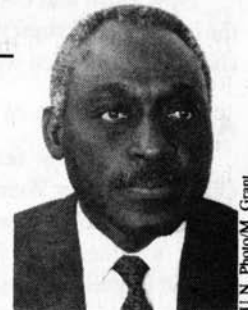

Interview: Dr. Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor, Chairman, Group of 77

'By a stroke of the pen, cancel all debts'



U.N. Photo/M. Grant

Dr. Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor is the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations. He is also chairman of the Group of 77, which represents the more than 100 developing sector nations. The interview was conducted in New York on Oct. 22, by Warren A.J. Hamerman and Dana Scanlon.

EIR: You have spoken many times about the conditionalities imposed on the developing sector for loans. During the period of preparations for UNCED (United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development) in Brazil, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has denounced what he called "green" conditionalities which are being imposed on the developing sector. In Geneva at the Preparatory Commission for UNCED, you have also raised a protest against the notion that in the name of protecting the environment, developing sector economies are being asked to destroy themselves.

Dr. Awoonor: Yes, indeed. When the question of the environment was put on the international agenda a few years ago, we were enthusiastic supporters of this issue, because we share a common planet and we must be concerned as to its fate. But suddenly, when we, the developing countries, insisted upon the question of development being an intrinsic aspect of any effort to deal with environmental degradation on a global scale, we were being told that we were introducing an irrelevant issue. And we said: It's not only a question of keeping the world green, or protecting the flora or the fauna of this planet, but the human beings which are the makers or unmakers of this planet. A great percentage of that human population lives in a state of abject poverty. In our parts of the world, poverty is the cause of environmental degradation, if it is not in the developed parts of the world, where overconsumption is. . . .

EIR: Our magazine has long since taken the view that there are in fact no limits to resources, if advanced technology is made available to the entire world's economy. In that regard, the issue would not be one of viewing so-called pollution in one area or another, but of finding an economic development program which can increase the world's economic output as a whole to maintain its population. This would imply a need to have technology transfer to the developing sector. How

do you view that issue?

Dr. Awoonor: You're absolutely right. In the discussions in the Prep Coms [Preparatory Commissions for UNCED] one of the questions where we get stuck, as it were, is the vital question of technology transfer. We are being lectured, we the developing countries, are being lectured about the virtues of free enterprise. In this area also, we should go to the marketplace and buy technology, when anybody in his right mind in the advanced countries knows that we cannot afford the price-tag on the kind of technology that is available in the advanced countries. We are saying that governments, through the United Nations, must establish a mechanism which will enable the transfer of these technologies at concessionary rates, to nations that desire them, so that we can do our own part in the protection of the environment.

EIR: Dr. Mahathir of Malaysia has publicly raised the issue that the developing sector should consider not going to the UNCED conference in Brazil next year. In your capacity as chairman of the Group of 77, do you have any thoughts on that proposal?

Dr. Awoonor: I think Dr. Mahathir's frustration with some of the tactics that are being used preparatory to this meeting in Rio is very understandable to many of us, many of our countries in the Group of 77. At the same time, we don't think that deciding at this point not to go would be a move in the right direction, because we have not completed the preparatory process. The Fourth Preparatory meeting will take place next year, and it is at that point that such vital questions, that we call under "Agenda 21," the cross sectoral issues of technology transfer, and so on, will be on the table. And when we are not able to reach any agreement, at that final Prep Com, then we may decide what will be the fate of the meeting in Rio.

EIR: George Bush came to the United Nations General Assembly and gave a very imposing speech of his version of a *Pax Universalis*, which would take the form of the hegemony of America and its allies over the entire world economy. Yet, the U.S. economy itself is in great decay and collapse. It has been said that while the Marxist economic system has happily collapsed, the economic system of the United States and Britain is not far behind. How do you see that overall strategic situation?

Dr. Awoonor: I want to return to the concept of the *Pax Universalis*, first. I think there is something rather simple-minded about it. And the simple-mindedness derives from the self-perception of big-powerism, the arsenals of power, and of course this is a post-Gulf war syndrome. It is also helped along by the fact that the Soviet Union and its empire had collapsed.

