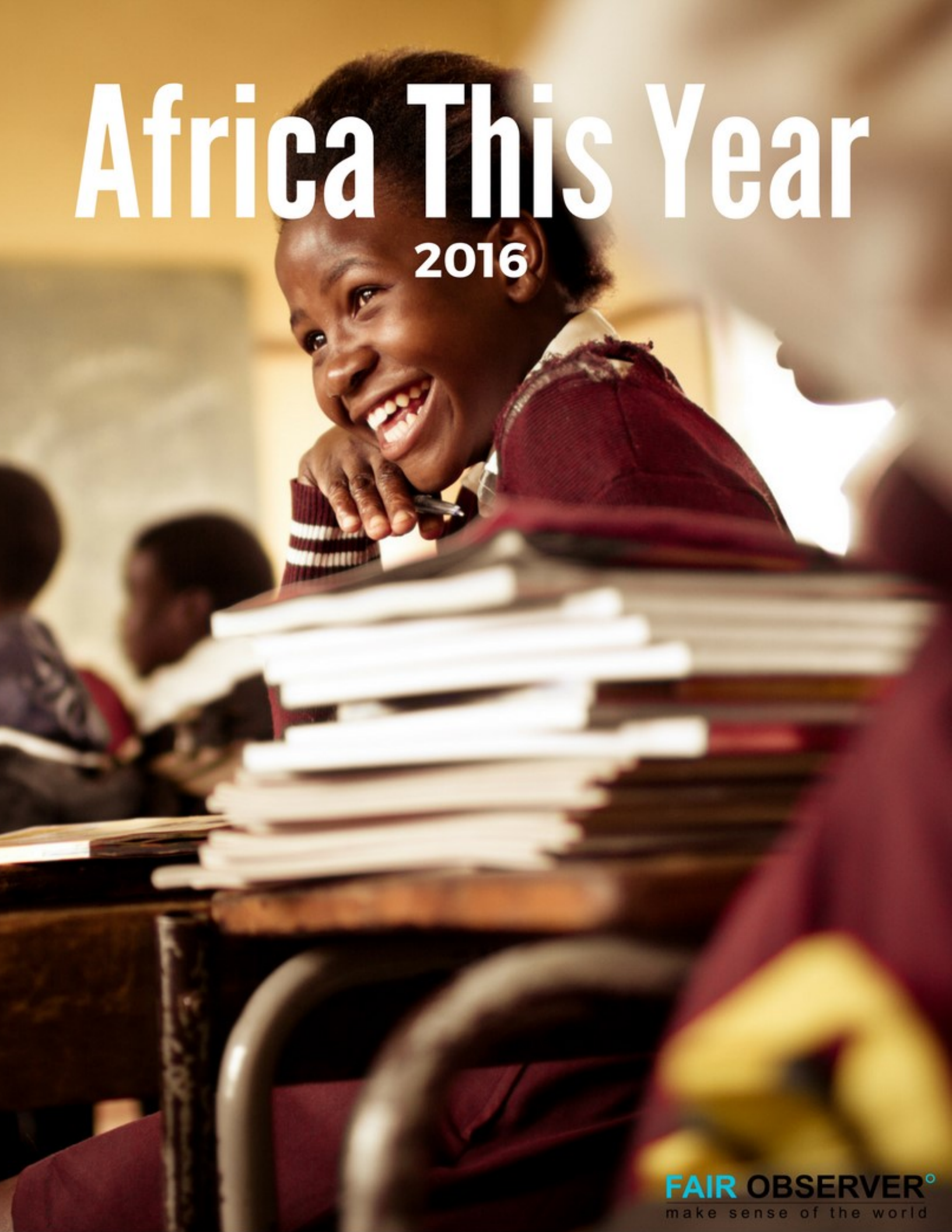


Africa This Year

2016



Africa This Year

2016



Samuel Ollunga & Atul Singh

Atul Singh (Founder, CEO & Editor-in-Chief)

Abul-Hasanat Siddique (Co-Founder, COO & Managing Editor)

Anna Pivovarchuk (Co-Founder, Deputy Managing & Culture Editor)

Fair Observer | 461 Harbor Blvd | Belmont | CA 94002 | USA

www.fairobserver.com | info@fairobserver.com

The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.

Copyright © 2017 Fair Observer

Photo Credit: [Epicurean](#), iStock, Standard License

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

CONTENTS

Authors	5
About Fair Observer	6
Share Your Perspective	7
Africa This Year: 2016	8
Global Economic Slowdown Afflicts Africa	10
Democracy on Trial	15
A Welcome Time For Change	20
Taking Stock of Strides in Justice, Peace and Prosperity	25
Toward a More Respected African Union	30
Dreams of Unity in Uncertain Times	36
Pan-Africanism Means Colonial Borders Must Go	42
Democracy Deepens Amidst Economic Woes	48
Saving the Village to Transform the Continent	54
International Institutions Stumble	60
Africa in the Age of Donald Trump	68
The Season of Elections, Hope and Change	75

AUTHORS

Samuel Ollunga is a corporate lawyer who was educated at Harvard in the US and Cambridge in Britain. He grew up in Kenya and is still deeply involved with Africa. He has worked for leading Wall Street firms on a number of leading transactions. Ollunga has wide interests ranging from international law and politics to sport and the arts. He aims to contribute to Africa's development—economic, political and social—in the coming years.

Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He teaches Political Economy at the University of California, Berkeley and at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar where he also teaches World History. He studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School.

ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct [educational and training programs](#) for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

We provide context, analysis and multiple perspectives on world news, politics, economics, business and culture. Our multimedia journal is recognized by the US Library of Congress with International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) 2372-9112.

We have a [crowdsourced journalism model](#) that combines a wide funnel with a strong filter. This means that while anyone can write for us, every article we publish has to meet our editorial guidelines. Already, we have more than [1,800 contributors](#) from over 70 countries, including former prime ministers and Nobel laureates, leading academics and eminent professionals, journalists and students.

Fair Observer is a partner of the World Bank and the United Nations Foundation.

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Join our community of more than [1,800 contributors](#) to publish your perspective, share your narrative and shape the global discourse. Become a Fair Observer and help us make sense of the world.

Remember, we produce a crowdsourced multimedia journal and welcome content in all forms: reports, articles, videos, photo features and infographics. Think of us as a global community like Medium, Al Jazeera English or *The Guardian's* Comment is Free on world affairs. You could also compare us to *The Huffington Post*, except that we work closely with our contributors, provide feedback and enable them to achieve their potential.

We have a reputation for being thoughtful and insightful. The US Library of Congress recognizes us as a journal with ISSN 2372-9112 and publishing with us puts you in a select circle.

For further information, please visit www.fairobsver.com or contact us at submissions@fairobsver.com.

Africa This Year: 2016

In 2016, Fair Observer chronicled the political, social, cultural and economic issues shaping Africa every month.

For the last few years, these authors have been discussing Africa with passion and, dare we say, *panache*. One of us has roots near Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake, and, in many ways, the lifeline of the continent's longest river, the Nile. The other was born across the Arabian Sea in Vasco da Gama, a naval base that India has inherited from its Portuguese colonizers. Lest you forget, good old Vasco first docked off Africa and then sailed with the help of a [Gujarati sea pilot to India](#). So, the story of Europe, India, the Middle East and, indeed, the rest of the world is inextricably intertwined with Africa.

The authors crossed paths in 2010 because of a rather decent lawyer named Amit Singh. One of them had worked with this former Oxford debater while the other happened to be his brother. The authors discovered that they enjoyed making sense of the world around them and believed that narratives from around the globe mattered. Both had studied in three continents and saw themselves as citizens of the world. Essentially, both authors were eager to tell the story of Africa through a new prism. Both aimed to provide deep thinking, fresh insights and rich context whilst avoiding the prejudices of former imperial masters, as well as the pitfalls of most postcolonial writers.

Both authors believed then and, certainly now, that we are seeing something significant stirring deep in the soul of Africa. The continent faces enormous challenges. In 2016, African economies suffered immensely as commodity prices crashed. Poverty still stalks the land and rising inequality, as in the rest of the world, is causing immense disquiet to anyone remotely thoughtful. Images of conflict and civil war regularly flash on news screens. Water is not exactly abundant in certain parts of the continent. Yet a closer examination reveals a continent that is changing subtly and radically.

Literacy is on the rise. Health care in Africa is improving albeit in fits and starts. Not only are elections taking place, but some African "big men" are vacating their thrones. A new civic engagement is emerging and so is a new discourse. Even as many African states are experiencing centrifugal forces, the African Union is providing centripetal

energy to the continent. It is striving to improve intra-African trade and has even launched the first African passports.

African regional arrangements such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community, and the East African Community are growing stronger. Not only are these supranational institutions deepening inter-state ties and seeking to create common markets, they are also reverting to the precolonial regional economic rhythms. The African Union, regional organizations and even individual states are becoming more assertive on the world stage. They no longer take as kindly to foreign prescriptions or outside intervention. Africa is growing in confidence and is in greater control of its own destiny than at any time since Vasco first appeared on its shores.

If this is the African century, then ours is a quest to chronicle the political, social, cultural and economic narratives of our era. Ours is a labor of love to record for posterity the forces shaping this great continent. Our aim is to inform and educate the world about Africa even as we play our part in influencing the direction, pace and cadence of the continent's journey.

Samuel Ollunga

Contributor & Lawyer

Atul Singh

Founder, CEO & Editor-in-Chief

January 2017



Global Economic Slowdown Afflicts Africa

January 31, 2016

The IMF predicts lower growth rates for Africa because of lower commodity prices and higher borrowing costs.

Africa is the birthplace of humanity and the continent with the oldest history. Yet it is the youngest continent still seeking its tryst with destiny. Africa's storied narrative is as enduring as the Nile, and yet it has long been ignored by mainstream media.

Therefore, we have decided to right that wrong. We have decided to tell you the story of Africa with its multitudinous cadences and intricate plots. The great continent is on the march despite all trials and tribulations. It bubbles with the energy of youth and pulsates with hope for the 21st century. There is a great story waiting to be told and, therefore, we begin our first chapter of Africa This Month.

GLOBAL SLOWDOWN

This has been a tough month for the global economy. [Markets have tumbled](#) from Tokyo and Dubai to London and New York. The slowing Chinese economy is casting a dark shadow on Latin America and Africa. Its insatiable hunger for commodities is waning. As a result, Brazil is in deep recession. [South Africa is not doing](#) much better and [other African economies](#) such as Angola, Ghana and Mozambique are suffering too. The Chinese no longer need as much copper, tin, iron, oil and other raw materials. So, commodity prices have crashed and so have African economies.

In 2015, African exports to China amounted to \$67 billion. This was [38% less than the figure for 2014](#). Chinese investment in Africa also fell by 40% in the first six months of 2015. Nigeria and South Africa, the two largest African economies, are in dire straits. Their currencies have fallen to [record lows](#). This has increased the cost of servicing their debt. Credit rating agencies have lowered or downgraded their outlook. Hence, borrowing has become more expensive. Unsurprisingly, the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) predicts [lower growth rates for Africa](#) because of lower commodity prices and higher borrowing costs.

Economic downturn is particularly damaging for Nigeria. President Muhammadu Buhari is taking on Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group that has long unleashed violence in the region. This costs money. However, Nigeria earns 80% of its revenues from oil and does not have much cash in the bank these days. Former President Goodluck Jonathan's national security adviser is under arrest. He is [accused of stealing \\$2 billion](#) earmarked for buying weapons to fight Boko Haram. The specter of potential unrest in the Niger Delta is raising its head.

Drought is worsening the economic situation in many parts of Africa. Ethiopia's northern Tigray and Afar regions are suffering their worst drought in 50 years. A less severe drought in 1984 killed more than a million Ethiopians. Many think Ethiopia's drought to be "[as bad for children as Syria's war](#)." More than 10 million people need food aid and 400,000 children suffer malnutrition. In southern Africa, [14 million people face hunger](#) because last year's harvest was damaged by El Nino.

Poor political choices are hurting countries like South Africa. Inflation is rising and so is unemployment. In December 2015, President Jacob Zuma replaced the respected Nhlanelahle Nene with a nonentity named David Van Rooyen as finance minister. The markets lost confidence and Zuma appointed a third person to this position in desperation. Pravin Gordhan, South Africa's finance minister, faces a big challenge to reform an economy of shopping malls, ballooning deficits and rampant corruption.

THE HORROR OF TERROR

In Nigeria, Buhari has claimed that the war against Boko Haram is "technically" won. Yet the group continues to strike targets at will. It has launched several attacks in the northern parts of Nigeria and Cameroon. Suicide bombers are targeting crowded areas such as marketplaces. On January 25, [such bombers killed at least 35 people](#) in a marketplace in the village of Bodo in northern Cameroon.

In other parts of West Africa, trouble continues to brew. On January 15, al-Murabitoun, an affiliate terrorist group of al-Qaeda led by the elusive Mokhtar Belmokhtar, [attacked Ouagadougou](#), the capital of Burkina Faso. It was a carbon copy of the attack on an upscale hotel in Mali last year, and 32 people from 18 countries were killed.

In East Africa, Kenya's campaign against al-Shabab in Somalia suffered its most devastating blow to date. On January 15, al-Shabab militants overran a Kenyan army base in southwestern Somalia. The group claims to have killed about 100 troops, a figure the Kenyan government vehemently denies while keeping its lips tight about the death toll.

After this incident, [Kenyan forces withdrew](#) from two military bases in the region. This vacuum has reportedly been filled by al-Shabab. Yet Kenya has declared it will remain in Somalia, and other African states seem to be set for the long haul too.

In East Africa, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) forces, comprising over 22,000 troops and police from Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, Burundi and Sierra-Leone, lead the fight against al-Shabab. About 8,700 African Union (AU) troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin are battling Boko Haram. The US is providing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. France and Britain are helping too.

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

There are 19 general elections scheduled for 2016 on the continent. Yet it is Burundi's controversial poll last year that is most in the news. Its president has proved to be most unlike Nelson Mandela and has amended the constitution to give himself a third term. This has led to rioting and even a failed coup. Hundreds are dead and human rights abuses are suspected. So alarming are the unfolding events that the AU passed a resolution to send troops to restore peace in Burundi. The government has declared that it would consider AU soldiers as an occupying force.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has won 98% of referendum votes removing term limits. This means that he could stay in power forever. Kagame seems to be popular in Rwanda because he has presided over a period of high economic growth. Yet it does not bode well that the president is unable to leave office.

The bright spot in Africa is Tanzania. In 2015, it elected a president with the lowest victory margin in its history. Yet John Pombe Magufuli, nicknamed "The Bulldozer" for eminently reasonable reasons, has arguably had the best start to a presidency in the

country's colorful history. In the few months since his election, he has lived up to his campaign slogan, "*Hapa kazi tu*," Swahili for "Here, it is all about work."

In a break from the past, Magufuli suspended lavish Independence Day celebrations. Instead, he used the day to embark on a public environmental cleaning exercise. Magufuli has curtailed unnecessary foreign travel by government officials. He has taken on corruption. He fired several top ranking state personnel, including the country's anti-corruption tsar. He personally inspects several government offices to ascertain whether officials were performing their duties and has warned lazy officers that their days of apathy are numbered. So far, Tanzanians and other Africans are cheering him on.

Yet even Magufuli has to be kept under watch. His government has been accused of intolerance toward dissent because it shut down and banned a weekly newspaper on the grounds it was inciting violence. Tanzanians might do well to remember to keep the feet of the powerful close to the fire.

EBOLA: OVER OR NOT?

After ravaging West Africa for nearly three years, the World Health Organization (WHO) served up some good news for the start of the year. It announced on January 14 that the Ebola epidemic was over—that the disease had been eradicated. Before celebrations could begin in earnest, the WHO reported the next day that there was a probable new case of infection in Sierra Leone. This serves to demonstrate how robust and long-drawn-out the fight against this deadly disease has been. Even a single case attracts minute attention.

It is safe to expect, following lessons learned over the last three years, that the WHO and the countries affected by Ebola are battle-hardened. They have the expertise to deal with future incidences of the disease. The key question is whether the WHO has the ability to deal with a new epidemic that may break out. The recent outbreak of the Zika virus in South and Central America is a potential case in point.

Although Zika is not new to the continent, it is spreading in Brazil in an alarming way. Zika was first discovered in Uganda. The continent has not faced the explosive contagion that is unfolding in Latin America. In Brazil, experts believe Zika leads to a below-average head size and a smaller than average brain size in children born to

mothers suffering from the virus—a condition known as microcephaly. It shows that Africa remains highly vulnerable to a contagion, old or new.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Democracy on Trial

February 29, 2016

Despite economic woes, Africa still presents opportunities, and despite challenges, democracy is marching forward in the continent.

