

# *Democratization in Africa*

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March 4, 2003*

My opening lecture on the *Role of Frontline*

*States in the Liberation of Southern Africa*

represented the first chapter in modern

Africa's quest for self-governance. This

second lecture in the series on

*Democratization in Africa* represents the

second chapter. This second chapter is a

story that is every bit as dramatic and compelling as the first.

The first chapter was a story of how the indigenous people of the continent sacrificed and struggled to regain control of their countries. This second chapter is about how we make our countries work. By that I mean, the challenge in the present is how do the leaders and people of the continent develop systems of governance that enable the people to be fully enfranchised and have

the range of opportunities that enable them to fulfill their God-given potential.

In July of last year, African leaders gathered in Durban, South Africa to institutionalize their vision of how they saw the people of the continent being enfranchised. In summary, with the inauguration of the African Union, the leaders of Africa declared that accelerating the pace of democratization and development of the

economic infrastructure on the continent could best fulfill Africa's potential.

I was fortunate enough to have been there. It was indeed a moving experience. As one of the founders of the Organization of African Unity, it was great to see the new generation of African leaders take this bold step to secure Africa's future. While the formation of the African Union is a seminal step in Africa's move toward democratization it was not the first step. The *winds of*

*democratization have been blowing across the continent for some time.* This metaphor of the “winds of democratization” is so appropriate because just as the winds ebb and flow so has Africa’s move toward democratic governance. But having said that, there are a number of countries that have several cycles of democratic elections. Countries like Botswana, Cape Verde, Tanzania, Nigeria, South Africa, Mauritius, and my own country of Zambia. There are others that seem to be securely moving

through their first cycle of viable democratic elections like Benin, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, and Senegal. And, with President Chissano's announcement that he will be stepping down at the end of his current term and the recent election in Kenya (which I observed) the trend is certain to continue.

A moment ago I said that the inauguration of the AU was a watershed in Africa's move toward democratization, to understand why it took until 2002 to institutionalize this step

toward democratization in Africa, it is first important to understand the obstacles. While some of Africa's most harsh and unfair critics would suggest that Africa's move to democratization reflects the lack of a democratic culture and the intractable conflicts rooted in tribalism; I beg to differ. To be sure, the lack of a modern history of democratic governance is a factor affecting democracy's development, as are the tribal conflicts that have been exacerbated by the artificial country boundaries drawn by

colonial powers. But, Africa's move toward democratization has been slowed by factors a lot less nebulous, and a lot more manageable.

The obstacles to Africa's move toward democratization have principally been political and economic. The political problems are the most obvious and commonly documented. Number one on the list of obstacles to democratization on the continent was *the Cold War*. As the United



States and the former Soviet Union used Africa as a battleground to fight ideological, and in some cases, real proxy wars the affect was the destabilization of governments across the continent. A classic case in point is Western support, led by Belgium, for the Mobutu government in Zaire. The disastrous effects of that are still being felt. (While I'm on this point, it should be noted for the record that t one point, U.S. aid to prop up Mobutu in Zaire was more than the aid to all of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.) Now, to

go back to my point about western control by proxy, let me add that one of the things that has African leadership nervous about this notion of “regime change” being touted during this present crisis around Iraq are the past implications it has had for places like Africa. Western “successful” regime change has resulted in the assassination of leaders like Lumumba and the imposition of kleptocrats like Mobutu.

Beyond Zaire, there are other examples, like Angola, of the destabilizing affects of the Cold War. Let me add, the effects of the Cold War agenda continued to haunt Africa like a ghost up until the recent capture and death on Jonas Savimbi in Angola.

Second on the list of political obstacles is something I referred to in my lecture yesterday, and that was the attacks on independent African nation states by oppressive forces in other African states that

were committed to maintaining power. Here, Zambia is exhibit number one. Because of our support for the liberation struggles of the people of Angola, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique; at various times my country and my government was under siege from the Boers of South Africa and Namibia, the Rhodesians, and the Portuguese. The liberation of the continent was directly related to the direction of governance on the continent. Not many people outside of Zambia know this, but in

my case the freedom of Nelson Mandela also allowed us in Zambia a freedom to get on with our lives. I can remember the day that Mandela was released from prison as if were yesterday,. That day my eyes welled up with tears and I dropped to my knees and I offered prayers of thanksgiving to God that that day had finally come. After my prayers, I arose from my knees, wiped my eyes, and called my most trusted advisors together to put in place the machinery to move Zambia toward multiparty elections. With freedom

secured on the continent, other made the same decision that I did, that being that the time was upon us to move to next level of governance. I'd like to think that what we did, what I did, reflected what Americans did in electing President Franklin Roosevelt to four terms when American citizens felt their very way of life was at stake.