But a uniform, or a unilateral world, which is based on a single perception of reality—which has got ingredients such as the free market, which to many of us is largely predatory in many, many instances—that free market concept was constructed over a long history of exploitation of other people. The British Empire was not set up because the trees and the coconut groves of the west coast of Africa were greener than any other trees anywhere else. It was predicated on exploitation. But if that is the principle with which we are entering into the so-called new world order, then we are going to be having problems.

EIR: In the last few years, a series of documents written in the United States in 1974, by Dr. Henry Kissinger at the National Security Council, and when George Bush was head of the CIA, has been declassified. And in these documents, the National Security Council of the United States said that it was in the strategic interest of the United States to drastically reduce the population of the developing sector, and to prevent any organizing for a new, just world economic order. These documents target 13 key nations in the developing sector, for what has been called genocide or malthusian depopulation. Have you seen these documents?

Dr. Awoonor: I have seen these documents, and I think they are authentic documents. And I'm not surprised that this was the thinking which was coming out of a certain kind of political mentality. Having said that, of course, one has to resist this oversimplification of the problems of the world. We talk in the United Nations—at least we talk—about an interdependent world, where each nation is linked with the other. And of course, we are all part of the same species, *Homo sapiens*. Now we say, on the question of population alone, for example, there is no reason why population control by itself will answer the question of poverty and underdevelopment. It is the other way around. If you are able to provide the developing countries the tools for development, afford them the opportunity to be able to earn their way in an equitable marketplace of the world—and I'm stressing the word equitable—they will, given education, given environmental work, they will reduce their populations. They will not reduce their populations as a result of any pressure from any sector who says, "We are afraid of being swamped, and so therefore let us impose a malthusian solution." Having said that, we are aware of the distribution of resources in the world. The developed countries of the world still have control over the vast remnants of resources that the world has. Yet, we are calling for a balance in the consumption of these

resources. And therefore, a malthusian effort to control population will be seen by us, as an attempt to reduce the populations of our countries in order to have greater access to the resources on which we sit. . . .

EIR: We have concluded in addition that the world is vastly underpopulated, and especially Africa being underpopulated, and point as evidence to what we ought to do, to the injunction in the Book of Genesis. God says to be fruitful and multiply and for man to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. And that areas like Africa are vastly underpopulated at this time.

Dr. Awoonor: I agree absolutely with you. But I want you to tell that to those who are purveying this idea of family planning!

EIR: Isn't population control also increasingly a conditionality, imposed by the International Monetary Fund?

Dr. Awoonor: Yes, it is.

EIR: Is that the case in Ghana specifically?

Dr. Awoonor: We are being told that even though our growth rate over the past eight years has averaged about 5%, we have a population growth of about 3%, and therefore our growth rate was computed as 2%. And so we should do something about it: We are getting all the lectures and the sermons. We are listening very carefully, we are trying to. But we have come to the conclusion, the irrefutable conclusion that poverty is part and parcel of population growth. Where economic development occurs, populations naturally level off. You can't have it the other way around.

EIR: I would like to ask you a question about the relationship between peace and development, or war and poverty. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly (see *EIR*, Oct. 11, 1991, p. 40), the foreign minister of Ghana quoted Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which was issued earlier this year. Your foreign minister said that the encyclical raised the obvious necessary solution, that development is the new name for peace, quoting the Pope. I would like to ask you to comment on this.

Dr. Awoonor: Yes, indeed. Our foreign minister underscored that point. And I think it's a point that we are also insisting upon within the framework of the United Nations. We are saying: If you talk about population, we must deal with development; if you talk about environment, we must deal with development; if you talk about any element—

EIR: Human rights?

Dr. Awoonor: Human rights, about democracy, we must talk about development. All these elemental features which are suddenly becoming so looming in the eyes of those who have mandated the world for all these years, must come along with the recognition that development, as you correctly said,

“Everybody is screaming blue murder because Haitian democracy is under assault, and there was talk of landing troops, and so on. What nonsense! Haiti has this problem because it is one of the chronically most poor countries on planet earth.”

and as the Pope said, is the word that we must deal with if we want peace.