As per an ancient African proverb, the prettiest flowers bloom amidst the sharpest thorns. Amara Konneh, the finance minister of Liberia, is one such flower. This “land of the free” is not quite as free as it sounds. Members of Liberia’s Senate are used to perks and privileges. Konneh wants to trim them and Liberian senators want to send him to jail for his efforts.

WABENZI PERKS

Prima facie, this sounds like yet another horror story from Africa. However, Konneh’s case demonstrates that a new wind of democratization and accountability is blowing through the continent. Named the “2014 African Finance Minister of the Year,” the fact that Konneh’s steady hands guide the country’s fiscal docket is heartening. That he is trimming the perks and privileges of senators is historic.

In Africa, [Wabenzi elites](#) have long led a charmed life. They ride in flashy Mercedes Benz cars, drink San Pellegrino sparkling water and wear Rolex gold watches to flaunt their status. Africa has long suffered from the “big man syndrome,” but leaders like Konneh are challenging this culture of ostentation and impunity. Konneh has [won plaudits](#) for curbing corruption and waste.

This month, Konneh set his eyes on high-flying senators. He is cutting down their personal allowances for vehicles, homes and other goodies to save Liberia \$1.2 million. This may not sound like a lot of money, but Liberia’s economy is in shambles. The [2014 Ebola outbreak](#) killed nearly 5,000 people. One of the poorest countries in the world came to the brink of collapse as businesses folded and foreign investors pulled out. Konneh has been trying to stabilize and revitalize the economy at the time of a global slowdown.

Liberia’s senators have responded by ordering Konneh’s arrest. The *Wabenzis* are outraged that the finance minister has the temerity to tamper with them. For the

moment, the arrest order is in abeyance because one senator has filed a motion for reconsideration. Konneh might still be arrested, but he has challenged the big men of Liberia. It will be hard for them to put the genie of accountability back into the bottle.

ELECTION SAGAS

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has been president of Uganda since 1986. On February 18, 2016, he was re-elected. Like [Robert Mugabe](#), Museveni shows no signs of stepping down. Museveni has melded “[state and party, bending institutions to his will, from the security forces to the judiciary.](#)” Kadumba Busingye, a lawyer and a poet, calls Museveni “a sophisticated dictator in a suit.” The wily old fox ruggedly navigated his electoral designs through teeming disgruntled opposition street protests and the cacophony of accusations of rigging. [Violence broke out before the election](#), heralding a chorus of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the electoral process. Since then, armed soldiers have been patrolling the streets of Kampala, the national capital. Their job is to intimidate voters who feel cheated, angry and disenfranchised.

Ugandan elections were far from free. International observers expressed their discontentment with both the overarching democratic climate of the country, and the independence and transparency of the electoral commission. Kizza Besigye, Museveni’s former physician and longstanding opponent, was arrested several times. On one occasion, Besigye was detained for disrupting traffic. More generally, Ugandan authorities argued that Besigye was a threat to peace. The media have been muzzled and there is reason to despair. Yet there is much reason to hope.

This land that has seen the likes of Idi Amin is in every facet, leaps and bounds to the good now. Museveni is not executing his opponents summarily. Besigye addressed large rallies in both urban and rural areas. The latter have historically been Museveni’s stronghold, but large numbers turned up to hear Besigye. On February 13, Museveni and Besigye squared off in the first live television debate featuring a sitting Ugandan president. Prior to this, Museveni had dismissed, out of hand, the idea of a debate as an exercise for schoolchildren. He had to eat his words and rock up for this exercise in his pursuit of power.

Public opinion now matters. The media might be on a tight leash, but social media has come into its own. Political discussions occur on social media such as Facebook and

Twitter. Mobile banking enables new candidates to raise money to fund their election campaigns. Museveni still rules but his days on the throne might be numbered.

In Niger, President Mahamadou Issoufou is facing a challenge from Hama Amadou. Elections are underway in this uranium-rich landlocked West African country. The first round has been indecisive despite the fact that Amadou is in jail. This is a great boost for democracy. It shows that people are starting to discover the power of the ballot box. It also shows that challenges to the big men of Africa are becoming more robust.

There are three specific reasons to be optimistic. First, Amadou chose to return to Niger to contest elections. This former prime minister and president of the National Assembly could have stayed in exile, but his return is symbolic of the new trend of Africans coming home to make a difference. Second, Amadou is still running for office despite being locked up on what are believed to be trumped up charges of child trafficking. Third, electoral irregularities are diminishing. Unlike Saddam Hussein, Issoufou is [not the only candidate](#) and is certainly not winning 100% of the vote. Regardless of what happens in March, the forthcoming runoff offers reasons to cheer.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

The [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) has been trying to convict some prominent Kenyans for crimes against humanity. The ethnic violence that broke out in 2007, although brief, killed 1,200 people. Over half a million were displaced. Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former ICC prosecutor, thumped his chest and declared that he would slay the dragons of impunity and injustice. Yet all but two of his cases against the indicted Kenyans collapsed dismally before trial. Remaining in the dock are Kenya's deputy president, William Ruto, and one other.

An amendment to the ICC's Rules of Procedure and Evidence, adopted during the 12th session of the Assembly of State Parties, on November 27, 2013, allow the court to use previously recorded and subsequently recanted witness testimony in certain circumstances.

The prosecutor's case in the two remaining Kenyan cases sought to rely heavily on recanted witness testimony. This month, in what may be the final blow that collapses the last of the prosecutor's Kenyan cases, the ICC's Appeals Chamber unanimously rejected the admissibility of recanted evidence. The ICC ruled that its 2013 decision

could not be applied retroactively in the Kenyan cases to the detriment of the accused persons.

Some argue that this has given Kenyan politicians the [get-out-of-jail free card](#). It certainly demonstrates the incompetence of the ICC. It conducted shoddy investigations, did not take the time to research the veracity of witness testimony, relied on contradictory evidence by different witnesses, demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of Kenyan sociopolitical conditions, and naively failed to protect witnesses. Some of them have disappeared mysteriously, while others have retreated into the shadows after complaining of intimidation.

Many argue that the ICC targets Africa disproportionately or even exclusively. All cases before it, without exception, involve African countries. Despite appalling atrocities by the [Islamic State](#) in Syria, Iraq and beyond, the ICC is yet to investigate any atrocity or charge anyone in the Middle East. Recent revelations are proof that the ICC conducted its Kenyan investigations with cavalier abandon. It faces a real crisis of credibility going forward.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In [South Africa](#), President Jacob Zuma is on the ropes. The fall of global commodity prices has battered Africa's second-largest economy. To add insult to injury, the country's agricultural sector is facing the worst drought in over a century. Unemployment is at 24.5% and food prices have surged. Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan bluntly declared that the country's economy was in crisis.

Gordhan cut economic growth forecasts to an anemic 0.9%. He has drawn up a remedial road map to stave off a ratings downgrade to junk bond status. This would increase the cost of borrowing and South Africa would have to pay higher interest rates to issue new debt. Gordhan has presented a new budget with soft tax increases, government spending cuts and a temporary halt on public sector hiring. Despite his efforts, investors remained unconvinced that the economy is back in the saddle. The rand continues to fall.

The African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party, is facing its toughest year since it came to power. Municipal elections are scheduled for later this year. With a wobbling economy, the ANC faces increasing discontent.

Yet it is not all doom and gloom in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is urbanizing faster than any other part of the world. By 2030, 50% of its population will live in cities and [city dwellers tend to have more money to spend](#). Hence, retail, financial, construction and technology sectors in cities continue to do well. Lagos, Nairobi, Accra, Johannesburg and even Kinshasa are still boomtowns. Despite [the global economic slowdown](#), African economies continue to present opportunities and canny investors are sniffing around for them. To end with another salient African proverb: A hand that has been licked must, thitherto, not have been empty.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



A Welcome Time For Change

March 31, 2016

Benin's successful elections and peaceful transfer of power along with the ICC's first conviction for rape as a war crime set new precedents for Africa.

In times of crisis, two heads are usually better than one. It seems that leaders of the two largest African economies, Nigeria and South Africa, have taken this creed to heart. Hence, they are taking steps to bury the hatchet after a period of frosty relations. Both countries are in disarray because oil prices have crashed and commodity prices are falling. As the global economy stumbles, Africa's biggest economies are taking a beating.

Thus, it makes sense for both countries to get together to cook up responses to the economic crisis engulfing them. It helps that both countries are far away and do not share any borders. They might have frigid relations but are not quite at war. Yet there is another reason why they are patching up. South African President Jacob Zuma is facing intense political heat at home. His state visit to Nigeria, which was inspired by the two countries' efforts to find common ground, also served as an apostrophe to his domestic tribulations. He desperately needs some good news.

ZUMA'S GUPTAGATE

Zuma is facing allegations of corruption yet again. "Guptagate" is his latest scandal. As per allegations, the wealthy and influential Gupta family wields undue influence over Zuma and his government. Toward the end of 2015, [Zuma caused outrage by sacking Nhlanhla Nene](#), who was a rather well-respected finance minister.

Now, outrage has turned to shock. Mcebisi Jonas, South Africa's deputy finance minister, has recently alleged that members of [the Gupta family offered him Nene's position](#). Zuma's son is under a cloud. The police are investigating him and the Guptas for [wielding improper political influence](#). The secretary general of the African National Congress (ANC), Zuma's own party, has declared that South Africa risks becoming a "mafia state" unless it can deal with corruption.

Corruption in poor countries revolves around a simple point. There is a divergence between the law of the land that proclaims public interest and political actions that further private endowment. In the case of South Africa, the absolute domination of the ANC has allowed [Zuma to put his hands in the cookie jar repeatedly](#).

Furthermore, Guptagate reveals that South Africa might be suffering from the crony capitalism that has plagued countries like Russia and Indonesia. Politicians hand over public resources to big business that, in turn, fills their private coffers and funds their election campaigns. The heavy hand of the state remains along with the inequalities of flawed markets, creating a deeply inequitable society.

ELECTION SEASON

In February, [Niger's elections were in focus](#). They continue to remain important. President Mahamadou Issoufou is running for his second term just like many presidents around the world. The only twist is that Hama Amadou, his opponent, has been locked up in jail. It turns out that Amadou is now not in his prison cell, but has been flown to Paris for medical treatment. The opposition have decided that enough is enough. They allege gross electoral violations and are [boycotting the elections](#).

Multi-party elections are a new-fangled thing in Niger. They have been around only since 1990 and continue to be flawed. Issoufou is a mining engineer who is referred to as “the Lion,” while Amadou is a comeback veteran who is hence nicknamed “the Phoenix.” This uranium-rich land continues to be trapped in poverty with armed groups operating in the northern desert areas bordering Libya and Algeria, while Boko Haram wreaks havoc in the south along its border with Nigeria. Political turmoil will not help Niger mitigate poverty or control conflict. Unsurprisingly, religious groups, tribal leaders and trade unions are appealing for calm.

Niger could emulate Benin, its much smaller southwestern neighbor. The presidential elections have gone rather smoothly. For a start, Thomas Boni Yayi, the incumbent president, decided to respect the constitution and retire. By contrast, this month, incumbents were re-elected in Congo-Brazzaville, Cape Verde and Tanzania's Zanzibar islands. In a continent of strongmen who try to sit on the throne until their last breath, Boni Yayi has earned much respect for his abdication.

Benin's election attracted more than two dozen candidates. Eventually, two were left standing. Lionel Zinsou, the sitting prime minister, took on Patrice Talon, a local entrepreneur, and lost. [Zinsou is an urbane fellow](#) who studied at Ecole Normale Supérieure and the London School of Economics. He has been an investor, a merchant banker and a speechwriter for Laurent Fabius when he was prime minister of France. Zinsou has dual nationality and holds a French passport.

Talon is more of a rough and tumble operator. He is a [self-made entrepreneur](#) who is known as "the king of cotton." This [lover of designer glasses, flashy clothes and sports cars](#) was accused of plotting to poison Boni Yayi and fled to exile before the outgoing president pardoned him in 2014. He painted Zinsou as a ["yovo" or "the white man"](#) during the campaign. His dual citizenship was also used against him as a question mark on where his loyalties lay. The tactic worked. Zinsou found it hard to shake off the tag of France's candidate and lost. He has graciously conceded defeat. Talon has promised to generate jobs. People believe him because he has a track record of creating wealth. The entrepreneur has also promised to decentralize powers currently concentrated in the hands of the president. Talon has also promised to introduce a five-year term limit, a radical new development. Whether he delivers or not, Talon's victory reveals that his country wants the colonial centralized model to change. Citizens are yearning for a more bottom-up system with greater public participation and accountability.

MANY FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Terrorism is a global phenomenon that afflicts cities from Baghdad to Brussels. Countries from Pakistan to France are facing wanton attacks of violence. African countries are no exception. Ivory Coast experienced an attack by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). [Six gunmen attacked a resort in the sleepy town of Grand-Bassam](#) and killed 14 people. Soldiers rushed to the scene and killed all the gunmen. Two soldiers lost their lives in the daring rescue.

The attack is part of a pattern wherein terrorists are targeting soft civilian targets to create a climate of fear. Ivory Coast is cooperating with France to stymie the rise of AQIM and is home to the main French base in the region. The country has taken strong measures against AQIM in the Muslim north of the country. It banned foreign Muslim preachers from entering the country and suspended the construction of mosques because they were deemed to be breeding grounds for terrorism. Inevitably,

Ivory Coast is a target and expected fanatical Islamic terrorists to attack sooner rather than later. Just like Europe or Asia, Africa faces a terrorism problem. States, religious organizations, tribal leaders, civil society and regional organizations have to cooperate closely to tackle it.

This attack was spectacular but not as worrying as the violence in South Sudan. In recent months, [medical facilities have come under increased attack](#). Patients are killed, hospitals are looted and structures are torched in acts of wanton cruelty that constitute war crimes. Medical organizations are pulling out and already poor health conditions are worsening without adequate care. Malnutrition is rife, causing terrible damage to young children. A terrible tragedy is unfolding as South Sudan's civil war rages with ever greater ferocity. As of now, there seems to be little hope in the immediate future.

Finally, drone strikes against al-Shabab have been the subject of a [vigorous debate](#). In March, the [US reportedly killed 150 militants in airstrikes](#) involving both manned and unmanned aircraft. Supporters of airstrikes claim that they weaken al-Shabab. This brutal and ruthless organization has been ambushing Kenyan soldiers and killing innocent civilians at will. Therefore, airstrikes in general and drone strikes in particular have a key role in defeating al-Shabab.

Opponents point out that [nobody knows the identities of those targeted](#) and the killing raises three big issues. First, the legal justification for summary execution by presidential fiat of whoever occupies the White House is slim at best and nonexistent at worst. Second, it is more than possible that drone strikes kill innocents or, to use the politically correct term, cause collateral casualties. In 2014, [US drone strikes targeted 41 men but ended up killing 1,147 people](#). Third, drone strikes might be helping al-Shabab instead of hurting it. The number of its fighters has doubled since 2013 despite successful airstrikes. Abukar Arman, Somalia's former special envoy to the US, has called the drone strikes a "priceless propaganda tool for al-Shabab."

ICC MAKES HISTORY

The International Criminal Court (ICC) delivered a landmark ruling on March 21. It convicted Jean-Pierre Bemba, a former rebel-turned-opposition leader in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who has been found [guilty of crimes including rape and murder](#), which were committed by his troops against civilians in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The ruling is significant for three key reasons.

First, Bemba is the most senior political leader to have been convicted by the court. At the time of his arrest in Brussels, Bemba was a senator in Congo and the big boss of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC). He also served as one of DRC's vice-presidents in a unity government. In brief, Bemba is big fry and his feet have been held to the fire.

Second, Bemba is the first person to be convicted for committing these atrocities in a foreign country. His militia crossed the border into neighboring CAR to assist then-President Ange-Felix Patasse in crushing the rebels trying to depose him.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, "[it is the court's first conviction for rape as a war crime](#)" and establishes the principle that commanders are responsible for the actions of their subordinates." In the month that celebrates International Women's Day, the ICC ruling provides protection for women's rights that have been violated since time immemorial. It situates women's rights at the very heart of such customary international law norms to which humanity permits no derogation. It sends a powerful message to military commanders and militiamen that, henceforth, they will be held responsible for acts of sexual violence.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Taking Stock of Strides in Justice, Peace and Prosperity

April 30, 2016

South Africa's highest court spoke truth to power, while the ICC made a fool of itself as South Sudan declared a frosty peace.