Beyond the political impediments that had a destabilizing affect on the move to democratization, there were economic

impediments as well. The drop of commodity prices over the last three decades has had a particularly destabilizing effect on African nation states. The 1973 Oil Shock had an equally devastating effect on African governments. The increased debt burden that African governments had to assume because of the drop in commodity prices and the oil shock created a harsh environment for governance and democratic development.

But now that the Cold War has ended, the continent is free from Cairo to Cape Town, there is the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, the issue of debt relief is on the table, capital flows, while not where they need to be, are increasing to Africa, and, at least for now, there is some stability in the oil market; the environmental factors are such that Africa has the best opportunity since the liberation struggles over the last four decades to proceed toward “normal” development.



The changed environment plus the resolve of African leaders are making for some miraculous and monumental changes. Just last month the African Presidential Archives and Research Center at Boston University released its first *African Leaders' State of Africa Report*. This report documents some of the changes taking place. In assessing the state of democracy on the African continent my friend and colleague at the Center, Ambassador Stith puts it well:

*“as the original thirteen colonies of the United States drove democratization and development on the North American continent; as are, at least, thirteen countries on the continent positioned to do the same on the African continent. Africa is more than the sum of its problems. And, the current trend toward democratization is the most compelling evidence for this case.”*

Beyond his assessment, the evidence is ample that the arc of change on the continent bends toward democracy. As I said earlier, I co-led the Carter Center delegation to monitor the recent election in Kenya. Aside from the government's effort to ensure a free and fair election, the evidence of Africa's commitment to democracy was reflected in the faces of the people. It was reflected in the long lines. It is reflected in the hope they expressed. Even in Zimbabwe,

where there have been some questions about the health of democracy, that the people still stand in long lines to express their will and hopes for their country reflects that the roots of democracy run deep.

Though in its infancy, democracy is alive, well, and growing on the continent of Africa.

Some of the world's most promising young democracies exist in countries like Benin,

Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Malawi,  
Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria,  
Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and  
Zambia. With this growing vibrancy of  
democracy there have been some significant  
economic benefits as well:

## **South Africa**

- *“... When the first democratically elected government took office, we inherited a treasury in crisis. The fiscal deficit was over 9 percent and rising... this year’s budget deficit will not be higher than 1.7 percent of GDP.”*
- *“Export of fully built-up motor vehicles have grown to well over 100,000 this year ... within two or three years, South*

*Africa will be exporting 250,000 motor vehicles annually.”*

- *“In the land reform program, 444,000 hectares had been redistributed in the five years leading to the end of 1998; in the three years since then, the number has increased by 600,000 hectares.  
...While the number of houses built or under construction ... currently stands at 1.2 million.”*

## **Tanzania**

- *“The GDP growth rate rose to 5.6 percent in 2001, from 4.9 percent in 2000, and is projected to rise to 5.9 percent in 2002.”*
- *“The growth of the mining sector remained strong at 13.5 percent and its contribution to GDP increased to 2.5 percent.”*
- *“By the end of October 2002, the rate of inflation was registered at 4.5 percent*

*having remained below 5 percent since October 2001.”*

## **Senegal**

- *“Senegal came to the forefront in the fight against terrorism by being the first African country to organize and host a pan-African conference on terrorism on October 17, 2001. More than thirty-six countries attended the conference and adopted the Dakar Declaration against Terrorism.”*
- *“(T)he privatization process, which is being carried out most smoothly. Senegal now has two mobile telecommunications operators and is on its way to the issuance of a third license, which the market demands.”*
- *(T)ourism under President Wade has experienced an unprecedented expansion, with the number rising from*

*400,000 in the year 2000 to 700,000 in 2002.”*

## **Nigeria**

- *“(T)here are other new LNG as well as gas-to-liquid programmes that are currently ongoing. Consequently, by 2008, exportable LNG would have increased to over 25 million metric tons, amounting to revenue of more than 50 percent more than current earnings from crude.”*
- *“Oil production capacity (has increased) from about 2.4 million to about 3 million barrels per day.”*
- *“(T)he inflation has continued to fall since the first quarter of 2002. Inflation decelerated from about 19 percent in the first quarter of 2002 to about 14.8 percent at the end of the third quarter. We expect inflation to be around 14 percent at the end of 2002.”*



## Mozambique

- *(T)he resettlement and return to normalcy of 1.7 million citizens who had sought refuge in neighboring countries for over sixteen years of destabilizing war, and of 4.5 million displaced people, are indeed among Mozambique's major political accomplishments.”*
- *“This stable political environment, coupled with macroeconomic reforms, has made it possible to check inflation, stabilize our currency, and maintain the economy in a continuous growth average of 8 percent per year between 1994 and 2002, with double digit growth in 1997, 1998, and 2001.”*
- *“(We have) witnessed the birth, on Mozambican soil, of a state-of-the-art aluminum smelting industry. I am talking about Mozal, a \$2 billion investment in two plants, the first one of which is in*