Recently I made a speech in the U.N. after the coup d'état in Haiti. And everybody is sort of jumping around, screaming blue murder because Haitian democracy is under assault, and there was talk of landing troops, and so on. And I said: What nonsense. Haiti has this problem because it is one of the chronically most poor countries on planet earth. It's a miserable country which is ground in the dust by poverty. And that poverty is exacerbated by a debt, a foreign debt. Why doesn't somebody begin by simply saying to Haiti: "The \$3 billion that you owe to the rest of the world, we cancel it off. And we will provide you with more money now to build schools, to build hospitals, and things that will enable you to stand up on your feet." Until you do that, no democracy in Haiti is going to be sustainable. It will not work.

EIR: We agree very much with the need to defend national sovereignty in the developing sector, which Mr. Bush seems not to wish to respect. National sovereignty is the basis for ending poverty in the developing sector. Could you give us your thoughts on this issue of the protection of national sovereignty?

Dr. Awoonor: It is a very important issue insofar as our work in the United Nations is concerned. I'm talking about the United Nations because this is the arena we have defined as the global marketplace of democracy, where every nation, small or big, has a right of say. And we think that anything that would be done by any power, in its self-perception as a big power, which abrogates, or seeks to abrogate the sovereignty of any nation, is a basic violation of international agreements, of international norms, and the entire international system on which peace can be constructed. So to move into a country on some pretext or the other, without recourse to the various mechanisms that are set up both within the U.N., the International Court of Justice, and such institutions that we have agreed upon since the Second World War, would provide us with the basic infrastructure for constructing peace, is a recipe for disaster. And that is why we were not very happy when the move was made into Grenada; we, as a country, Ghana, we were not happy about that. We were not happy when that dismal little war was launched in Panama, ostensibly just to capture a drug trafficker. We don't think this is the way to do things. If you are preaching morality to the rest of the world, you must be a moral person yourself.

EIR: Turning to the issue of development, which underlies all of your remarks. January began the United Nations' Fourth Development Decade. The Schiller Institute has circulated at the U.N. a proposal for a True Fourth Development Decade, which was prepared under the direction of the American economist Lyndon LaRouche. This proposal calls for going outside the collapsed Bretton Woods system, to create a true fourth development decade. I would like your comments on this proposal.

Dr. Awoonor: I think it is a brilliant document of immense originality. It takes a lot of courage for anybody from the developed part of the world, the advanced part of the world, to see the problem in that global perspective. The document spells out the technical possibilities of providing the infrastructure with which many, many parts of the world, which are now racked with hunger and poverty, can lift themselves up. When they say you must lift yourself up by your bootstraps, it's like providing the boots first. This system of doing that technical work, the development of water, and such elements that are part of the program, sounds to me as one of the most innovative and original ideas that I've seen.

I have talked in that direction when we were dealing with the question of humanitarian relief. When we talked about humanitarian relief, I have said, we must think about development also. And I gave as an example, which coincides with what the Schiller document and the LaRouche document ["The Oasis Plan for the Middle East"] also gives, the example of the cyclical drought in the Sahel, or in the Horn of Africa. The question is, the problem is of water. We wait every year, and when the drought comes, we rush, airplanes are coming, dropping food around, and quickly they go back. Next year, the same drought will occur. Why don't we sit down and say: Let us develop a water system for this area, which once and for all gives the people the capacity to grow their own food.

I gave another example of Bangladesh, which almost every year is a victim of one of the most destructive typhoons in the history of modern times. The world waits, every year. The typhoons come along. Two hundred thousand people die in Bangladesh. We rush airplanes in there, we drop food. We go back to our nice little homes in Bellevue, or wherever it is that we are coming from to do this good work. The LaRouche program says, let us go in and solve that problem once and for all. It is a problem of low-lying areas, it is a problem of controlling draining from the Himalayas. It is a

The environmentalists want to “keep the whole of Africa as a zoo of the world, a botanical garden of the world. Of course, this is nonsense. You cannot keep Africa as a zoo of the world, with us, the Africans, in there as the zookeepers. Africa needs development.”

problem of constructing an engineering system that would prevent the recurrence of this problem, and at the same time enable the people in the whole of that vast area, vastly populated area, to have the capacity to produce food, to develop schools, and to find their own way.