As Africa sits astride the equator, the seasons offer the end of April as a time to reflect. In many parts of Africa, [the harvest is starting to come in](#) and a new planting season is about to begin. Political, social and economic developments this month provide excellent material for much reflection and are of much significance for the future.

ZUMA'S WOES CONTINUE

In March, [South African President Jacob Zuma was the focus of attention because of Guptagate](#). This month, he has been hit by a new political storm. On March 31, the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that Zuma breached the constitution by ignoring a state order to repay some of the \$16 million plus government funds used to spruce up his private residence. Apparently, a pool and an amphitheater were part of security features to protect the president.

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela did not quite agree and rapped Zuma on his knuckles. Mandonsela's [brilliant 52-page statement](#) is a credit to her and to South Africa's young democracy. She courageously asked Zuma to cough up costs "that do not relate to security, and which include Visitors' Centre, the amphitheater, the cattle kraal and chicken run, the swimming pool."

Zuma ignored Mandonsela's order and all 11 of South Africa's highest justices have held that he showed a "substantial disregard" for the constitutional power of the public protector. The court has held Mandonsela's order to be legally binding and chided Zuma for not taking remedial action as directed. [Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng caustically remarked](#): "In failing to comply with the remedial action, the president thus failed to uphold, comply and respect the constitution."

[This judgment](#) sets another major precedent. It squashed the parliament's resolution absolving Zuma and nullifying the findings of the public prosecutor. The court held that parliament had not only failed in its duty to hold the president to account, but also that its resolution was unconstitutional. Lawyers who love Latin would term this section of the judgment the *locus classicus* or the authoritative passage on the doctrines of separation of powers and rule of law.

The highest court in South Africa has made history. Rarely do courts in Africa or indeed anywhere in erstwhile colonies pass such bold judgments. There is a higher chance of getting struck by lightning six times while riding on a unicorn than of seeing an African head of state held to account by the judiciary of his country. As the justices declared, "constitutionalism, accountability and the rule of law constitute the sharp and mighty sword that stands ready to chop the ugly head of impunity off its stiffened neck." The ruling fired up South Africa's opposition. Like sharks, they smelt blood. They had long seen Zuma perform Houdini acts, escaping the jaws of justice one scandal after another. Therefore, they launched impeachment proceedings against Zuma. Again, the [president survived the impeachment vote](#). Zuma's charm still works and the African National Congress (ANC) still supports him blindly. Yet he has been greatly damaged and it is unlikely he will wield the same power going forward.

Julius Malema, the firebrand boss of the Economic Freedom Fighters Party, has declared that his party is running out of patience and [planning to remove the ANC from power with the "barrel of a gun."](#) Zuma's government has promptly charged Malema with treason. This angry nation with anxieties of the past is on a knife's edge, and it appears that things will get worse in South Africa before they get better.

KENYA AND THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Kenya's stormy marriage with the International Criminal Court (ICC) seems to be over. In a landmark majority ruling, the [ICC has thrown out the cases against Kenyan Deputy President William Ruto and journalist Joshua Sang](#). The court ruled there was insufficient evidence but refused to acquit them. If new evidence comes up, the accused may face trial again. This is unlikely and, therefore, Ruto's supporters celebrated wildly.

On March 13, 2015, [the prosecutor dropped similar charges and terminated proceedings against Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta](#). While giving the notice to

withdraw charges, the prosecutor's office accused Kenyatta's government of refusing to hand over vital evidence. It claimed that witnesses had been "[bribed and intimidated](#)." Kenyatta rallied nationalist support by claiming that the ICC was interfering in Kenya's internal affairs.

The collapse of all cases against the accused after the disputed Kenyan elections of 2007 ends international efforts to pursue justice for victims of violence. Around 1,200 people were killed and more than half a million fled for their lives when a naked pursuit of power led rivals to ignite inter-ethnic clashes that spiraled out of control. Kenyatta and Ruto who are now united in government and against the ICC were rivals then.

Now, victims of violence and their families have no recourse to justice. They will never know the definitive truth or get any compensation. The collapse of cases has revealed the ICC to be weak and ineffective. Its credibility is in question. Louis Moreno Ocampo, the former prosecutor of the ICC, huffed, puffed and thumped his chest but was found wanting when Kenyan politicians called his bluff. His cross-examination of Kenyatta on September 29, 2011, revealed that he was clueless about the sociopolitical dynamics of Kenya. The ICC's investigations were shoddy and it has proved itself to be an outfit of amateurs. It is in dire need of reform to salvage the little credibility it has left.

To add insult to injury, Kenyatta has already declared that no Kenyan would ever be hauled up in front of the ICC. He claimed that the court unfairly targets Africa and, apart from Georgia, the other eight nations facing trial are African states. [Idriss Déby, the chairman of the African Union, agrees](#). He declared: "Elsewhere in the world, many things happen, many flagrant violations of human rights, but nobody cares." Unsurprisingly, the African Union is backing the Kenyan proposal to revoke [the Rome Statute](#) and leave the ICC.

Most countries that have ratified the statute hail from Africa. As the US State Department website clearly says, "[the US is not a party to the ICC's statute](#)." [Neither are China and Russia](#). The ICC increasingly reminds us of the ill-fated League of Nations that collapsed after World War I because most powers cared two hoots for it. If African states leave then the ICC might lose its *raison d'être* and implode.

Yet the ICC seems to serve a purpose for many. The idea of international criminal justice might hark back to colonial times, but it also has a draw for victims of violence in conflict-ridden or war-ravaged areas. [In the words of Kenya's Daily Nation](#), "Leaving

the ICC with no credible mechanism for justice for mass crimes in sight would be an error of colossal proportions.”

PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN?

This month, the world’s youngest country, gained much needed good news. After two years of civil war, a peace agreement has been concluded. Riek Machar, the rebel leader, has returned to the capital, Juba. [He has even been sworn in as vice-president](#) in President Salva Kiir’s new unity government.

There is much irony in South Sudan’s peace deal. Machar has taken up the very same position he held before the civil war, which broke out when Kiir fired him. In the ensuing conflict, tens of thousands have been killed and about 2 million people have lost their homes. The economy has hit rock bottom. Kiir and Machar are now referring to each other as brothers. Unsurprisingly, their relations continue to be frosty.

In the midst of relief at some sort of peace dawning over the land, inconvenient questions keep nagging away. Was this bloodshed and wanton destruction necessary? Who is responsible for the tragedies that the people have suffered since the sacking of Machar in July 2013? Will this peace last or is it just a truce before conflict breaks out again?

Despite these questions, people of South Sudan can breathe a sigh of relief for now as the fighting, killing, raping and looting comes to a long awaited end.

ECONOMIC WOES

As the Atlantic Council points out, African economies are being hit by a “[perfect storm](#)” of declining commodity prices and downturns in emerging economies. In particular, the economies of Angola, Nigeria and Zambia are suffering because of plummeting oil, copper, iron ore and platinum prices. [Terms of trade for Sub-Saharan Africa](#) have declined by 16%. [Moody’s has downgraded Nigeria’s sovereign debt rating](#). Other African countries are at risk too.

Even Ghana’s economy is under stress. In 2015, [the economy grew at its slowest pace in 20 years](#). Falling oil and gold prices are hobbling this African star. Last year, cocoa

production dropped to its lowest in five years and continues to slump more this year. Government revenues are limited and inflation is rising.

Anthony Akoto Osei, a ranking member of the parliament's finance committee, has declared that [Ghana's economic situation is similar to Greece](#) but, unlike the Hellenic nation, it is unlikely to get a bailout. The Ghanaian government has resorted to heavy domestic borrowing, which is [pushing up interest rates preposterously](#). Only Malawi has higher rates. The bank lending rate of 26% and microfinancing rates as high as 70% are killing local businesses and the general population. The International Monetary Fund is offering Ghana \$1 billion of loans on the condition that it will reduce its budget deficit from 7.3% to 5.3%.

Even the Chinese who have long been investing heavily in Africa are not riding to the rescue. [The dragon is no longer breathing fire](#) and its economic model has run its course. The Middle Kingdom has scaled back its investment in Africa. It is also importing less than before. The fall in both price and quantity of exports is hurting African economies. Consequently, they are facing budget shortfalls, weakening currencies and falling economic growth. Clearly, much pain is in store ahead.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Toward a More Respected African Union

May 31, 2016

In spite of strife and humanitarian challenges, Africa is rising in global stature and beginning to bring its Big Men to justice.

Africa was once deemed [the Dark Continent](#). Even today, Africans and those of African origin face racism, discrimination and danger not only in the [US](#) and [Europe](#), but also in [China](#) and [India](#). Thankfully, the most recent incidents of racism against Africans in Europe, China and India have led to widespread outrage in these timeworn societies. Even a [far-right German anti-immigration party apologized](#) for its leader's remarks on Jérôme Boateng, a German soccer player and son of an African father. Perhaps, as Bob Dylan once sang, "[the times they are a-changin'](#)."

TWO BIG DEVELOPMENTS ON AFRICA DAY

On May 25, 1963, the Organization of African Unity was formed and, over time, it evolved into the African Union (AU). Just as European leaders came together after World War II to end "[the frequent and bloody wars](#)" that plagued Europe for centuries, newly independent African states united "[to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa](#)."

It is for this reason that May 25 has been christened "Africa Day" and is commemorated every year. This month, Africa Day was marked by two significant events.

First, South Korean President Park Geun-hye became the first Korean leader to address the AU. She spoke of combining "Africa's abundant and human resources" with "South Korea's technology and capital" to create new synergies and boost Africa's development.

Park paid the *de rigueur* tribute to [Nelson Mandela](#) and pointed out that Korea shared Africa's colonial experience. She reminded her audience that barely half a century ago, "[Korea remained plagued by starvation and despair](#)." She promised to be a partner for

Africa and pursue a “plan for two-way exchanges of 10,000 youths” that would create jobs. Under this plan, 6,000 Africans will get educated in South Korea whilst 4,000 Koreans will volunteer in Africa. Even though the numbers are not tremendously high, this people-to-people exchange promises to be significant.

Aside from the big boys—the US and China—other countries are also taking more of an interest in Africa. A greater engagement with the wider world along with educational opportunities elsewhere is what this young and ambitious continent of over a billion needs. Park’s promise of setting up technology innovation centers marks a new step for a continent that has so far largely been a source of raw materials for the rest of the world.

Most significantly, Park paid tribute to Africa for experiencing the process of crafting an agreement on the [“African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone”](#) and sought African help on nuclear North Korea. Now, the extent of Africa’s potential influence in this regard is debatable. Even US President [Barack Obama finds it exasperating to deal](#) with North Korea’s “erratic” and “irresponsible” leader. [China’s influence on North Korea](#), a country it feeds and fuels through energy supplies, is limited as well. So, the AU cannot achieve what the US and China have failed to. What is important here is that the leader of a richer part of the world living under the shadow of nuclear devastation is giving the AU long overdue credit for abjuring nuclear weapons and limiting possibilities of destruction like Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

Second, the AU took a historic step on Africa Day in India. Africans in India have long experienced discrimination. More than seven decades after independence, Indians retain deference for white folks whilst looking down on those with more melanin in their skin. Stories of discrimination are rife and Africans have catalogued the [everyday racism that blights their lives](#). Africans are regularly called “blacky” and often fear for their safety. Men are seen as [criminals and drug peddlers](#). Women are seen as loose and sex workers.

In a nutshell, life for most Africans in India is nasty and brutish. Sometimes, it can be short as well. Recently, [a Congolese student was beaten to death in New Delhi](#), India’s national capital. Sushma Swaraj, India’s unedifying foreign minister, incongruously claimed that [the death was not a case of a racist attack](#). Attacks against Africans are well-chronicled and [a mob attack in 2014](#) attracted much attention. Some Indians say

this attack was a response to African men misbehaving with Indian women. That is most likely bunkum. Indians tend to pick on Africans because of the color of their skin.

[India's flailing state fails to protect the vulnerable](#). Africans are no exception. What irks them is the constant denial on the part of Indian leaders like Swaraj that they face a problem. On Africa Day, [the African Group of Heads of Mission declared that it would not join Indian celebrations](#) out of solidarity with the dead Congolese student. This is a slap in the face of the Indian government, which has been courting Africa lately. In October 2015, it hosted [a summit for African leaders](#) and [even critics of the Indian government deemed it to be a success](#). Yet Indian authorities have failed to acknowledge, leave aside address, the daily discrimination Africans face in the country.

The boycott was not the only weapon African diplomats used to pierce the armor of apathy and negligence on the part of the Indian government. They went on to declare: "Given the pervading climate of fear and insecurity in Delhi, the African Heads of Mission are left with little option than to consider recommending to their governments not to send new students to India, unless and until their safety can be guaranteed." India wants big power status and a seat in the United Nations Security Council. For that it needs African support. On Africa Day, African diplomats have finally recognized their clout and have set a terrific precedent by holding a rising regional power to account.

JUSTICE FINALLY AS A "BIG MAN" GOES TO JAIL

Hissène Habré, once the "[Big Man](#)" of Chad, was sentenced in Senegal "[to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity, torture and sex crimes](#)." *The Guardian* called Habré's conviction "[a watershed for human rights justice in Africa and beyond](#)." It sets a new precedent because it is the first time a former African dictator was tried and convicted of international crimes, in a different African state, under that country's laws.

Once, Habré ruled Chad with an iron fist from 1982 to 1990. The country, also known as the "Dead Heart of Africa," lies south of Libya and west of Sudan. In the good old days of the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) deemed it as a critical battleground against the Soviets. Indeed, it was [the boys from Langley](#) who assisted Habré's ascent to the throne. Habré beat back Muammar Gaddafi's troops to repay the

CIA's faith in him. Generous American and French assistance helped. Ronald Reagan, who [embraced the South African apartheid regime](#), infamously declared: "[Chad's accomplishment is admired by the free world and will benefit all of Africa.](#)"

Like other dictators propped up during the Cold War, Habré was a brutal thug. His henchmen [killed an estimated 40,000 people](#), tortured thousands and raped hundreds. When Idriss Déby overthrew Habré, the CIA helped Habré resettle in Senegal where he lived in the lap of luxury.

Sadly for Habré, the world changed after the Cold War. The US under [Barack Obama is charting a very different course](#). Cold War dictators can no longer be whitewashed as champions of freedom and are seen as the tyrants they truly were. General Augusto Pinochet of Chile was arrested in London on a warrant from a Spanish judge for crimes committed against his people. Universal jurisdiction, the idea of the culmination of the universality of human rights and international justice, has boldly stepped off the theory pages and has been gathering operational steam. In fact, it was Pinochet's arrest that inspired the [Chadian Association for Human Rights](#) to contact Human Rights Watch (HRW) to bring Habré to justice, earning him the moniker, "the African Pinochet."

Habré's trial and conviction occurred because the United Nations' [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ) ordered Senegal "to prosecute and try him" or extradite him to Belgium. Revivified by Pinochet's tribulations, three Belgian citizens of Chadian origin [filed a case against Habré in November 2000](#). Belgian authorities investigated and then indicted Habré in 2005. It was only after torturous negotiations and convoluted legal proceedings that Habré was eventually tried.

Habré's conviction will strike fear into the hearts of other African dictators. [Salil Shetty, the secretary-general of Amnesty International, has declared](#): "Safe havens are no longer safe for those suspected of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity or other crimes under international law." This is not entirely true. Idriss Déby, the man who overthrew Habré in 1990, continues to rule Chad. Africa continues to have other Big Men such as Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. Yet they have now been put on notice that they may not get away with impunity for all their atrocities. Once they lose power, Big Men can now end up in jail.

THE RWANDA BURUNDI STORY CONTINUES

Rwanda and Burundi have acquired infamy for [ethnic conflict and genocide of the 1990s](#). Since then, both countries have reached some sort of stability under authoritarian rulers. Rwanda is ruled by Paul Kagame, Museveni's former intelligence chief. In the words of Nii Akuetteh, Kagame "is one of America's friendly tyrants" and, [as per the BBC](#), is a man schooled in conflict who is no Nelson Mandela. Burundi's big boss is Pierre Nkurunziza. Like other Big Men, he wants to stay on in power and [has won a third term in office](#), which some say contravenes the constitution. Many are not too pleased with this idea and [Burundi has been experiencing violence since April 2015](#).

Kagame is Tutsi and Nkurunziza is Hutu. Tribal rivalries that had been shoved under the carpet are now making a comeback. Nkurunziza has been trying to take away the powers of Burundi's Tutsi minority, which is pushing back. In both countries, Hutus form a majority. In the continuing violence, [Amnesty International has uncovered "possible mass graves"](#) of victims of Burundian security forces. [Kagame has intervened as he did in Congo](#) to protect Tutsi interests. After all, the professorial Kagame runs a government where almost all key personnel share his ethnic roots. Kagame has a reputation for being authoritarian. In two well written stories, [Newsweek](#) and [Politico](#) describe how Kagame's opponents mysteriously drop dead.