*full operation, with an expected output of 500,000 tons of aluminum ingots after the completion of the second phase.”*

## **Mauritius**

- *“The economy has sustained a 6 percent annual growth rate for the last two decades, first driven by sugar, then by textiles, apparel and tourism, and most recently, by financial services.”*
- *“Mauritius is now classified as a middle-income country and ranks, on the basis of the recent Human Development Index for 173 countries sixty-seventh globally.”*
- *“In 2001, 522 companies of the Industrial Free Zone employed 87,607 people. Textile exports to the United States, the European Union, and other markets generated \$1 billion in 2001.”*

## Zambia

- *“Zambia has extensively reformed its trade regime, and today is one of the most liberalized in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result... there has been a surge in imports... reaching \$1,258 million by 2001.”*
- *“In 2001, the (tourism) sector grew by 24.2 percent, up from a growth rate of 12.3 percent.”*

*“By September 2002, a total of 256 companies had been privatized out of a working portfolio of 280.”*

These signs of the times bode well for Africa's future.

While democracy has not reached its full potential of the continent, I believe we're headed in the right direction.

I could conclude on this point but since Zimbabwe has figured most prominently in the news on Africa in the western media, let me close on that note.

There are those that would conclude that the outcome of the recent election in Zimbabwe

confirms the death of democracy in that country, and perhaps in the region. Such a conclusion, to paraphrase Mark Twain, might be a “bit exaggerated.” There are several lessons to be gleaned from the latest “election” in Zimbabwe. The most obvious is that Robert Mugabe’s time has clearly come and gone. Whether we measure it in terms of his violation of the rule of law relative to the land seizures or the recent seriously flawed election. Or, whether we

base it on what Zimbabwe was at independence versus what it is now.

I remember going to Zimbabwe at the point of its independence in 1980. The name of the capital city was still Salisbury and Harare was the center of black life in the area. The Zimbabwe dollar had near parity with the U.S. dollar, the nation was the breadbasket for the region, and it was the hope of the region and a place refugees from other countries came to find sanctuary.

Today, the currency trades at around 260 to the dollar, the country will need hundreds of millions of dollars of food aid, and Zimbabweans now flee their homeland seeking sanctuary and hope in other places. This is the most obvious point to be made relative to Zimbabwe; but it is not the only point reflected in the present circumstances in Zimbabwe or the region.

A first, less obvious point is that while Mugabe's position as a champion of

freedom and fairness has been compromised  
, the masses of people in Zimbabwe  
overwhelmingly demonstrated that they  
would not compromise their commitment to  
democratic values. The turnout for the  
election far exceeded what we see in the  
way of turnout for elections here. Not only  
was the turnout overwhelming, but people  
also endured the inconvenience of long lines  
and the threat of intimidation.



Secondly, the unilateral efforts of the West, however well intentioned, are not the most effective way to further movements for democratic governance. The EU's sanctions, and the U.S. support for such, did not work in ensuring that the Movement for Democratic Change got a fair shot in Zimbabwe's election. What we should appreciate is that such unilateral action comes across as "preachy" and self righteous, at best; or paternalistic, at worst. If the West wants to be helpful it is

important to work in *partnership* with regional leadership to find solutions to regional problems. I know that the leadership in the region was as aggrieved and concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe as anyone in the world community. And, given the stakes for the region it stands to reason. The opportunity for partnering with the regional leadership was there for the making. Had that opportunity been pursued it is quite possible that the outcome in Zimbabwe would have

been different. And, if not at the least, a framework for solving the problem could have been put in place that would have outlined complementary roles for all concerned.

Thirdly, while Robert Mugabe is the most visible leader on the front pages of western newspapers he should not be portrayed as the *face of Africa*. Tanzania President Benjamin Mkapa is not Mugabe, nor is South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Botswanan President Festus Mogae is not Mugabe. Nor are Tanzania, South Africa, and Botswana Zimbabwe. There are leaders and countries on the continent of Africa that are serious about democracy; they are not simply talking the talk, but walking the walk. They deserved to be acknowledged as such; and they deserve our support.

If the West, and particularly the United States as the world's leading democracy, are as serious about democratization in Africa as

the hubbub would indicate we need to appreciate the further lessons that are reflected in the total picture coming out of Zimbabwe and the region. We must remember that democracies in their infancies are not what they can be when they mature. Based on your own experience, do not forget that such anachronisms as the Electoral College were put in place to correct the mistakes of the people and not necessarily reflect the will of the people. You must remember as reflected in the

controversy of your last Presidential election that democracy is sometimes “messy”. This is not to say that the election in Zimbabwe reflects any of the above, it is simply to say that you must engage the leadership of these nascent democracies reflecting your experiences, and not your arrogance. If you do you will be able to share some valuable insights and encourage the needed perseverance if the grandest designs and loftiest hopes of the leaders and people of Africa are to be realized.