EIR: The proposal suggests that there be some form of discussion, formal preparatory discussion around that positive solution, as opposed to allowing debt or malthusian policies to crush the developing sector. Do you see the possibility for such discussions, over the next period?

Dr. Awoonor: The possibility will occur only when those who own the technology, those who have the money, are able to sit down in partnership with us and say: We understand what it is that you are talking about, let us now move one step forward and talk about the feasibility of this new alternative. Now, until we do that—and I find it very difficult to believe that we can do that just by the drop of a hat—we are going nowhere. In the United Nations system, the function of the G-77 is to continue to keep on hammering away at the resistance that we meet to suggestions of this kind of cooperative enterprise. That is why we still have the Non-Aligned Movement, which we have called the conscience of the majority, of 103 nations, many, many of them, post-imperial, post-colonial nations, that have been exploited for hundreds of years by the now-great prophets of democracy. And we say, even when we see it as a kind of a reparation for the predation that you people visited upon us, let us sit down and talk about the possibility of doing it another way. Somehow, they find us irritating, they find us nagging, but we are saying, we're not going to be wished away. We will be here, we will continue to be insistent when we will talk, we will raise our voices, and we will raise them in every forum. And it is good to believe, to feel that, on the other side of the divide, that is in the developed, the advanced countries, there are people who are listening, there are organizations who are listening. . . .

EIR: Mr. LaRouche was found to be an irritant also, and, as I think you know, he has been in jail now for almost three years. Have you had a chance to look at how his trial was conducted? Do you find it shocking that in the land of liberty, of America, this kind of procedure would have been carried out?

Dr. Awoonor: I have not yet gone into the details of that

trial. I am in receipt of some documents, and I would like to find time to look at it. But I could see how a man who is promoting the kind of program that he is promoting would be seen as a thorn in the flesh. He would be a very uncomfortable person to the powers that be, and this is not the first time in the history of the world that those who really are coming with new messages, new prophets, are regularly crucified! Aren't they?

EIR: Actually, he became a political prisoner in the same week that George Bush was inaugurated President of the United States.

Dr. Awoonor: I tell you, someone once said, if Christ walked into this country or any of these great advanced democracies of the world, they would lock him up! Because he would be a troublemaker.

EIR: You have used the phrase “advanced sector,” which is associated with the United States. However, the state of the economy is far from advanced. The arrogance of Bush's position rests upon an illusion that the economy could hold itself together. However the recent crisis of Salomon Brothers, the collapse of Citibank, the breakdown of basic infrastructure systems in the United States, indicate that this economy is in a total state of collapse, and only a global world recovery for development could work. Do you have any comment on that?

Dr. Awoonor: I think there is a point that you are making, that self-interest alone on the part of the organizers of this economy must mean recognizing that, until the rest of the world moves up somewhere along, this economy, the economy of Europe, and any other so-called advanced economy, will also be suffering. We have said, if the developing countries are saddled with debt, they cannot produce anything. Then, of course, you do not have markets, you do not have partners in the international trading system that will answer the needs of everybody. You see yourselves in this country as a self-sufficient economy, but, of course, you also have segments of this economy which are linked with other economies outside.

EIR: One of the principal strategies of George Bush and the international “new world order” institutions of Bretton Woods, seems to be to play a divide and conquer strategy,

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similar to all the emperors of the past—the Roman Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the British Empire—and they want to pit natural allies against one another. At the recent Bangkok IMF meeting for example, the natural allies of freedom and development in eastern Europe and the developing sector are being pitted against one another for meager handouts, which don't exist anyway. Do you have any thoughts on the divide and conquer strategy of the empire people?