The rivalry between Nkurunziza and Kagame has led to strife in Burundi. In March, Nkurunziza accused Kagame of [seeking to export genocide](#) to Burundi. Unsurprisingly, many are fleeing. As per Tanzania's *Daily News*, [more than 260,000 people](#), over half of whom are children, have fled Burundi. Nearly 140,000 have fled to Tanzania alone. Thousands have fled to Rwanda too. Kagame is hitting back. This month, [Rwanda has expelled more than 1,500 Burundians](#) and the situation is reaching a tipping point.

HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

Even as refugees continue to stream out of Burundi, Africa faces even bigger humanitarian challenges. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), ["Displacement due to the Boko Haram insurgency has now reached almost three million"](#) in the Lake Chad Basin that comprises Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Speaking at the [World Humanitarian Summit](#) in Istanbul, Stephen O'Brien, the under-secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) at the United Nations (UN), declared West Africa's [Lake Chad Basin to be the world's most neglected humanitarian crisis](#).

A senior Red Cross official estimates the gap between the suffering and the humanitarian response to be bigger than in Syria, Iraq or Yemen. In 2015, the UN raised barely 40% of the \$535 million that it sought for the region. Boko Haram's carnage has disrupted trade and agriculture. Drought, joblessness and extreme poverty have done the rest.


Last year, the UN pointed out that [Lake Chad Basin had become an epicenter of "violence and terror"](#) where children as young as 6 years old were becoming suicide bombers. At the time, O'Brien called it "the scene of the fastest-growing displacement crisis in Africa." Things have got worse since. Clearly, increasing awareness and providing relief are the two big challenges facing policymakers in the region and richer parts of the world.

Even as numbers of refugees rise, Kenya has announced that Dadaab, the [world's largest refugee camp](#), will close in November. Dadaab was set up in 1991 and houses more than 300,000 Somali refugees. Some people have been living there for over 20 years. Kenya's reason for closing Dadaab is security. It claims that terrorists plan attacks against Kenya in Dadaab. Therefore, it will spend \$10 million to repatriate refugees humanely.

Unrecognized by much of the world, [Kenya has one of the largest refugee populations in the world](#). This resource-strapped country hosts half a million refugees. Now, Kenya seems to have reached the limits of its hospitality. It has shut down the Department of Refugee Affairs. The same populism that Donald Trump is unleashing in the US is infecting Kenyan politics. People want to take care of their own instead of funding refugees from other tribes and other religions.

What happens to these people who have fled dangerous areas and are often at great risk of hunger, disease and violence remains the big unanswered question.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*

Dreams of  **Unity in**

Uncertain Times

June 30, 2016

The free movement of people is about to begin in Africa even as Brexit buffets African economies, Nigeria falters and South Sudan faces disaster.

In many parts of the world and Africa, church bells toll the knell of the passing of the first half of the year. This month has been eventful. Colombia achieved a long-negotiated peace deal and the [United Kingdom decided to end its troubled marriage with the European Union](#) (EU). Africa avoided major drama, but many developments might have significant ramifications over time.

DREAMS OF UNITY

Many pan-Africanists trace their roots to the late 18th century when [Ignatius Sancho, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano](#) became the first African writers to register themselves on the British consciousness. They worked as members of Sons of Africa, a society of freed African slaves in London, which played a key role in the abolition of the international slave trade in 1807.

Pan-Africanists aim to bring together all African peoples so that they become more self-reliant and empowered. The African Union (AU) is heir to the pan-Africanist tradition and represents 54 states. Even as the UK decided to quit the EU, the AU is planning [to create an EU-style “continent without borders”](#) that allows a free movement of people across Africa.

In July, [the AU is launching an electronic passport](#) that will allow Africans to move seamlessly across borders. AU President Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma sees the passport as both symbolic and significant because it is a “steady step toward the objective of creating a strong, prosperous and integrated Africa, driven by its own citizens and capable of taking its rightful place on the world stage.” Emulating the EU, the AU is working toward unrestricted movement of persons, goods and services across the continent.

As one of the authors pointed out last year, [barely 10% of the total commerce of the continent is intra-African trade](#). In contrast, intra-Asian trade is 25% and intra-European

Union trade is over 75%. This is a legacy of colonization, poor infrastructure and trade barriers. The AU is taking some of these barriers down to promote trade and drive prosperity.

It is not just the AU that is working to boost trading ties. The East African Community (EAC) that once collapsed in 1977 despite almost achieving full integration has now been revived and is making significant progress. Its member states, charting the same path as the predecessor alliance, agreed on a customs union in 2005, a common market in 2010 and aims to create a common currency by 2024. According to Thierry Mayer and Mathias Thoenig, two professors of economics who write for the [International Growth Centre](#), the EAC customs union increased bilateral trade among members by 213% on average, which improved welfare and security in the region.

Risks remain. Nigeria demonstrates that even large and wealthy states are fragile and vulnerable. The AU and EAC could overreach like the EU. Mayer and Thoenig estimate that potential risks and costs outweigh the small trade and welfare effects of a common EAC currency. Memories of the first EAC collapse remain fresh in the region's psyche.

In an eerie similarity to countries like Greece and Italy, East Africa has been loading up on debt. Interest payments are mounting and eating into the development kitty. In 2013, Kenya spent 70% more on repaying its public debt than on development. Simultaneously, falling commodity prices are pushing down export earnings and making [debt levels unsustainable](#). A single EAC currency might lead to similar tensions as in the EU. EAC leaders must tread carefully.

BREXIT'S EFFECTS ON AFRICA

Not too long ago, much of Africa was part of the British Empire. Even today, the UK continues to play a significant role in the continent from trade and finance to education and development. Therefore, [Brexit has brought waves of uncertainty crashing on African shores](#).

Once markets settle down after their post-Brexit volatility, there are seven areas of concern for Africa.

First, African exports to the UK might suffer in case the British economy goes into recession. With fewer pounds to the good, English lads might buy fewer roses to woo their lissome lovelies, hurting Kenyan growers. Cocoa farmers in Ghana are likely to be hurt by the lower demand for chocolate, a luxury that people consume less when they feel poorer.

Second, the falling pound might push up British exports to Africa. This would be beneficial for exporters in the UK but might hurt African producers competing with exports. British exports might rise precisely when African exports are falling, increasing African current account deficits.

Third, the UK remains a major source of investment into African economies, particularly for countries like South Africa and Kenya. If Brexit leads to recession, there will be less capital making its way to Africa.

Fourth, the UK has pledged 0.7% of its gross national income to development aid, most of which flows to Africa. The country is unlikely to renege on its promise, but if the British economy shrinks, less money will make it to Africa. More importantly, the UK has been the biggest supporter of EU aid programs in Africa. With its biggest champion out, Africa might find EU aid money dwindling in the years to come.

Fifth, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that subsidizes European farms has long hurt African farmers. The UK has consistently fought a lonely battle within the EU to reform CAP. Now, the *dirigiste* French could merrily persist with CAP and African farmers can kiss goodbye to hopes of a level playing field in agricultural trade.

Sixth, Brexit has fueled anti-immigration sentiments in the UK. [Racism is on the rise](#) and immigration controls might become tighter now. Africans living in the UK might have to move back. When this happens, remittances would inevitably fall. Of course, some hope that the UK might boost immigration from African countries even as it places limits on immigrants from the EU. If this were to happen, Africa would lose more of its highly-skilled professionals because these are precisely the sort of people that British policymakers want in the UK.

Finally, both market volatility and market recession make people flock to safer repositories of value such as gold, silver and diamonds. Their prices inevitably rise

during such periods. Therefore, Brexit is likely to help the mining sector, particularly in South Africa where [the rand has been falling against the dollar since 2015](#).

NIGERIA IS SINGING THE BLUES

Internal developments continue to be significant even as external shocks hit African economies. [The Economist reports](#) that oil production in the Niger Delta has fallen to about 1.5 million barrels a day from 2.2 million last year. This 22-year low production level is a result of relentless attacks aimed at sabotage. Earlier this year, [Niger Delta Avengers \(NDA\) blew up a major pipeline](#). Armed militant groups in the Niger Delta have been attacking companies, destroying infrastructure and conducting extortion with great gusto. Hence, oil production has suffered despite oil prices bouncing back to nearly \$50 a barrel.

This fall in production is catastrophic for the Nigerian government, which relies almost entirely for its revenues on the oil industry. President Muhammadu Buhari has adopted what Al Jazeera calls a “[sledge hammer approach](#)” that is clearly not working. He is a northerner who took over the Nigerian presidency from Goodluck Jonathan, a local boy from the Niger Delta who, by a foreordination synonymous with his first name, made it right to the top. The traditional regional, religious and tribal rivalries in Nigeria have since come into play.

As Brexit demonstrated, history matters. Nigeria is yet another former British colony with incredibly diverse people yoked together into a European-style Westphalian state where de facto power is centralized in the national capital. The big man who controls Abuja, the capital, presides over a web of patronage that allows those in power and their lackeys to steal oil revenues and actual barrels of oil.

Naturally, local people have not been too pleased with this arrangement. A bloody insurgency raged in the Niger Delta from 2006 to 2009. It only ended when the then-president “[offered amnesty, vocational training, and monthly cash payments to nearly 30,000 militants, at a yearly cost of about \\$500 million](#).” The powers in Abuja and oil companies placated former militant leaders by rewarding them with lucrative contracts to guard pipelines. Jonathan showered further goodies on his home region during his reign.

This peculiar system of self and patronage was messy but worked fairly well. When Buhari took charge he did three things that have led to blowback. First, he curtailed the expensive amnesty program. Second, he ended many of those juicy pipeline security contracts. Finally, he prosecuted one former militant leader for fraud. Buhari is a former general who is trying to assert his authority again. Yet his tough talk about crushing militancy cannot be backed by strong action. His military lacks material, men and the morale to win.

More importantly, it is the militants not the military who have the hearts and minds of the local populace in the Niger Delta region. They may just be gangs who are out to extort money for themselves, but they are sons of the soil, not strangers from elsewhere. Like Robin Hood, NDA and other militants are shrewd enough to share some of their booty to create their own support networks. This is not terribly hard in a region [“characterized by widespread poverty, youth unemployment, political underrepresentation, and environmental degradation.”](#)

Buhari faces a full-scale economic crisis as government revenues plummet and expenditures mount because of the costs of fighting wide-ranging insurgencies. Even as militants cause mayhem in the south, Boko Haram wreaks havoc in the north. On June 20, Nigeria’s currency went into free fall when its central bank stopped pegging it to the dollar. [The naira lost 40% of its value in a single day.](#) As a result, the cold specter of both inflation and recession is staring Nigeria in the face.

TROUBLE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Nigeria is not the only place in trouble. This month, the United Nations (UN) warned that 4.8 million people in South Sudan, a third of the country’s population, “will be facing severe food shortages over the coming months and the [risk of a hunger catastrophe](#)” is very real. Renewed fighting between the government and rebel groups is largely to blame. The recent pompously celebrated ceasefire is being breached.

The weather has not helped either. An unusually long and harsh annual lean season has been followed by heavy rains. Families are running low on food stocks even as refugee camps suffer flooding and shelters collapse. In 2016, more than 100,000 children have been treated for severe malnutrition, an increase of 150% since 2014. These malnourished children with low immunity levels are highly vulnerable to

waterborne diseases in this rainy season. The specter of [blood and rain in South Sudan](#) is only too real as UN peacekeepers struggle to provide relief.

In the past week alone, [70,000 people have fled the town of Wau](#) in northwestern Sudan as government troops and rebel forces continue to clash. Clearly, the [peace deal](#) signed in August 2015 is coming apart at the seams. In recent months, more than 100,000 refugees have fled South Sudan to the neighboring countries of Kenya, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. There are thousands of others who have been internally displaced.

Food insecurity is rapidly spreading beyond areas of conflict, “as rising prices, impassable roads and dysfunctional markets prevent families from accessing food.” Inflation is running at 300%, the oil industry has collapsed, corruption is a way of life and the economy is in disarray. For the first time, the government of [South Sudan has cancelled independence day celebrations](#). It did not do so in past years even at the height of the civil war.

Al Jazeera reports that both President Salva Kiir and rebel chief Riek Machar have lost control. Numerous militia forces led by ambitious warlords are belting it out in a ferocious battle for control and dominance as famine and disease threaten to stalk the land.

As the Chinese proverb goes, we live in uncertain times. Brexit threatens to tear apart the EU even as AU seeks to unite Africa. At the same time, post-colonial states like Nigeria face discord whilst even more recent creations like South Sudan face disaster. To paraphrase the late great Chinua Achebe, will the center hold or will things fall apart?

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Pan-Africanism Means Colonial Borders Must Go

July 31, 2016

This month, the African Union launched the first African passports to boost free movement of goods, services and people even as grim challenges buffet the continent.

Pan-Africanism is alive and kicking. The idea that all of Africa must come closer together has suffered setbacks but still retains resonance. This month, Rwanda hosted the [27th African Union \(AU\) Summit](#) and Africa achieved a major milestone by officially launching the African passport. In her welcome remarks to the summit, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, chairperson of the AU Commission, presented the [first African passports](#) to Chadian President Idriss Deby, the current chairperson of the AU, and Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

PAN-AFRICANISM AND COLONIALISM

The high-water mark of pan-Africanism is the idea that colonial borders must go and the African people must come together. These arbitrary borders were drawn up by imperial powers in the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 and have caused untold suffering on the continent. As one of the two authors pointed out in [The World This Week](#), “the 54 countries of Africa do not trade much with each other.” Intra-European trade is over 75% and fast-growing intra-Asian trade exceeds 25%, but intra-African trade is a measly 10%. This anemic intra-African interaction and exchange is a barrier to growth, prosperity and development.

Borders have not only impeded trade, but they have also led to conflict. Disparate peoples have been forced to coexist in rigidly defined sovereign states with centralized power structures that encourage despotism, patronage and struggle for power. Africans chose neither the states they live in nor their borders.

Naturally, pan-Africanism wants to recover the timeworn rhythms of Africa. Dismantling arbitrary European borders is a start. The African passport aims to enable the free movement of people, goods and services across the entire continent. Over time, it is

likely to spur economic growth, greater integration and a renewed sense of continental identity.

Apart from economics, the African passport has immense historic significance. It has been over a century since imperial lines of oppression tore apart the so-called [Dark Continent](#) and ravaged age-old African identities. The African passport has been achieved because many remarkable people have spilled much blood, sweat and tears to come this far. This is part of the continent's [long walk to freedom](#) and as Nelson Mandela, Africa's greatest son, once said, "There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires."

These desires for greater peace, prosperity and pride have been there for a while, but the AU is finally taking small steps toward them in the face of specters of conflict, starvation and disease that still stalk the region. The AU has come up with an ambitious-sounding [Agenda 2063](#) that aims for "inclusive growth and sustainable development." More importantly, it aims to "optimize the use of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans." This focus on equity in the era of inequality is most heartening. It harks back to the pre-imperial times of greater equity and harmony in African societies. It also ties into the AU's stated goal to generate an African Renaissance.

CLOUDS OF WAR OVER THE WORLD'S YOUNGEST COUNTRY

Even as the AU dreams of greater unity, South Sudan is disintegrating. The world's youngest state is plagued by an on-and-off civil war that is casting an apocalyptic shadow over the land.

President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar negotiated a peace deal on August 2015 that came into effect in April this year. Machar even moved back to Juba, the national capital of South Sudan. Yet the peace deal has proved fragile. Fighting has broken out between Kiir's forces and Machar's loyalists. The Paris-based *Sudan Tribune* reports that [over 270 people were killed near the presidential palace in Juba](#). Machar has now left Juba for a secret location. He claims to fear for his safety in the capital. Unsurprisingly, both sides are blaming each other for the clash. Kiir's subordinates claim that a [text message sent by Machar's spokesman triggered the violence](#). The text said Machar was being detained in the presidential palace when he

was actually in a formal meeting with Kiir. Machar's men tried to break into the palace to rescue their leader, setting off a deadly skirmish. Machar's representative in Kenya rubbished this claim. He asserted that the [killing in cold blood of two senior officers](#) in Machar's rebel army, followed by an unwarranted attack by Kiir's forces during the Kiir-Machar meeting in the presidential palace, is the real cause of the bloodshed.

