

Remarks of Congressman Donald M. Payne
The Africa Society/Ralph Bunche Issue Forum:
“Democracy Threatened: The Legitimacy of Elections in Africa”
March 12, 2008

I would like to thank Bernadette Paolo of the Africa Society for inviting me and for all the excellent work she does to educate Americans on Africa and keep dialogue going. It is great to be at the Ralph Bunche Center where Ambassador Dawson has been such a leader.

While this discussion is focused on the legitimacy of elections in Africa, I want to provide some context of how far African nations have come in terms of democracy.

In the 50 years that have followed, the continent has made great progress. Particularly over the last decade there has been a significant amount of change for the better in Africa. We cannot and should not ignore the challenges still facing the continent. However, we should take time to recognize the encouraging things that have happened.

Consider this stark reminder of the changing political face of Africa. Between 1960 and 1990, only three African heads of state and government had retired voluntarily or left office after losing an election. Since 1990, that number has soared to nearly 40.

The African Union, comprised of 53 of the 54 nations in Africa (Morocco is not a member) has done a great deal to support peace and security on the continent in the 5 years since it supplanted the old Organization of African Unity.

The number of conflicts in the region is decreasing. According to the World Bank, in 2002 there were 16 conflicts in Africa. Today that number has fallen by more than half. We should give the AU the credit it deserves in mitigating conflicts, resolving conflicts and elections disputes after they've occurred, and upholding democracy on the continent.

In 2005, when Obasanjo was president of Nigeria and of the AU, he threatened ECOWAS sanctions against the regime in Togo which took over illegally following the death of the president (father of the new president). Obasanjo also hosted talks which led to elections.

Obasanjo also stepped in immediately in Liberia in the 90's and again in 2003 when the US would not go in until Charles Taylor was removed.

We have several examples of African leaders resolving conflicts – During the war in Congo Nelson Mandela and Sam Nujoma of Namibia brought the warring parties together in 1999 and Masire (of Botswana) continued the process through the Inter-Congolese Dialogue which led to the end of the war.

Two prominent Kenyans have done a great deal to bring peace in East Africa -- General Simbeiywo [sum- BAY- wo] led North and South Sudan to sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, and Ambassador Kiplagat mediated negotiations in Somalia to form the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

Three years ago, I met with Chairperson Konare in Addis on Somalia. The AU wanted the UN arms embargo in Somalia lifted to allow for AU troops to go in. I met with State Department officials at the time. State was opposed to lifting the embargo. Instead, the US backed and armed the warlords, looked the other way when our ally Ethiopia invaded, and launched three air strikes on Somalia. If we had supported the AU, we could have avoided the human loss and destruction we have seen.

Most recently, in Kenya, Kofi Annan and AU President John Kufour came together immediately after the elections when people took to the streets in violence. It was Annan, with President Kikwete [key- KWET- tay] of Tanzania who finally convinced Kibaki and Odinga to agree to the deal that ended the post-election crisis.

There have been some notable elections in the last 2-3 years. Liberia held elections with the highest voter turnout ever, electing the first woman president in Africa.

Nigeria's April 2007 elections were historic and though they were contested and certainly lacked the transparency and credibility they should have, Nigerians -- who are all too familiar with war -- decided to go through the judicial system to challenge the results.

Mauritania held elections a year ago in March 2007 which were deemed free and fair.

Sierra Leone's landmark elections last September saw high voter turnout and the election of President Koroma and a new party.

Mali's 2007 elections were widely accepted and viewed as fair and peaceful.

In 2005 Tanzania had legitimate elections with President Kikwete coming to power. Uganda's 2006 elections saw President Museveni re-elected, opposition leaders jailed, and political intimidation.

We need to closely watch Angola's 2009 elections. They have been postponed for too long and must be closely monitored and supported.

So Africa is by and large heading in the right direction. AU leaders, regional leaders, and former presidents have always been the first to step in to avoid or end conflicts and to resolve election disputes. We should be focusing on increasing capacity and funding for this critical work.

Addendum to Congressman Payne's Remarks

Brief Overview of Subcommittee Activities

In the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health which I chair in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, we have held 20 hearings on critical issues facing the continent focused on ending agricultural subsidies and increasing trade capacity, Africa's water crisis, food security, political and human rights updates in Nigeria and Guinea, and AFRICOM (Africa Command), to name a few.

Two weeks ago we held a follow up hearing on extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) which threatens to undermine efforts made to fight HIV/AIDS on the continent. In South Africa last year 52 out of 53 people living with AIDS died within 3 weeks of contracting XDR-TB.

Following the case of the Atlanta man who traveled through Europe and back to the US via Canada while infected with XDR-TB, I was able to get an extra \$50 million for research, development, and treatment of the illness in Africa through the congressional appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2008.

I met with World Bank President Zoellick last week to say we must have parity in funding for TB. The World Bank is spending 83 cents per TB case in Africa, while it is spending \$9.33 cents per TB case outside of Africa. This has to stop. We are working with the Foreign Operations Committee to ensure additional funding for lab capacity again for Fiscal Year 2009.

Tomorrow we have a hearing on Child Survival. On Earth Day -- April 22nd - we will hold a hearing on ways to mitigate the impact of Climate Change in Africa and are currently working with partners on the ground on a new initiative to revive Africa's institutions of higher education.

From PEPFAR to food security, to Darfur, we will continue to advance the cause for poverty elimination, greater prosperity, and improved quality of life for all Africans.

Our work is supported and complemented by the work of partners like the African Society, the Ralph Bunche Center, NDI, NED, and friends of Africa here today.

We particularly work closely with the Diplomatic Corps. Ambassador Ogego was present when at the end of 2007 we held the inaugural Diplomatic Corps Roundtable with Members of the CBC, the Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Appropriations Committee. We will hold the follow up in about a month.

As chairman, I believe open dialogue and partnership with the diplomatic corps and others is critical to our work to shape US policy on Africa and to speak out when we feel it is headed in the wrong direction.

Again, I thank you all for your work.