Dr. Awoonor: Yes, indeed, I'm glad you brought this particular point up. I understand the need of the powerful to keep their victims always in a state of quarrels. But I always say, what about those who are the victims? Are they so simple-minded to believe that their survival depends upon squabbling among themselves? This is where the behavior of the eastern Europeans sometimes astounds me. Granted, communism has collapsed. Granted, the Russian empire is ending. Does it mean that the solution to their problems is simply running around like chickens to whom corn is being thrown on the ground—and therefore trampling on other values which should be the underpinning of an equitable global system? We have seen them behave in certain directions, vis-à-vis South Africa, where we have launched a battle for years to dismantle apartheid, and push the racist regime to accept the humanity of all the people who live in that territory. Today, with the collapse of communism, these former friends of ours are quickly rushing into the arms of the still-existing apartheid system. What happened in Bangkok was not a surprise, but a surprise in the sense that it came as a shock because the eastern European nations seem to believe that the solutions to their own problems lie in playing possum before the big powers. I can tell them that if they think playing possum alone enabled people to develop, I know a number of countries that are going nowhere, and have been playing possum for hundreds of years.

EIR: Probably the only way to defeat a divide and conquer strategy is to unify in opposition to the empire. This is the lesson from how to defeat the British world empire. And today that would mean unifying eastern Europe and the developing sector, elements in the advanced sector for a True Fourth Development Decade. That would seem like the approach which would most terrify Mr. Bush and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Dr. Awoonor: What you have said is so correct! At the

same time we are very much worried about some of the organizations in the developed countries whose agenda sometimes seems to coincide with that of the big powers, the big owners of authority and so on. We are talking about the conduct of some of the environmental groups, for example. When we are talking about environmental work, and we are insisting that this should be part and parcel of an entire strategy for development, we are getting lectures from some of these groups. Lectures that are reflective of a Garden of Eden mentality: We keep the whole of Africa as a zoo of the world, a botanical garden of the world. Of course, this is nonsense. You cannot keep Africa as a zoo of the world, with us, the Africans, in there as the zookeepers. Africa needs development, so the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are involved in environmental work must move away from the thinking of some of the institutions that we have already talked about, which thinking is refusing to link up the question of development with that of the environment.

EIR: You referred earlier to the crushing debt problem in Haiti. Overall, worldwide, we're looking at foreign debt in the trillions of dollars. Much of this debt, according to an analysis conducted by *EIR*, is illegitimate, it is the result of usury, of high interest rates, of repeated devaluation of currencies, and so forth, making it impossible to repay the debt. What would the Group of 77 like to see happen in this respect, both in terms of the debt stock and the debt service?

Dr. Awoonor: We had made a statement in Geneva on behalf of the Group of 77, where we were considering the question of the collapse of eastern Europe, of the Soviet empire, and its impact upon the global system. And I made a point, on behalf of the Group, that the kind of concessionary arrangement that was made by the United States, and a number of other countries, with Poland, must be a model with which we can begin: which is a generous forgiveness of debt. Almost 70% of Poland's debt had been written off. And when we raised this point, we are told: Poland is a special case. We don't know why Poland is a special case. Why Haiti is not a special case. Why Argentina is not a special case. Why Brazil is not a special case. Why Nigeria is not a special case. Why Ghana is not a special case. Finally, what one wants to say is that the debt is *unpayable*. We cannot pay that debt, because it is a cycle of dependence, a cycle of poverty that has been constructed, within which we are whirling and whirling.

The center cannot hold. We are saying that interest payment alone is a burden for many, many countries. In 1988 the IMF took out of Africa \$1 billion more than it put in. Tell me what is that? You use the term usury. What else is that? It is usury of the most horrendous type. But we are saying that the world, beginning with those who claim that they control it, must sit down and analyse the collective burden of debt on each country, and by a stroke of the pen, cancel all debts.

I don't think Britain has paid all its debts to the United States since the Second World War. I don't think the Canadians have paid the amount of money that America poured in to build the various railway systems. Debt cancellation is not a new thing in the history of the world. We must sit down and address this once and for all, because we are going nowhere.