Whatever the truth, the reality is that South Sudan faces a tragedy. In the June edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors painted a grim picture of the situation in that country. As per the United Nations (UN), 4.8 million people, a third of the country's population, are at risk of food shortages and "[the risk of a hunger catastrophe](#)" is very real. Floods have worsened the situation, making mass malnourishment and dangerous epidemics an imminent possibility. [Blood and rain in South Sudan](#) are a terrifying prospect.

Yet Kiir and Machar show no signs of backing down. Kiir has appointed a new vice president. Machar has rejected the appointment and [warned of a new war](#). Each side claims that the other breached the peace deal. Machar has [appealed to the UN and the AU to deploy troops](#) to restore peace. [Kiir opposes any such intervention](#). The stage seems to be set for a tragic return to conflict.

The United States has joined the AU in [condemning continued fighting in South Sudan](#). It singled out Kiir's forces for "raping and gang raping women and girls who have taken refuge in UN Protection of Civilian sites." The UN has reported at least [120 cases of sexual violence in Juba](#). The US is promising to hold "those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other violations of international humanitarian law" accountable. Ironically, this violence is taking place in the "[African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women](#)" and making mockery of the AU's declaration earlier this year.

In a speech in Kigali, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon declared that he was "appalled by the magnitude of the violence, the indiscriminate attacks on civilians and peacekeepers, and the immense loss of lives and suffering this crisis has inflicted on the people of South Sudan." He called the renewed fighting horrendous and totally unacceptable. He was particularly alarmed by reports of sexual violence and killings of innocent civilians. "[Enough is enough](#)" said the UN boss.

Ban has "urged the Security Council to take action on three fronts: first, impose an immediate arms embargo on South Sudan. Second, enact additional targeted

sanctions on leaders and commanders working to unravel the peace process. Third, fortify the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS.”

Ban’s words have had some effect. The UNMISS mandate that was due to expire on July 31 has been [extended to August 12](#). This is a mere stopgap arrangement. The UN, AU and other stakeholders have to rise to the occasion and do more to steer South Sudan from hurtling into the abyss.

CRACKDOWN IN BURUNDI AND UN REACTION

Even as strongmen cause strife in South Sudan in their struggle for power, Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza is causing disharmony in his country by clinging on to his office. Last year, Nkurunziza decided to run for a third term.

Nkurunziza’s decision was unconstitutional and thus did not prove to be terribly popular. A failed coup in 2015 gave Nkurunziza the perfect excuse to launch a crackdown that, according to Hilary Matfess, led to [“the tragic death of democracy in Burundi.”](#) In November, *The East African* reported that [Bujumbura residents fled](#) the national capital because they feared for their safety. Nkurunziza had given a five-day ultimatum to dissenters to surrender illegal weapons. In turn, dissenters feared that yielding to these demands might leave them exceedingly vulnerable to repression.

The dissidents had a point. Many of them have suffered enormously. The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) has documented [“348 extrajudicial executions and about 651 cases of torture in Burundi](#) between April 2015 and April 2016.” The OHCHR has also expressed concern over “the significant number of arrest and detention cases involving children, who are often held in adult prisons.” So grim is the situation that more than 270,000 have fled to seek refuge in neighboring countries. This month, [the UN Security Council resolved to send a 228-strong police contingent to Burundi](#). This is the UN’s boldest effort to deal with the unfolding crisis in the country. Deutsche Welle has published a clear [chronology of the Burundian crisis](#) and reports that a former minister close to Nkurunziza was assassinated this month.

Naturally, Nkurunziza is not too pleased. He wants a free hand to crush his opponents. Therefore, his government has been evasive about, and averse to, the UN deployment. Burundi did not attend the AU Summit, which is quite telling. It is up to the

UN and the AU to restrain Nkurunziza and prevent another African country from descending into bloodshed.

AFRICAN ECONOMY WOES

Even as the AU attempts to increase intra-African trade, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised growth projections “down substantially in sub-Saharan Africa” in its [World Economic Outlook Update](#). The IMF takes [the same view as the authors did last month](#) and analyzes the effects of Brexit that “has brought waves of uncertainty crashing on African shores.”

The IMF points to challenging macroeconomic conditions in Africa’s largest economies. In June, the authors wrote about Nigeria’s [“full-scale economic crisis as government revenues plummet and expenditures mount.”](#) The IMF is forecasting the Nigerian economy to shrink and the South African one to grow by a paltry 0.1% in 2016. Other African economies are also suffering as [commodity prices continue to slump](#). Some are [predicting an upcoming upswing in commodity prices](#) but, until that actually occurs, African economies will continue to suffer.

Africa is experiencing a sharp growth in population. As per the [African Economic Outlook 2016](#), “three out of every four Africans still live under poor human conditions.” The continent needs strong economic growth and rapid employment generation. Yet African governments remain mired in colonial-era legislation and regressive red tape. Corruption does not help. A 2002 AU report estimated that [corruption cost the continent \\$150 billion a year](#). Aid was less than a sixth of this amount even in 2008 when it reached a [record level of \\$22.5 billion](#).

Suffice to say, the proceeds of growth have largely accrued to political elites who siphon off their country’s wealth like Russian oligarchs. Government expenditure is synonymous with inefficiency and waste even when it is not squandered on patronage or subjected to outright theft. Clearly, Africa needed structural and institutional reforms yesterday. Perhaps the current economic crisis will force its political elites and rapacious interest groups to bring in some long overdue reforms.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

This month marked the end of the long-drawn-out trial of Hissène Habré, a former president of Chad. In the May edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors examined the implications of Habré being sentenced in Senegal “[to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity, torture and sex crimes](#).”

Habré ruled a country called the “Dead Heart of Africa” with an iron fist from 1982 to 1990. His draconian regime [killed an estimated 40,000 people](#). The authors hailed the conviction of one of Africa’s Big Men who have often gotten away with impunity for all their atrocities. It marked a major milestone in international justice in Africa. The Extraordinary African Chambers (EAC) is a pioneering legal experiment by Senegal and the AU “[created to prosecute international crimes committed in Chad between 7 June 1982 and 1 December 1990](#).” Habré is the first former head of state tried by a tribunal set up by the AU in another African country. Hence, he is also the first of the Big Men to be convicted on African soil.

This month, the Habré trial set another milestone. [The EAC ordered Habré to compensate all the victims of his crimes](#). The EAC has [ordered Habré to pay](#) \$34,000 to every victim of sexual violence, \$25,000 to everyone who was tortured or imprisoned, and \$17,000 to those who suffered indirectly. Damages to victims of international crimes are a rare de facto phenomenon in international criminal law. They are rarer still when the perpetrator is given a life sentence. Yet the EAC has ordered Habré to pay compensation in his personal capacity.

The wheels of international justice are starting to turn in Africa. Perhaps they may come full circle one day.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Democracy Deepens Amidst Economic Woes

August 31, 2016

Elections, free, fair and not-so-fair, at a time of economic crisis mark a deepening of democracy in a continent where Big Men once ruled with impunity.

Power abhors a vacuum. In many parts of Africa, independence from European imperial powers was just a ceremonial transfer of power to local autocrats. When the imperialists hurriedly packed their belongings and marched off, “[Big Men](#)” took over and dispensed with niceties such as elections.

As the authors explained in the previous edition of [Africa This Month](#), Africans chose neither the states they live in nor their borders. Disparate peoples were forced to coexist in rigidly defined sovereign states with centralized power structures that encouraged despotism, patronage and struggle for power. The African Big Man emerged as a de facto all-powerful king in a land that had thitherto known smaller homogenous kingdoms or chiefs and council of elders. In a twist of irony, many pre-colonial traditional African regions espoused inclusive democratic values that were further eroded by the emergence of the Big Men.

This month, many elections took place in Africa. All of them were rambunctious affairs. Some had messy outcomes but they point to a new future for a continent where the true will of the people—the women and men at the grassroots—is finally beginning to matter.

SOUTH AFRICA: THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF AN ERA

The country of Nelson Mandela made history this month. The ruling [African National Congress](#) (ANC), once Mandela’s party, lost to the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) in local polls in the administrative capital, Pretoria. The DA also won the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality, which has a rich history of anti-apartheid struggle. The [ANC even lost Johannesburg](#), marking what the BBC called “a tectonic shift in South African politics.”

Although the ANC still won 54% of the national vote, its electoral performance was the worst since the end of apartheid in 1994. Mandela is probably smiling in his grave as democracy takes root in his country. A democrat at heart, he would be glad to see South Africans shed off racial and tribal dispositions, and vote on the issues. Such was the magnanimity of the man that he would sooner see this ideal triumph at the expense of his beloved ANC.

With housing inadequate, [unemployment at 26.6%](#), education poor, water scarce, electricity irregular and garbage strewn in the streets, people lost patience with the corruption scandals and routine incompetence of the Jacob Zuma-led ANC.

South Africa has suffered deeply from the global economic downturn. As demand for commodities has plummeted, earnings and jobs have been in short supply. The ANC is certainly not responsible for the downturn but it has demonstrated a lack of leadership at a time of crisis. In the [March](#) and [April](#) editions of Africa This Month, the authors chronicled some of the scandals of President Jacob Zuma that have cast a gloomy cloud over the country.

The “Guptagate” scandal hurt the South African economy at the very time it needed a steady hand on the tiller. Zuma arbitrarily sacked Nhlamhla Nene, his capable finance minister, and appointed an upstart instead who barely lasted two weeks into the job. Rumors swirled in South Africa about the wealthy Gupta family wielding undue influence over Zuma, and the deputy finance minister alleged that the family had offered him Nene’s position. This incident shook investor confidence in the economy and the ANC’s reputation was dragged into the mud along with Zuma’s.

Scandals have continued to plague Zuma and the ANC even as the economy and people suffer. In the land of apartheid, many black South Africans have voted for the once white-dominated DA. In 2014, when the DA elected a black leader, Mmusi Maimane, [the ANC ridiculed him as a stooge](#). Given South Africa’s history, this was a powerful and emotive label. Yet despite the historic appeal of the ANC, black South Africans voted for the DA in the hope it will do a better job in providing services to the people than the ANC.

Clearly, there has been what the BBC calls a “paradigm shift in South Africa’s politics — voters are now more interested in issues rather than race.”

A FISHY ELECTION IN GABON

Despite the ANC being shell-shocked at the outcome of the polls—a pyrrhic victory—South Africa’s elections went off rather smoothly. In West Africa, [Gabon’s presidential election](#) was not as smooth; a contest made even more problematic by the fact that it ended up becoming quite a close-run thing. Election authorities declared that President Ali Bongo had garnered 49.8% of the vote, while opposition leader Jean Ping had received 48.2%. Bongo beat Ping by a mere 5,594 votes; the closest presidential election in Gabon’s history.

Bongo came to power in 2009 after [a contested election](#). In the aftermath of that election, the opposition alleged fraud. Their supporters took to the streets and torched the French consulate general. Bongo’s troops crushed the protests with an iron fist, paving way for him to “ascend to the throne” upon the death of his father, [Omar Bongo](#), who was Africa’s longest-serving leader when he died in 2009. He was often described as the last of Africa’s Big Men and the world’s longest serving non-monarch.

Omar Bongo rose to power through the colonial military. He was the first black man to serve in the French Air Force in Chad and French paratroopers once saved his bacon. As a member of the [minority Bateke ethnic group](#), Bongo ruled cannily and outlasted most of his fellow leaders. Corruption and violence were par for the course, though, and the Bongo family amassed a personal fortune from the country’s oil boom.

Ping was once an ally of Omar Bongo and has two children with his daughter. He is the son of a Chinese merchant who emigrated from Wenzhou and holds a [doctorate in economics](#) from the University of Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne). From 2008 to 2012, Ping served as the [chairperson of the African Union Commission](#) (AUC) and is a rather well-known international figure.

Ping poignantly points out that voter turnout in Ali Bongo’s home province of Haut-Ogooue was 99.9% and Bongo got 95.5% of votes, while voter turnout in other provinces was between 45% and 71%. A 99.9% turnout is nearly impossible, and not even Australia manages it despite making voting compulsory. Clearly, the vote has not been free and fair. In any case, Gabon’s electoral registers are outdated, and people who leave or die still end up remaining on the rolls. Therefore, Ping’s allegation that the [vote was “stolen”](#) holds a bit more weight than the gripes about sour grapes of a sore loser.

Unsurprisingly, people are protesting and violence has erupted. Eight hundred people have already been arrested in Gabon's capital, Libreville. At least another 400 have been locked up in other parts of the country. True to form, the United Nations (UN), the United States and France, the former colonial power and patron of Omar Bongo, have called for restraint and greater transparency about the election results. They have urged for the release of vote tallies in each polling station.

Ping will take the matter to the constitutional court, which will decide upon the election result. Even if the court rules in favor of Ali Bongo, the fact that Jean Ping can go to court is a giant step forward for democracy in a country where Omar Bongo's opponents were routinely murdered in the 1970s and opposition leader Joseph Redjambe mysteriously died in 1990. Ultimately, the court's determination could have a profound effect on the direction of Gabon's democratic evolution.

ZAMBIA GOES TO THE POLLS

Like Gabon, Zambia too had a close election. It was a repeat of last year's presidential by-election, which was triggered by the death of [Michael Sata](#), its then-president. In the 2015 by-election, [President Edgar Lungu won 48.3%](#) of the vote. Hakainde Hichilema, his opponent, got 46.7% of the vote and denounced the election as a sham.

This time, Lungu won 50.4% of the vote with Hichilema getting 47.7%. Last year's election led to a constitutional amendment in January that created a new electoral system in which a candidate needs over 50% of the votes cast to avoid a second round of voting. Hichilema is alleging fraud again and claiming the election result does not represent the will of the people. He is challenging the result in the country's constitutional court.

Apart from voting for a president, Zambians voted for members of parliament, mayors, local councilors and an amendment to the constitution on changes to the bill of rights. The BBC reported high voter turnout and "[long, calm, orderly queues](#)." Election monitors did not report any complaints and international observers declared [Zambian elections to be free and fair](#). The African Union Election Observation Mission, [led by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan](#), declared the election to have been, for the most part, peaceful.

Truth be told, Zambian elections were largely fair but far from perfect. As per the European Union (EU) delegation, they were “[marred by systematic bias in state media, and by restrictions on the campaign](#)” that “unduly affected small parties and independent candidates.” Yet Zambian democracy is alive and kicking. Hichilema’s running mate served the late Sata whose son also supported the opposition leader.

Lungu leads Sata’s party but is not quite formidably in charge. Zambians are restive and the opposition is vibrant at a time when the bottom has been knocked out of the economy. Crashing copper prices have caused mines to close and left thousands unemployed. The country has had to go to the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) cap in hand. At the same time, like the rest of southern Africa, [Zambia is suffering from a drought](#) that the UN has described as the worst in 35 years. Since the region relies on hydroelectric power, electricity has been in short supply as well. The knock-on effect on the economy has been catastrophic.

To its credit, Zambia has not descended into violence or civil conflict despite its economic crisis. Both parties are patiently waiting for a final decision on the election results by its constitutional court. By peacefully holding elections, Zambia has demonstrated that democracy is developing deep roots in this young nation.

NIGERIA SLIPS INTO RECESSION

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has [slipped into recession](#). The latest growth figures show that the economy contracted by 2.1% between April and June. This makes for two consecutive quarters of contraction, which qualifies as recession. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics blames low oil prices. Given that the government earns 70% of its revenues from crude oil, deficits have naturally ballooned. The naira, the country’s currency, was finally allowed to float freely in June and lost 40% of its value in a single day. Propping it up was a blunder of Himalayan proportions. Its foreign exchange reserves leaked faster than air out of a deflating balloon. Now, the falling naira has led to other problems. Inflation is at an 11-year high, reaching 17.1% in July.

The country has lost its reputation for fiscal and monetary competence. Markets have lost confidence. Earlier this year, the IMF forecast that the [Nigerian economy would contract by 1.8% in 2016](#). That figure might turn out to be higher. Aero Contractors, Nigeria’s second largest airline, has suspended flights and operations indefinitely. Not

only oil companies and airlines but also financial institutions and construction companies are firing staff. The entire industrial sector is shrinking. Food, beverage, tobacco, hotels and even tourism sectors are suffering. [Nigerians are groaning](#) as the unemployment rate hits 46%.

This is far cry from the boom years that saw Nigeria become the largest economy in Africa. After its [last recession in 2004](#), Nigeria embarked on a period of high growth on the backs of rising oil prices. Sadly, Nigeria remained a one-trick pony and the country has suffered as the economic tide turned dramatically.

In the June edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors pointed out how President Muhammadu Buhari's "[sledge hammer approach](#)" in the Niger Delta was too expensive for the country. At a time of recession, it might turn out to be utterly unaffordable. In the north, Boko Haram continues to be a problem and economic woes might amplify that unrest.

