption process," she added.

Emily and Matt Knudsen said they continue to support the Ugandan boy and his mother. They say there needs to be more emphasis on assisting families, rather than intercountry adoption.

"There are many families who even act in God's name ... who want that cute little black baby, even at the expense of tearing a birth family apart," Emily said.

"That's why I think there needs to be greater checks and balances. I would never want this to happen to another family - neither the one adopting nor the birth family," she said.

Morocco: What a simulated battle tells us about a true ally

May 28, 2015/thehill.com

At a time of escalating turmoil and uncertainty in the Middle East and North Africa, the U.S. military's African Lion exercise, Phase II of which wrapped up last week in Agadir, Morocco, is another reminder of just how important it is that the United States continue to strengthen its relationships in the region, and of how we have a strong friend in Morocco.

African Lion, which began in the 1990s as a biennial U.S.-Morocco effort, is now an annual event -- and the largest annual U.S. joint military exercise in Africa. Some 2,500 military personnel from not just the US and Morocco, but also the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Senegal, and Tunisia, trained for weeks for the exercise, designed to address potential crises by building, as the U.S.

Marine Corps put it, “familiarity and operational proficiency.”

In Phase I of this year’s exercise, held in February in Agadir, a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) was created to prepare for a simulated international crisis, taking troops through a scenario that focused on humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and rapid and stable deployment operations.

U.S. Air Forces Europe Air National Guard adviser Col. Pierre Oury, who oversaw the air training component of the exercise, told Military Times, “The Moroccans... have one of the most capable air forces on the African continent, and we are very interested in working with their capabilities, and accomplishing objectives such as sharing our experiences and building stronger relationships.”

This relationship building has gone, and continues to go, a long way. Morocco, which was named a major non-NATO ally in 2004, remains the only Maghreb country that is a member of the U.S.’s anti-ISIL coalition. It was among the first Arab countries to condemn the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., and since then, it has enhanced its cooperation with the U.S. on military and counterterrorism efforts through data-sharing, law enforcement partnerships, and the interdiction of financing for terrorists. In 2011, Morocco joined the U.S. and 28 other countries as a founding member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum. In 2014, during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, Morocco and the US signed a Framework for Cooperation on Training for Civilian Security Services.

Equally important is Morocco’s leadership -- at home in the region -- in keeping the peace and fighting both terrorism and its root causes. Morocco offers expertise on its multifaceted approach, which includes traditional counterterrorism efforts, a focus on economic and human development, and an innovative international program for Imam training. Morocco has contributed troops to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa; gave France, Spain and Portugal access to its bases during the Mali crisis; and has hosted the UN-brokered peace talks between Libya’s warring factions. Recognizing, along with the U.S., the importance of a thriving continent, Morocco has strengthened its trade, economic, and social ties with its African neighbors, signing numerous pacts on everything from trade, to banking, to education, to healthcare, to agriculture with Senegal, Chad, Gabon and Cote d’Ivoire, among others.

As the U.S. confronts harsh realities in the Middle East and Africa, African Lion reminds us again that we are not alone there.

Gabriel is a former U.S. ambassador to Morocco, and currently advises the government of Morocco.

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

CHINA/AFRICA :

Ghana's vice president calls for closer ties with China, eyes more investment

Source:Xinhua/2015-5-29

Ghana's Vice President Kwesi Amissah- Arthur has called for closer relations between Ghana and China, particularly in terms of trade and investment, the state-run Ghanaian Times reported.

Amissah-Arthur made the remarks when he was receiving a Chinese delegation led by Zhou Yuxiao, China's Special Envoy for the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), in the capital Accra on Wednesday.

The five-member delegation was to inform the government about the sixth FOCAC Ministerial Meeting due to take place late this year in South Africa.

The vice president called for China's private sector to take advantage of "the favorable environment" to invest in Ghana, and Chinese financial institutions to set up business in the country so as to assist Ghanaian traders doing business in China.

He commended the Chinese government for offering credit to projects in the country such as the Atuabo Gas Processing Plant, roads, railway lines and other infrastructure construction.

The 55-year-old diplomatic relations between the two nations should be further strengthened, he said.

Zhou said that China had earmarked about 500 billion US dollars for overseas development, and urged Ghana to take advantage of the opportunity.

He said the FOCAC has been around for over 15 years and efforts are ongoing to make it even bigger and better.

He noted that China is bent on transforming the traditional trade relations with its partners to a new mode of cooperation in industrialization, adding that China is ready to transfer its know-how to African countries.

Air China puts direct route to SA on hold

2015-05-29/traveller24.news24.com

Cape Town - Air China has cancelled the launch of its much-anticipated direct flights to South Africa.

Air China spokesperson Jane Hu told Traveller24, "The flight has been cancelled due to xenophobic attacks last month. China did issue a travel warning to our citizens not to travel to South Africa at that stage.

"People are worried about this country," said Hu.

According to Hu, SA's revision of its visa rules also affected the airline's decision. On 1 June, children under the age of 18 years who are travelling to or from South Africa will be required to

have an unabridged birth certificate.

"It's not only the children's policy but also finger printer (Biometric data) may cause more trouble in China. As you may know, most countries offer more loose visa policies for Chinese (citizens), as China is a huge market."

SA's requirement for all visa applications to be done in person in order to submit biometric data has been problematic due to the lack of visa facilitation centres in China, resulting in potential visitors needing to travel to Beijing and Shanghai in order to apply. In a recent statement in Parliament, Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom confirmed he was concerned about the decline in visitor number from South Africa's key source markets, including China.

While the direct flight has been postponed until 29 October, Hu confirmed the airline would be placing an alert message regarding the unabridged birth certificate requirements on Air China's booking system in order to remind passengers about it.

"We will have a team here for our new flight and will have a policy in place, (for) now we don't have our own flight yet. "

Airports Company South Africa Spokesperson (Acsa) Colin Naidoo confirmed to Traveller24 that Air China had cancelled their slots to South Africa for the season running from 31 August to 23 October.

Air China was expected to start operating a direct route to Johannesburg from Beijing in May 2015, following an announcement that SAA had cancelled its R1bn loss making Beijing route as part of its Long Term Turnaround strategy and entered into a code share agreement with Air China in order to strengthen connectivity between the two countries.

When asked how this affected SAA's plans, SAAspokesperson Tlali Tali said, " We will, through Hong Kong and other code share partners, continue to offer good connections into China."

Hu echoed the sentiment saying, "We are working with SAA for more code share flights."

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

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