EIR: What do you think about the Brady Plan and various other of these schemes?

Dr. Awoonor: Those are what I call tinkering on the edge of disaster. They are patch and paste plans. They are not deep enough. They are not comprehensive enough. And they have no compassion.

EIR: A worldwide debt moratorium could be part and parcel of creating a new post-Bretton Woods economic system. This is an aspect of the True Fourth Development Decade proposal.

Dr. Awoonor: Absolutely. I agree with you entirely, that we have got to begin with debt, because that is already on the table. A year ago, we in Ghana used 60% of all our foreign exchange earnings, just to service our debt. Sixty percent. So we have 40% left, with which we have got to build schools, which the British never built when they were there for over a hundred years. We have to build clinics, which they didn't build. We have to make provisions of water for our villages and towns. How do we do that, if all we work for goes back to the same people who had exploited us over the centuries.

EIR: The biggest debt collectors, the IMF and the Anglo-American banking system, are also the biggest purveyors of the idea that the developing sector economies should be export-oriented, to pay the debt. They are also big proponents of trade liberalization and so forth. But isn't this basically all just to collect the debt?

Dr. Awoonor: You have said it, it is basically to collect the debt. It is a form of slavery, a new form of slavery. I give you money, you stay on my plantation and you work for a plantation, and I give you clothes, and I give you food. That's it. You are only a beast of burden. You have nothing of your own to do, you have no mind of your own, you have no capacity to dream, and to build. We say this is what you are going to do: you are going to produce cocoa. You must produce coffee. Well, if you don't get enough money for your cocoa or your coffee, hard luck, because it's a free market!

EIR: It's not free if people are put in slavery, and there are no credits available because the markets have now collapsed.

Dr. Awoonor: That's right. Coffee growers in the world are seeing the lowest price that they've received for coffee in 50 years. Fifty years! And take the case of Colombia. It's a coffee-producing country. Now, there's a big hue and cry about drugs. How else do you expect Colombian peasants not to grow coca leaves when you cannot even pay them the smallest pittance for their labor in the coffee fields, and when they know that with a little bag of coca, they can make tons and tons of money. Somebody just organize the arithmetic and the logic of this, and therefore enable Colombia to grow coffee instead of coca. But, no, that is not going to happen. Maybe somebody is benefiting from the coca. Maybe.

EIR: Do you have any thoughts that you would like conveyed to the readership of *EIR* that we've not covered up until this point?

Dr. Awoonor: I would like to say, addressing what I consider the post-Gulf war and the post-Cold War period, what Mr. Bush and many others have described as a coming new world order. We are seeing some ingredients of that so-called new world order, as being no different from the old world order. In fact, we are seeing other things coming up—when we had the Soviet empire, at least there was what one commentator called a balance of terror, and so therefore, arrogance of power was slightly more muted. We are seeing, one person used the word, unipolar world, in which one power and its way of doing things, and its way of perceiving reality, and its ideology—they talk as if communism is the only ideology that we have. Capitalism is also an ideology; and that capitalist ideology is based on concepts of democracy, liberal democracy which is individualism, and its attendant greed-machine, based on the so-called free market, which is another word for “get the best of your friend, sharp dealing, cut all the corners,” which also reveals a lack of compassion for our common humankind; and we are saying, if that is the world that we are going to be constructing, then we are in for trouble. And I want to say, that we, in the developing countries, who form the majority of the human population of this planet, we who are the ones who are poor, malnourished, without education, without adequate shelter, we are the ones who are ill with diseases both old and new. We lack clinics and hospitals, we are the ones who are supposed to earn our way in this marketplace, which even though it is called free, we know it is not free. Then we are going to be insisting—we are going to be here and we are going to be making as much noise as we can make. And we will make it. Nobody can lecture us. We will put our needs on the agenda, and to insist upon the world looking at these needs.

EIR: We will do all that we can to take that noise, and publish it, and transfer it around the world.