The silver line for the Nigerian economy is the [new 185-kilometer standard gauge railway line](#) that links Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja, with its commercial capital, Kaduna. The Chinese constructed the Abuja-Kaduna railway for a cost of about \$900 million. Both cargo and passenger trains will run between the two cities, increasing the movement of people, goods and services. This is exactly the kind of investment in infrastructure that Nigeria and the rest of Africa need to get the economy back on track.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Saving the Village to Transform the Continent

September 30, 2016

African leaders get together and come up with a declaration that emphasizes the development of rural areas so that Africans stop fleeing to cities and other continents.

The end of the commodity boom has hit places like Africa and Latin America hard. In April, the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) observed in its Regional Economic Outlook](#) that “economic activity in sub-Saharan Africa has weakened markedly” and that growth in 2015 fell to 3.5%, the lowest level in 15 years. Drought in southern Africa has not helped either.

Yet there are positives in the African story. Countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya and Senegal are doing well because they are paying less in oil prices, experiencing strong private consumption and investing in infrastructure. Nevertheless, the IMF has called for a “policy reset” that includes curbing fiscal deficits and building a sustainable tax base.

African leaders have not quite heeded the IMF’s recommendations and most African economies “[continued to disappoint in the second quarter.](#)” Right from the first edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors have chronicled how the global economic slowdown afflicts Africa. This slowdown is causing an exodus from the African countryside to urban areas and from the continent itself to other parts of the world. African leaders met in September to map out ways to stop the mass rural exodus.

SAVING THE VILLAGE

Early this month, representatives of 30 African countries met at the [2nd Africa Rural Development Forum \(ARDF\)](#) to drive “rural change” in their continent. The leaders did come up with some sound ideas. They argued for land and agrarian reform. Agriculture-led rural industrialization was part of the mix. Furthermore, the leaders emphasized public expenditure in rural areas to improve infrastructure.

The big challenge for Africa is how it acts on the ARDF's eminently agreeable declaration. The African population, [already comprising 1.2 billion people](#), is exploding. About 41% of the population is under 15. This means that the continent has to create jobs and create them fast. The ARDF promised to promote youth empowerment through improving education, skills and knowledge as well as increasing access to other factors of production.

This is a worthy goal in a continent where [inequality is increasing as per the IMF](#) and [elites are often engaged in massive land grabs](#). Pessimists point out that the ARDF declaration is just hot air and will never be implemented. Optimists argue that it is a belated recognition of the importance of the land question that has bedeviled rural areas in much of Africa as [it does in Colombia](#).

The ARDF declaration also emphasizes the green economy as well as information and communication technologies. Given the population explosion and growing urbanization, Africa is facing [major environmental challenges](#). Deforestation, industrial agriculture, overfishing, sewage, noxious automobile fumes, heaps of plastic *et al* are poisoning Africa's air, water and soil.

With new technologies such as wind, solar and geothermal energy, there is less reason for villagers to flock to shanty towns and crowded slums in the shadows of big cities. It is now possible to have electricity and connectivity in villages. African communities do not need to suffer the breakdown that English villages suffered in the 19th century. The Dickensian misery of urban poverty with its isolation, squalor and disease is not necessarily inevitable.

Most Africans live in rural areas. They still have an enduring cultural attachment to their land. Their families and communities are still tight-knit. Therefore, development of rural areas must take precedence. If those in rural areas had access to roads, electricity, health care, schools and internet, they would be less likely to leave their homes. So, saving the village might turn out be the simplest solution to uncontrolled urbanization and massive emigration.

“BIBI” COMES CALLING

In July, Binyamin “Bibi” Netanyahu embarked upon a [four-country tour of East Africa](#), becoming the first Israeli prime minister to visit the continent in 30 years. He visited

Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Ethiopia to boost security, health care and trade ties in a trip of enormous significance.

This month, Bibi built on his tour by meeting with African leaders during the [71st session of the United Nations General Assembly](#) in New York. Although the meeting was a closed door affair, details have emerged that mark it out as pivotal in Israeli-African relations. Apparently, Israeli companies showcased their technological innovations to African leaders.

As per [The Jerusalem Post](#), Energyia Global Capital, a solar power company, was one of those presenting its innovations. It already has a prominent footprint on the continent, running the [first major solar power farm in East Africa](#) under the name Gigawatt Global. Located near Lake Mugesera in Rwanda, this power plant was built in less than a year and powers more than 15,000 homes. It is an example of the green economy that ARDF envisioned. US President Barack Obama's [Power Africa](#) backs the project.

Yosef Abramowitz, the big boss of the company, spoke about providing electricity to 600 million people in Africa and weaning another 200 million from smoke spewing fossil fuels. He announced an investment of \$2 billion on the continent over the next four years. With a dramatic flourish, he declared, "a new light is shining out of Zion." Relations between Israel and Africa were not always so warm. Most African nations severed their ties with Israel after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and, [as Al Jazeera observes](#), Israel's friendship with apartheid South Africa was off-putting. Bibi is changing Israel's relationship with Africa by sharing technology, entrepreneurial knowhow and expertise.

In his search for friends, Bibi's country, known also as "[start-up nation](#)," is willing to [share some of its secrets](#) with Africa. This is good news for a continent seeking partnerships in technology and innovation to transform health care, education, agriculture, energy generation and more.

THE EARTH SHAKES RATHER TERRIFYINGLY

The sleepy town of Bukoba in northern Tanzania on the western shores of Lake Victoria was rudely awakened on the morning of September 10 by a [terrifying earthquake](#). The quake measuring 5.7 on the Richter scale, struck at a depth of about

10 kilometers, taking the region by surprise. Seventeen people were reported dead with over 200 injured. Tremors from the epicenter fanned out into neighboring Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya.

Despite the low death rate, the devastation to the region was immense. Many buildings were damaged, with almost 300 homes destroyed. Power outages crippled the area and the main hospital in town was overstretched.

This was the second major earthquake in the region in a decade. Because of the rarity of earthquakes in East Africa, the region is ill prepared for such calamities. If it were not for the low casualty rate, Tanzania would have been in dire need of international assistance. Even with the current tragedy, assistance has been forthcoming. The United Kingdom put in £2.3 million for a relief fund for victims.

While most people have worked to provide relief to victims of the earthquake, some have attempted to take advantage of them. Fortunately, two such people have been caught. Both of them are public officials who have been dismissed from their jobs for setting up fake accounts to embezzle funds from the relief efforts.

In the January edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors pointed out how the election of Tanzania's President John Pombe Magufuli was a breath of fresh air. He has been a change from many of the mediocre African leaders who have ruled the roost in the past. The "Bulldozer, as Magufuli is known as, is doing his bit to change things with his no nonsense approach.

However, tackling corruption is like building Rome. Both cannot be done in a day. As [Reuters observes](#), Tanzania is ranked 117 out of 168 nations in Transparency International's 2015 Index. Clearly, a lot remains to be done. This means that delivery of public services, including relief after earthquakes, tends to leave a lot to be desired. Tanzania teaches humanity two valuable lessons. First, it helps to prepare for disasters even if they happen to be rare. Second, corruption is a scourge that every society needs to get rid of because it enables those in power to rob from the weak and the vulnerable.

WAS GANDHI RACIST?

In Ghana, many are calling for the [removal of a statue of Mahatma Gandhi](#) from a university campus. This statue was a gift from India when its president visited in mid-June. Gandhi spent 21 years in South Africa where he fought for the rights of his fellow-countrymen.

It turns out that this champion of nonviolence and scourge of the British Empire believed that Indians were better than “savages or the Natives of Africa.” An online petition calling for the removal of Gandhi’s statue quotes many pejorative comments that he made regarding Africans. In 1896, he held the African to be a “raw Kaffir whose occupation is hunting, and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and, then, pass his life in indolence and nakedness.”

The petitioners have a point. The British imported Indians into Africa to bolster their power. Indians worked in the mines, built railway lines and sold British goods, furthering the interests of the British. Today, Indians continue to be some of the wealthiest individuals, particularly in East Africa. They continue to lead separate lives from the local population. Many apartment blocks for Indians in cities such as Nairobi and Eldoret still do not rent out to Africans.

In the May edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors pointed out how Africans suffer racism on a daily basis in India, and how the flailing state fails to protect them. After the death of a Congolese student, African nations boycotted Africa Day celebrations, publicly slapping India in the face. If Ghanaians remove Gandhi’s statue, it will heap further embarrassment on a country that is seeking big power status.

The controversy about Gandhi proves how history poses uncomfortable questions. The Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, which thousands dream about and which has been awarded to people like Bill Clinton, was created out of the loot of treasures from Africa. It is named after a ruthless man who stole with impunity from this wonderful continent. Does that mean that Africans boycott the scholarship named after this robber baron and pull down his statues?

Similarly, Christianity came to Africa on the notion of *mission civilisatrice*. Christian soldiers were urged to “[spread the peaceful gospel with a Gatling gun](#)” in the same manner as the *conquistadores* of Latin America. Does this mean that Africans leave churches en masse and reclaim their old tribal names instead of current Christian ones?

Rajmohan Gandhi, a historian and biographer of his grandfather, states that [Gandhi was often “ignorant and prejudiced about South Africa’s blacks.”](#) He adds that India’s beatified leader was “an imperfect human being,” but he goes on to point out that “the imperfect Gandhi was more radical and progressive than most contemporary compatriots.” Is that enough for Ghanaians and Africans to forgive Gandhi for his prejudice, narrow-mindedness and racism?

These are questions to which there are no clear answers, but the fact that Africa is now questioning its tortured past is refreshing. Africans have long suffered from racism not only in Europe and the Americas, but also in Asia and the Arab world. The questioning of as haloed a figure as Gandhi shows the critical inquiry, the cultural confidence and the new bravery that, bit by bit, might transform this great continent.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



International Institutions Stumble

October 31, 2016

Despite divisions and conflicts, African leaders are behaving more assertively in their messy dealings with the international community and its imperfect institutions.

This month, Africa hosted a big international gathering. Delegates from over 150 countries met in Kigali, Rwanda, to reach a global deal to end the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFC).

FIRST GLOBAL DEAL IN AFRICA

HFCs are [“highly potent greenhouse gases, thousands of times more powerful than carbon dioxide.”](#) They are used in refrigerants. As temperatures rise due to global warming and consumers in emerging economies become more prosperous, demand for refrigerators, air conditioners and other cooling devices is booming.

Meanwhile, supply in turn is boosting demand. Economies of scale and efficiencies in the production process are leading to larger numbers of cooling devices at cheaper prices in markets worldwide. As a result, a higher amount of HFCs are being released into the environment, heating an already warming planet further.

It is important to remember that the HFCs were brought in after chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) were phased out under the [1987 Montreal Protocol](#) because they were thinning the ozone layer. By bringing in HFCs for CFCs, humanity exchanged one evil for another. With CFCs gone, [the ozone layer might be healing](#) but the planet is heating up. Such is the scale and speed of the crisis wrought by HFCs that all countries at the conference recognized they had to do something. After all-night negotiations, they reached a deal.

According to US Secretary of State John Kerry, this deal is a [“monumental step forward”](#) and will “reduce the warming of the planet by an entire half a degree centigrade.” The fact that this deal was concluded in Kigali instead of Kuala Lumpur or Kansas City is important. It is the first big global deal in recent memory to be concluded in Africa, and this is of enormous significance for the future.

A SERIOUS ELECTION FOR AU CHAIR

In previous editions of [Africa This Month](#), the authors have examined the African Union (AU). It turns out that this body is increasing in importance. Even as the world is fixated on the forthcoming US election, [five candidates have jumped into the fray to chair the African Union Commission](#).

Many like [Babatunde Fagbayibo](#), a young law professor, [argue](#) that “as long as the current structure of the AU remains in place, it will make little difference who the next chair is.” Fagbayibo argues that the AU Commission needs more institutional authority to implement directives and penalize states that refuse to comply. He wants greater clarity in the role of the chair, along with increased powers to make it a worthwhile position.

These authors find Fagbayibo’s arguments persuasive. They disagree with him on one point, though. The person who chairs the AU Commission is critical at this juncture of African history. In the not too distant past, Jacques Delors, as president of the European Commission, was responsible for “the acceleration of history” and the creation of the European Union (EU) as we know it today.

It was Delors who set out a grand vision for the EU, playing a crucial role in the Single European Act, the single market and the creation of the euro. Delors’ “acceleration of history” refers to his bold decision to [welcome East Germany into the heart of Europe](#) after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This ardent European was much more than a technocrat and once prophetically declared, “[Europe needs a soul!](#)” in an eloquently Gallic call reminiscent of Rousseau. Without Delors, it is impossible to imagine the EU of today.

Now, all is not going well in the EU. As one of the authors has argued earlier, Delors “[went too far in pushing through the euro.](#)” On balance though, Delors was a visionary the EU needed, to make its “tryst with destiny.” Delors proves that leaders matter even in supranational institutions. Fagbayibo is right in saying that the structure of the AU needs to change, but it would help to have someone like Delors as the chair of the AU Commission to make the case.

It is for this reason that five candidates for chair of the AU Commission is terrific news for Africa. It proves that, for all its limitations, the position matters. The election of the

chair will be messy. Regional considerations will come into play. So will the rivalry between Anglophone and Francophone countries. The process will involve backroom deals and horse trading. However, the mere fact that the continent has five candidates to choose from is a positive development for the future.

As optimists, the authors perceive the AU to be inching forward. For instance, in the July edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors examined the significance of the introduction of African passports by the AU. Such a move chips away at arbitrary colonial borders that have long shackled Africa's potential. It paves the way toward increasing intra-African trade, an essential ingredient in boosting economic growth in the continent and mitigating poverty. The strengthening of the AU facilitates such developments even if the progress may seem to be too slow for its critics.

These critics have a point when they argue that the AU "is slow to respond to security threats, that it prioritises power over justice and that it fails to adequately represent the needs of this continent's 1.11 billion citizens." The AU bureaucracy also comes in for a lot of flak. Yet as the [Institute for Security Studies](#) points out, the AU "puts a lot of effort, much of it effective, into smaller initiatives that yield incremental results." Critics could do well to remember that the AU is certainly no EU, but it is no South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation either. So far, it has had significant leaders, but perhaps it now needs a Delors in the saddle. The chance of this occurring increases incrementally with five candidates to choose from.

DEADLY PROTESTS AGAINST THE UN

It is not an everyday occurrence that the United Nations (UN) is accused of excesses and its troops fire to cause civilian deaths. [Protests against the UN's peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic](#) (CAR), or MINUSCA as it is known by its French acronym, broke out on October 20 and turned violent. Protesters wanted MINUSCA to leave for failing to protect the local population. When demonstrators tried to break into MINUSCA headquarters, its troops fired on them, leaving four people dead.

As expected, there are conflicting accounts of this tragic incident. Protest organizers claim peacekeepers started shooting protesters. MINUSCA denies the charge and argues that the soldiers merely fired teargas. On top of the four killed, 14 people were injured in the clashes, including five peacekeepers.

Protesters claim that MINUSCA has abdicated its duties and failed to protect civilians from armed rebels. Furthermore, they complain that MINUSCA peacekeepers have committed crimes against the local population. [Allegations of sexual abuse](#) have emerged repeatedly. In spring 2014, reports of largely French peacekeepers sexually abusing a number of young children in exchange for food or money surfaced, leaving the UN red faced.

Peacekeepers are in CAR because of the oft repeated African story of a bloody civil war. [In March 2013](#), Muslim Séléka rebels booted out then-President François Bozizé and launched a campaign of terror where no one—the old, women or children—was off limits. Their favorite weapon for slaughter was balaka, a local machete they used with much relish to hack human flesh.

Unsurprisingly, a counterforce appeared in the form of [anti-balaka vigilante groups](#). These mainly Christian groups were purportedly Bozizé's creation with the majority of fighters being youths without any schooling, with some as young as 10. The anti-balaka competed with the Séléka in brutality. The result is bitter and bloody where ethnic and religious divides are sowing deep hatred and creating a vicious cycle of vendetta.

In 2014, after Bozizé was deposed, [the UN slapped sanctions on him](#) and two rebel leaders for “undermining peace and fuelling violence in the conflict-torn country.” Thousands have been killed and more than 1 million out of a population of 4.5 million have been displaced. Syria may be grabbing headlines, but what is going on in CAR is no less tragic. The [numbers reported by Genocide Watch](#) with 1.5 million people facing hunger and 2.3 million children affected make grim reading. By some accounts, civil war in CAR has spiraled into genocide. Hence, the UN sent MINUSCA to restore a semblance of order and curb the worst of the violence.

Paragraph 30 of UN [Security Council Resolution 2149 of April 10, 2014](#), created MINUSCA and expressly spelled out its mandate to protect civilians. In particular, MINUSCA is supposed to protect civilians from threat of physical violence with a special focus on women and children. Given MINUSCA's mandate, the allegations of child abuse and the firing on protesters are especially damaging to its reputation. It gives the impression of the fence eating the crop and raises important issues.

The first pertains to the efficacy of the UN. This international body is the place where nation states deliberate. When states crumble and conflict erupts, it is this body representing the comity of nations that is expected to act and intervene. However, this body is infamously unwieldy and bureaucratic. Perhaps it is bound to be this way given the number of parties, interests and people involved. However, there is a case to be made for reforms when it comes to peacekeeping. Once a decision to send troops is made, there has to be a better way of managing them.

Allegations against UN peacekeepers have emerged in various situations over a protracted period of time. They chip away at the legitimacy of an organization that the world still needs. If nothing else, nation states need a club where they can have a jaw-jaw to avoid war-war. It would be helpful if this club can implement its decisions effectively and keep its peacekeepers in line. This means that the UN has to reform its peacekeeping operations, ensure accountability of action and sort out long-overdue command and control issues. The incident in CAR is a wake-up call for the UN to regain legitimacy before it is too late.

THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF THE ICC

It is not only the UN but also the International Criminal Court (ICC) that is in trouble. This month, three African countries, [South Africa, Burundi and Gambia](#), announced their decision to withdraw from the ICC. It is widely believed that [Kenya, Namibia and Uganda](#) may soon follow suit. Before these withdrawals, African states had made numerous threats to disengage from the ICC but failed to act upon them. Now, African states might be about to withdraw en masse.

The current developments force us to delve into the ICC. *Prima facie*, its founding tenets are noble. The [Preamble of the Rome Statute](#), the ICC's originating treaty, states that the court was formed in an effort "to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of [grave international] crimes" and "to guarantee lasting respect for and the enforcement of international justice." The urgency in those words speaks to a shared resolve to prevent future wide-scale atrocities. The ICC was also an attempt to exorcise the demons and horrors of heinous crimes that have plagued humanity in the past. Thus, the ICC has been envisaged as the tribunal of last resort for international crimes and the world's first permanent international criminal court.

Like many organizations, including the UN, EU and AU, the ICC was conceived on the basis of lofty ideals. However, human beings are complex and flawed creatures. In its actions, the ICC has certainly fallen short of its founding precept. In fact, African states have long argued that the court has been partial in its dispensation of justice. They make the point that Africans are singled out for prosecution, and serious atrocities in other parts of the world are almost invariably ignored. They have come to believe that, in the family of nation states, the strong escape justice while the weak are persecuted. Sheriff Bojang, Gambia's information minister, has derisively called the ICC the "[International Caucasian Court](#)."

There is certainly truth in the assertion that the ICC has focused mainly on Africa. Only one of its ten investigations has been conducted outside the continent. [Georgia](#), the only investigation outside Africa, has yet to result in an indictment and is seen as [a test for its future](#). Besides, many of the most violent parts of the world such as Syria and Iraq have not ratified the Rome Statute. Neither have big powers like [China](#) or dynamic democracies such as [India](#). Even the [US voted against the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998](#).

Critics point out that the ICC has no direct authority to investigate American troops in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Torture and drone strikes by the US are just about beyond its purview. [Palestine has pressed the ICC to charge Israel with war crimes](#), but the court has no chance in hell to do anything against Israel, which has not ratified the Rome Statute and promised never to do so.

It is certainly true that justice must be enforced on all violators of human rights through a genuinely independent adjudication process. It is also true that the ICC lacks both the conditions of universality of application and independence in process. The complementarity principle, where the ICC steps in only when states refuse to act, also inhibits the ICC's efficacy. Critics rightly point out that military commanders and political leaders of major powers are shielded from international criminal justice. There is certainly a theoretical case to be made to try some American neoconservatives who advocated torture and service personnel who practiced it, if not George W. Bush or Tony Blair. However, the treaty-based apparatus of the international criminal justice system and its institutions put them beyond the purview of the ICC.

Yet it is also true that victims of genocide, murder, rape and other human rights abuses need justice. Perfection must not become the enemy of the good. Compromise is not

evil but inevitable, and the loftiest ideals have to deal with the messiness of human nature.

African states claim that an initiative meant to protect vulnerable people from brutal rulers has degenerated into an instrument of hegemonic power against African leaders. Hence, they have no choice but to withdraw from the ICC. The reality is more complex. African states are withdrawing from the ICC to further the interests of their leaders.

Burundi is a classic case in point. As the authors reported in the July edition of [Africa This Month](#), President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for an unconstitutional third term led to an attempted coup. Although the coup failed, violence broke out in the country and was crushed brutally. In the process, Nkurunziza's loyalists purportedly committed grave atrocities. The authors pointed out that the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented 348 extrajudicial executions and about 651 cases of torture in Burundi between April 2015 and April 2016.

Therefore, on April 25, 2016, the ICC's chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, [announced that the ICC would be opening a preliminary](#) examination into the Burundi situation. In her announcement, she indicated that she was compelled to act by the fact that "more than 430 persons were reportedly killed, at least 3,400 people [were] arrested and over 230,000 Burundians forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries." It is this preliminary examination laced with the prospect of potential future investigation and prosecution that Burundi's government sought to preempt by its withdrawal from the court. Simply put, by jettisoning the ICC, Burundi is saving Nkurunziza's skin.

Gambia argues that it is pulling out of the ICC following its frustrations with the court, which it says has refused to charge the EU for the numerous deaths of African refugees and migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Further, it has accused myriad Western countries of going scot free despite atrocities they have committed against other independent states.

However, there is more than meets the eye. It is pertinent to note that Gambian President Yahya Jammeh took charge after a coup in 1994 and has already served five terms. Jammeh is facing protests and is [under pressure to step down](#). Human Rights Watch has termed Gambia a "[state of fear](#)" with arbitrary arrests, torture and

killings a feature of daily life. His intelligence apparatus and a paramilitary hit squad known as the “Jungulars” strike terror into the hearts of his people.

As expected, Jammeh is running for another term. Elections are scheduled for December. This time the opposition is inspired and vocal. Jammeh is likely to act like his counterpart in Burundi and unleash his muscle men to stick to his throne. In a twist of irony, Bensouda was once Gambia’s attorney general and justice minister until she was fired by Jammeh in 2000. Timing is everything. Given forthcoming elections, it is in Jammeh’s interest for Gambia to withdraw from the ICC so as to hedge against the risk of being dragged to the court.

While the withdrawal of other countries can be explained as cynical actions of repressive leaders, the reasons for South Africa’s withdrawal are more complex and worrying. In many ways, South Africa is the first country on the continent with political, institutional and economic gravitas that sets the tone for the rest of the region. The country was brought to task [for inviting and then failing to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir](#), who has been accused of genocide and war crimes. When this row broke out in 2015, [South Africa declared it might leave the ICC](#). This year it has gone ahead and done so.

South Africa’s argument for withdrawal is that the Rome Statute contradicts the country’s diplomatic immunity laws. This argument has merit but does not entirely wash given South Africa’s highly progressive constitution. The real reason for South Africa’s withdrawal might be that it prizes African solidarity over international justice.

The situation is complex. The ICC serves a valuable role for states where abuses are rampant and justice is denied. Yet the perception that Africans are picked on alone is obviously a touchy one, given the continent’s history of exploitation both during colonization and the subsequent Cold War. More recently, the ICC has not covered itself in glory. In the April edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors pointed out how the ICC had made a fool of itself in Kenya. Yet the authors hold the view that improving the imperfect ICC is a better idea than abandoning it altogether.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



Africa in the Age of Donald Trump

November 30, 2016

The incoming Trump administration is likely to turn isolationist and dial down engagement with Africa, allowing the Chinese to fill the resulting vacuum.

November has proved to be eventful. Apparently, [South African President Jacob Zuma's leadership of the African National Congress \(ANC\) is hanging by a thread](#). Derek Hanekom, the tourism minister, has tabled a motion for Zuma to go. Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi and Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi have joined the chorus. Obviously, Zuma is fighting back. The stage is set for a bitter political battle that demonstrates that South African democracy is alive and kicking, even if messy and unpredictable.

This month, the events most pertinent for Africa took place far beyond its shores. Fidel Castro is dead and Donald Trump is now president-elect of the US.

WHY DO CASTRO AND TRUMP MATTER?

Now that he is dead, far too much is being written about Fidel, as Castro has come to be fondly known. Every newspaper worth its salt is penning obituaries, reports and editorials. Even as [Trump has called Castro a "brutal dictator,"](#) many African leaders reacted with ["words of condolence, praise and solidarity."](#) Zuma thanked Fidel for his help and support in the struggle to end apartheid. The presidents of Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria and other nations joined in.

Fidel matters to Africa because he was a loyal ally in the struggle for liberation. At the height of colonialism, when the imperial powers sought to retain their hold on Africa, Fidel sought to help the forces fighting against them. In Angola, Cuban soldiers helped gain its freedom from Portugal. Since the 1960s, Cuban troops have served in Algeria, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Libya.

It was not just soldiers that Fidel dispatched to Africa. As [Time reported in 2014](#), Cuba was the first nation to dedicate hundreds of health care workers to West Africa. Cuba emerged as the great hero in the fight against Ebola. While most American news

organizations blacked out Cuban efforts, Africans have not forgotten how poor Cuba came to their aid when rich Europeans and Americans waited on the sidelines.

In the US, Fidel is often regarded as a bloodthirsty tyrant intent on World War III and bubonic plague. In Africa, the [sentiment is rather different](#). The iconic Nelson Mandela, better known as Madiba at home, summed up [what Africans feel about Fidel](#): “We are now being advised about Cuba by people who have supported the apartheid regime these last 40 years,” Madiba said on a visit to Havana in 1991. “No honorable man or woman could ever accept advice from people who never cared for us at the most difficult times.”

What Madiba excused was Fidel’s [“Big Man” syndrome](#) that saw many jailed, tortured, deported and killed for not seeing eye to eye with this communist big boss hell bent on creating his utopian idyll. Madiba and many in Africa saw an anti-colonial comrade in Fidel yet were blind to the repression and human rights abuses of his authoritarian communist regime.

As readers can gauge by now, Fidel was a complex character with a tortured legacy. US President Barack Obama, a great admirer of Madiba, and a former civil rights lawyer, understands this complexity in historical context, in statecraft and in the theater of international relations. In the March 27 edition of [The World This Week](#), one of the authors hailed Obama’s visit to Cuba and his decision to end the doctrinaire policy of isolating Fidel’s tiny island country. Obama has also engaged deeply with both Asia Pacific and Africa. This US policy of engagement is now under threat as Trump rides into office on the backs of a sentiment of isolationism and protectionism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADE

As per the [US Census Bureau](#), the 2015 US goods exports to Africa were more than \$27 billion. Imports were more than \$25 billion, giving the US a surplus of over \$1.75 for the year. In 2008, exports were a little above \$28 billion, imports nearly \$113.5 billion and the deficit over \$85 billion. Since the Great Recession, the US-Africa trade has been declining and the US deficit has turned into a surplus, albeit a modest one.

This drop in the dollar value of trade is not because Starbucks is buying less coffee from Africa and Hershey’s is buying less cocoa. In large part, this drop in the value of trade is because commodity prices have crashed. This has hurt Africa enormously. In

the September edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors quoted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to point out that sub-Saharan African growth in 2015 fell to 3.5%, the lowest level in 15 years. If a Trump administration brings in tariffs, African economies would suffer further. US tariffs would disrupt the economic rhythm of the continent, further slowing down growth and increasing unemployment.

These are not ordinary times. Trump's protectionist rhetoric is a throwback to the pre-World War II era. Africa is somewhat confused by what appears to be a sudden and far-reaching shift in US trade policy. Ironically, it was the World Bank (WB) and the IMF during the time of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher that arm-twisted African states into accepting structural adjustment programs (SAPs). These painful SAPs were imposed on African nations who were forced to liberalize economies, privatize assets and open their markets to trade. Just when Africans are adapting to global trade after the stress of SAPs, the Trump administration seems bullish about pulling the trade rug from under their feet.

The heavily negotiated [Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization](#) (WTO) heralded the age of freer global trade. Despite acceding to the treaty, African states came away feeling short-changed. They were forced to open their markets to foreign goods and services. However, in an industry such as agriculture, which matters most to African economies, Western nations ensured they retained many subsidy-based protections. This meant that African farmers never gained the opportunity to compete on a level playing field and that the so-called free trade was freer for the West than the rest.

Despite the unfairness of existing trade arrangements, African economies draw some benefits from trade. Trump has already [dumped the Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) (TPP) and is likely to tear up existing trade protocols. Principles that the WTO has established to promote global trade are now under threat. For many African states, this amounts to betrayal. The US is shutting the door in their face after inviting them to the party. African leaders will find it very hard to trust and cooperate with an administration undercutting trade rules, especially because its leader has repeatedly disparaged both development and conditions in the continent.

IMPACT ON AID

Not only would a Trump administration cause a decline in trade, but it would also slash trade with and investments in Africa. At this year's [US-Africa Business Forum](#) in September, the US government made new commitments of [\\$9.1 billion in trade and investment](#) to support the development of Africa's consumer goods, construction, energy, healthcare, manufacturing, telecommunications and transportation sectors. These commitments were made with the assumption that the prospects of a Trump presidency were remote. Now, these commitments might come to naught.

On July 26, 2015, Trump had some choice words for Obama's tour of Africa. In his inimitable way, Trump tweeted: "[Obama is in Africa pledging 1 billion dollars to help them. How about that money to help America\[?\]](#)." The soon-to-be president was playing on popular fears. In a 2015 poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation, [Americans estimated 26% of the federal budget was spent on foreign aid](#). The real amount, according to the [Center for Global Development](#), is less than 1% of the federal budget. This amount might shrink further.

Many in Washington and elsewhere argue that aid does little good. In 2009, Dambisa Moyo argued that [aid is hurting Africa](#), trapping nations in a cycle of corruption, slower economic growth and poverty. [Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute](#), who once served Ronald Reagan, makes a similar argument. He points out that despite \$30 billion of aid to Egypt over the last 30 years, the country remains poor and undemocratic. Bandow argues that "waste, inefficiency and corruption" end up benefiting corrupt elites. Furthermore, he suggests aid leads to dependency, retards reform and impedes growth. Bandow makes the added claim that most developing countries are tangential to American security. For him, aid is neither helpful to Africans nor in American national interest.

[National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#) paints a different picture. It turns out that the largest portion of foreign aid goes to health. In 2014, as much as a fifth—about \$3.1 billion—was spent on HIV/AIDS. Maternal and child health accounted for \$530 million while malaria soaked up \$470 million that year. The idea that Americans spend a lot of money on aid is nonsense. As Phyllis Pomerantz, a professor of public policy at Duke University, told NPR, among first world countries, Uncle Sam, with a [nearly \\$18 trillion GDP in 2015](#), has "one of the lowest percentages of gross national income donated to foreign aid."

NPR implies that Uncle Sam is really Uncle Scrooge. More importantly, it seems that the public health benefits to the planet in general and to the US in particular are so significant that they justify the costs. After all, in the day of modern air travel, super-viruses like Ebola could easily come to American shores.

From an African perspective, aid from the US matters because a small percentage of a large GDP is still a substantial amount. Besides, [aid to sub-Saharan Africa nearly quadrupled](#), from roughly \$1.94 billion in 2002 to \$7.08 billion, in 2012. Obama has continued to support Africa in his second term. The US had ignored Africa a while earlier. In the 1990s, the US cut aid to the continent. Africa did not quite matter then, as the US was no longer competing with the Soviet Union following the end to the Cold War. Today, the US is back to being [the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to Africa](#), particularly in the area of emergency food aid. Therefore, cutting aid to Africa risks increasing hunger, disease and strife in the short if not long run.

WOMEN'S HEALTH MIGHT SUFFER

As stated above, most aid goes into public health and, arguably, the money spent on women's health is exceedingly beneficial. [Maggie Fox](#) writes that money from the US is enabling 30% of women and girls in eastern and southern Africa to use modern methods of contraception. The [Guttmacher Institute](#) informed Fox that the US spends \$607 million of its foreign aid on birth control. The institute claims this prevented 6 million births and 2.3 million abortions. It also goes on to say that "for every \$10 million cut from this aid, 40,000 fewer women and couples would get birth control help, 44,000 more unplanned-for babies would be born and 38,000 more abortions would occur."

Liberal American commentators fear that the Trump administration could not only cut money for health programs but it could also withhold money from organizations conducting abortions. Mike Pence, the new vice president, is a devout Christian who [opposes both abortion and stem-cell research](#). Admittedly, most of Africa opposes abortion as well. However, Pence is likely to lead the charge on squeezing funding for organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) that do great work but offer abortion in certain regions as an option for women in case of rape, risk to their health or other extreme circumstances. This could hit the most vulnerable women and girls in Africa hardest because they may lose access to essential healthcare.

This has happened before under George W. Bush, who shared Pence's religious convictions, and [the effects on women's health in the continent were catastrophic](#). In fact, Stanford researchers Eran Bendavid and Grant Miller found that restricting funding for family planning organizations that support abortions actually [increased abortions in Africa](#). One of the first acts of Obama as president was to [reverse this Bush policy](#). The conviction of the American right about the absolute sanctity of life, shared by many Africans as well, might throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Reversing Obama's decision and reinstating a failed policy would lower the availability of contraceptives, increase pregnancy rates, lead to more abortions and hurt African women yet again.

INTERESTING TIMES

One of the authors often keeps repeating the adage that power abhors a vacuum. The forthcoming US disengagement with Africa will see another power shine the light on it. As is now public knowledge, China has been dramatically expanding its presence in Africa for the last few decades.

In a brilliant March 2015 [World Bank report](#), Miria Pigato and Wenxia Tang chronicle how trade between China and sub-Saharan Africa has "rapidly intensified since the late 1990s." In 1985, barely 2.3% of sub-Saharan Africa's trade was with China. In 2015, this figure was 25%. For China, a third of its energy now comes from sub-Saharan Africa. By 2013, China was sub-Saharan Africa's largest export and development partner with the annual trade amounting to \$170 billion. Note, this dwarfs the \$52 billion figure for 2015 US-Africa trade, that includes North Africa.

Pigato and Tang point out that China is stepping up the scope and scale of its engagement with breathtaking ferocity. In 2013, \$3.1 billion flowed into Africa as foreign direct investment (FDI) from China. In fact, FDI has grown at a staggering annual rate of 50% between 2004 and 2013. Already, 2,200 Chinese enterprises are operating in Africa and most of them are private enterprises. Chinese farmers are flowing into countries like [Zambia](#) and [Zimbabwe](#) even as their engineers build [roads](#), [railways](#) and [ports](#) across the continent. Perhaps most importantly, Chinese banks have, during 2003-2011, made loans in Africa of \$52.8 billion, about 2.8% of China's GDP.

As is the norm, such a deepening of economic ties has been followed by an increase in diplomatic contacts, bilateral aid and cooperation initiatives. In 2000, China kicked off the [Forum on China-Africa Cooperation](#) and many argue that the increase in US aid to Africa was merely a strategic decision to contain the Middle Kingdom. An isolationist Trump administration is likely to deem Africa as neither important nor strategic enough to merit either investment or attention.

The US retreat in Africa might be accompanied by a Chinese advance. In Djibouti, strategically located in the Horn of Africa at the mouth of the Red Sea *en route* to the Suez Canal, the Middle Kingdom is building its [first overseas naval base](#). India is sweating in fear as China's "string of pearls" of military alliances rings this bumbling subcontinent. Chinese allies now include Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, not to mention Nepal and Pakistan. Needless to say, neither Europe nor the US are too thrilled about Djibouti either.

Trump's forthcoming retreat from Africa would abandon an entire geographic theater to China. The US domination of the global economy rests on an intricate spiderweb of institutions, rules and engagements that it has woven together after World War II. The UN, the WB, the IMF and the WTO are all US creations. Similarly, the pitiable amount of aid that the US doles out enables it to reap peace dividends and international legitimacy. For instance, Obama's stress on governance and democracy as key issues for Africa along with his Kenyan heritage have greatly augmented what Joseph Nye has called the "[soft power](#)" of the US. With Trump in the White House, this power to win hearts and minds that Nye champions will decline and the US is likely to experience a global loss of influence. If the Chinese trade, aid, fight pirates and [guarantee security](#) in Africa, then why will Africans turn to Uncle Sam?

To end with a Chinese proverb, with Trump in the saddle, the US, Africa and the rest of the world will be living in "[interesting times](#)" indeed.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*



The Season of Elections, Hope and Change

December 31, 2016

Even as economic turmoil buffets the continent, elections are the flavor of the season as big men start to tumble from their thrones.

Twelve fateful months ago, the authors decided they would tell a new “[story of Africa with its multitudinous cadences and intricate plots](#).” Over the last 11 editions of Africa This Month, many themes have bubbled up to the surface. The wobbly global economy has taken its toll on Africa. Both [Brexit](#) and the [election of Donald Trump](#) have created uncertain and interesting times for this great continent. The issue of justice has rumbled on through the year with the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) in near-constant spotlight.

Yet perhaps the hulking theme this year has been democracy. In the January edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors pointed out that 19 general elections were scheduled in 2016. They have all now taken place. Some were largely free, some not so free and some not free at all. But the fact that they took place at all is a reaffirmation of the continent’s commitment to the overarching path of inclusive representation. Labels such as the “[Dark Continent](#)” are now antiquated as the dominance of the proverbial “[Big Men](#)” begins to wane.

The fact that two presidents were voted out of power this month is perhaps the most promising exemplar. In an earlier era, this would have been impossible but elections have now become the flavor of the season in Africa. Yahya Jammeh, president of The Gambia, and John Dramani Mahama, president of Ghana, lost elections in two strikingly different countries that represent two of the many faces of Africa.

GAMBIAN BIG MAN FAILS TO LAST A BILLION YEARS

Jammeh is a [stereotypical African big man](#). He seized power in 1994 in a relatively bloodless military coup. Since then, Jammeh has earned notoriety for claims that he could heal HIV/AIDS with a herbal concoction and that he could cure infertility among women. He walks around with prayer beads, finds homosexuality “[anti-Allah](#)”

and [threatens to slit the throats of gay men](#) when he is not promising to “cut off” their heads.

More worrying than his claims is the ruthless brutality he has unleashed upon his people. In September 2015, [Human Rights Watch declared The Gambia a “state of fear”](#) with arbitrary arrests, torture and killings a feature of daily life. Over the years, Jammeh’s intelligence apparatus and a paramilitary hit squad known as the “Jungulars” have become infamous for striking terror into the hearts of his people.

Unsurprisingly, Jammeh declared this October that The Gambia was pulling out of the ICC. Apparently, the country was frustrated with the court for not holding the European Union (EU) responsible for the deaths of Africans crossing the Mediterranean Sea. In reality, it would appear that Jammeh was making a cynical move to avoid international justice in case he lost power and decided to hold on by all means.

The move has turned out to be prescient. Most surprisingly, Jammeh has lost the elections this month despite all his goons. His braggadocious claim to the BBC that he would [rule The Gambia for “1 billion years”](#) has proved to be an inane blast of hot air. On December 2, [Jammeh even conceded defeat to Adama Barrow](#), the charismatic opposition leader with humble roots. He did so on camera for all to bear witness. In this tiny state of barely 2 million people that has experienced only two heads of state since independence in 1965, such developments seemed incredulous. They have turned out to be so.

Jammeh has now had a change of heart. Even as crowds were celebrating in the streets, Jammeh declared that [“serious and unacceptable abnormalities”](#) had forced him to reject the outcome of the recent election. He called for “fresh and transparent elections” under a new “God-fearing and independent electoral commission.”

Some fear that Jammeh could lead The Gambia into a bloody civil war. However, such fears might be exaggerated. The Gambia is a tiny country occupying both banks of Gambia River with Senegal all around it. It exists as a separate state because the British found it useful to seize and ship slaves along the river and then on to the Caribbean and the United States. During the era of the infamous [triangular slave trade](#), ships left ports like Bristol laden with finished goods that were dumped in much of Africa. Then they loaded up these ships with slaves and plonked them off for sugar, cotton or tobacco plantations in the New World. In the New World, they picked up

these slave-produced commodities so that the looms of Lancaster and elsewhere could keep spinning as workers supplemented their meager calories with sugary tea and smoked their way to death.

Even after the [abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire](#), The Gambia was too strategic to be handed over by the British. A cursory look at [any old tribal map](#) of that part of West Africa demonstrates how tribes that had lived there for centuries were arbitrarily divided into the two states of Senegal and The Gambia by France and the United Kingdom. Centralized structures of repression and patronage replaced tribal elders and village councils, hurtling people into penury, fear and oppression. Tragically, they paid the price in blood, liberty and resources to sate the Franco-British lust for wealth and power. Jammeh embodies the same lust of the former imperial masters.

Luckily for Africa, in the words of Nobel laureate Bob Dylan, “[the times they are a-changin](#).” The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) have emphatically [asked Jammeh to step down](#). Marcel de Souza, the ECOWAS Commission’s president, in his end of the year address, noted that “[the sudden volte-face by the outgoing President has put the country in a worrying political situation with an uncertain end](#).” Speaking to reporters, De Souza announced that if Jammeh did not relinquish power at the end of his term, ECOWAS had mandated a standby force from Senegal to intervene.

Senegal nearly envelopes The Gambia and is known to have [intervened against a military coup in 1981](#). As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Senegal is currently seeking broad consensus from the body, on the matter. Force may be the only language a despot like Jammeh understands to bring him to respect the sovereign will of the Gambian people. The Gambia is small enough for the ECOWAS, the AU and the UN to step in and prevent the country from going to civil war.

GHANAIAN DEMOCRACY IS GROWING UP

This month, it was a tale of two elections in Africa. In stark contrast to The Gambia, Ghana’s election is leading to a transfer of power that would be the envy of the US today. John Dramani Mahama, the outgoing president, got [44.4% of the vote](#) and lost by over 1 million votes. He duly called Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo who won 53.9% of the vote and conceded defeat rather graciously. Ghana is a [well-functioning democracy](#) that will experience yet another peaceful transition of power. This makes

this election a paragon of some of the finest democratic ideals that should be emulated by other African states and extolled by future generations.

Mahama lost because Ghana's economy hit the doldrums. Like many other countries, falling commodity prices have hit Ghana hard. Ghana's main exports remain [crude oil, gold and cocoa](#). Ironically, the country's biggest import is refined petroleum. Ghana is yet to emerge from the colonial pattern of trade and, as a result, suffers hugely during market downturns.

Ghana's colonial-era laws and dysfunctional institutions clog its economic arteries. Like many emerging economies, much of the money that comes into the exchequer is siphoned off or spent unwisely. In 2015, Ghana's public debt reached 71% of the gross domestic product (GDP), and it had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a [\\$918 million bailout](#) to restore its "debt sustainability and macroeconomic stability." An [austerity program](#) ensued to the pronounced displeasure of Ghanaians. This year, embarrassingly, Ghana could not pay its bills to Nigeria, which [shut off gas supplies](#) in retaliation.

Although, the [World Bank "constantly ranks Ghana among the top three in Africa](#) for freedom of the press and freedom of speech," it has also estimated [unemployment between the ages of 15-24 to be 48%](#). The report estimating such high unemployment was released just after the government claimed that it had created 600,000 jobs over the last four years, leaving it red faced.

Not only jobs but also power has been in short supply. Mahama was nicknamed "Mr. Dumsor," which literally translates as [Mr. Power Cut](#). Power failures of six to 24 hours were common. Both power generation and distribution are in trouble. The country's biggest source of power has been the [Akosombo Dam](#). Climate change has led to decreasing rainfall, which has led to a diminishing amount of water in the dam. This, in turn, means the dam's electricity production has declined at a time when the population and demand for power in the country is on the rise.

Transmission and distribution are another can of worms, with the notoriously corrupt and inefficient state-owned electricity company holding a monopoly. Far too many [Ghanaians have illegal connections](#), many tamper with their billing meters, and a significant number simply do not pay their bills.

In the face of such daunting challenges, Mahama's government was ineffective and enmeshed in [corruption scandals](#) that gave Akufo-Addo's message a credible opening. He has promised to make Ghana the [star of Africa again](#). He has to get to work on the economy and has a tough task ahead. But as far as democracy goes, Ghana is already a star. As Akufo-Addo rolls up his sleeves to take up the challenge of leading Ghana, the [immaculate words of Mahama's concession](#) speech provide goodwill and comfort to him and the nation. To wit: "And while it is true that only one person can be elected President. In reality, and certainly in a democracy such as [Ghana's], every election is an opportunity for the people of [Ghana] to express their will, to have their say in who will lead them in the shaping of Ghana's future. In this way, each victory belongs to the people. And the true winner is always Ghana."

KABILA DEPARTS WITH THE OUTGOING YEAR

Political parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have reached a draft agreement, as per which [President Joseph Kabila will step down](#) after elections are held before the end of 2017. The deal was brokered by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the DRC. Kabila is the big man in the country who has been in power for two terms. There was widespread fear that he may stay on for another term, if not the foreseeable future.

It is early days to tell what might transpire but the news of this deal is quite heartening. The DRC has not seen a single peaceful transfer of power since 1960. It is a gigantic country almost as big as Western Europe. It boasts some of the largest mineral resources in the world, with an abundance of diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt and zinc. A curse would befall the DRC when once a [white king craving red rubber caused black death](#) in this land. He was none other than the barbaric, brutal and bloody King Leopold II who set a standard for cruelty that has been rarely surpassed since.

The DRC has never really gotten over the toxic legacy of Leopold II. After independence in 1960, Mobutu Sese Seko "[seized, tortured and murdered](#)" Patrice Lumumba, a legendary leader of the independence struggle and the country's first democratically elected leader. Under Mobutu, the DRC was renamed Zaire and plundered in much the same manner as in the days of the Belgians. In this era of the Cold War, the US backed Mobutu and Richard Nixon called him "[a strong, effective, and progressive leader in the exciting new continent, the new Continent of Africa.](#)" Mobutu did not quite live up to those words and created a kleptocracy that robbed his

people. In the words of the BBC, "[Mobutu stashed much of the country's economic output in European banks.](#)"

As part of his "Zairianisation" policy to cleanse his country and its people's cultural identity of any vestiges of colonial influence, Mobutu changed his name. He dropped his respective English and French names "Joseph" and "Desire," replacing them with "Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu waza Banga." This loosely translates to the rooster that lords over the hens, or the all-powerful one.

As fate would have it, the all-powerful one's downfall would come when the conflict that began with the [Rwandan genocide in 1994](#) spread into the then-Zaire. This triggered what *Medicins Sans Frontieres* has called "[Africa's first world war.](#)"

As per the BBC, [5 million people died](#) between 1994 and 2003. That war might have ended but violence never really stopped. Rebel groups continue to operate in eastern parts of the country and endemic conflict continues.

Kabila, who ascended the throne after the assassination of his father, has been in power since 2001 and his second five-year term expired on December 19. The constitution bars him from a third term but Kabila has been trying to cling on to power. He has been breaking up protests that have been erupting since 2015. He has been able to do so because he runs a repressive shop. Opponents get jailed, tortured and shot on a regular basis. [Amnesty International is not too impressed](#) with Kabila's human rights record. This month, Kabila has been under pressure even as he was [cracking down on the opposition.](#)

If this peace deal sticks, then it would be the perfect New Year's gift to the people of the DRC. It might mitigate the suffering that they have almost incessantly gone through since the days of King Leopold II.

CHEETAHS UNABLE TO RUN FOR THEIR LIVES

The cheetah is the fastest land animal. It moves with incredible speed and superlative grace. Like many other species, it seemed to be heading toward extinction. In a terrifying paper presented at the [National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America](#), scientists estimate the global population of cheetahs to be around 7,100. The paper observes that this majestic animal is now "confined to 9% of its historical

distributional range.” Given such a dramatic depletion of its habitat, it is unsurprising that cheetahs are dying out. Poaching adds to the problem.

In the October 30 edition of [The World This Week](#), one of these authors argued that climate change matters and so do other species. The planet is experiencing a sixth global biodiversity extinction crisis. Rising human population and rapacious consumption are killing other species by the day. Africa has long been the last haven for many of this planet’s most glorious species such as zebras, giraffes, lions and cheetahs.

The dying out of cheetahs like the drying out of Ghana’s Akosombo Dam ram home the point that Africans have to rethink their quest for prosperity. Can cheetahs or other endangered species such as elephants and rhinos ever be quantified in terms of GDP? Furthermore, has all the exploitation of the environment in the DRC since the days of King Leopold II truly helped the average African who lives there?

In the September edition of [Africa This Month](#), the authors argued for saving the village to transform the continent. They end this edition and 2016 with the hope that Africans will retain some of the frugal ways of their ancestors and relearn how to live in harmony not only among themselves, but also with other species.

**Available online at [Fair Observer](#)*