
Interview: Siahyonkron Nyanseor



'There is no reason for Africa to be in this crisis'

Mr. Nyanseor is the chairman of the African Anti-Malthusian League of the Schiller Institute, and was formerly president of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Lawrence Freeman interviewed him on Dec. 22.

EIR: There's a lot in the news these days, about the relief effort that the United States and the U.N. are waging in Somalia. And we have a very acute situation there. But most people probably don't know, that there are many other parts of Africa that are at nearly the same disastrous situation. As a Liberian, you might want to describe to our readers how the situation is in Liberia at this point.

Nyanseor: What is happening on the continent is an age-old problem. Food has always been used as a weapon by the West to destabilize good government that is in the interests of the people. Liberia is a typical example of that. What is happening in Liberia now, is similar to what is happening in Somalia. The situation would have been arrested, had some intervention been done earlier. But perhaps it has something to do with having no interest in people of color, when it comes to their problem in this area. No one has an interest in them.

At this particular time, Charles Taylor came in, and we supported him because we wanted a genuine change, not a change that would be cosmetic. When Charles Taylor came in to unseat Samuel Doe, he had popular support, but later on he had ulterior motives and we did not support him. Charles has been supported by France, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast. And what he's doing now, is devastating the country. All the infrastructure has been destroyed, and it's just a matter of time. The Ecomag [military cease-fire monitoring group of the European Community of West African States], the West African forces are still trying to see how they can normalize the situation, but things are worse there. People are starving and dying in the hundreds daily in Liberia, and it seems that no one is paying attention, but focusing on Somalia.

EIR: I understand there's been a huge refugee problem, because, for the last several years, there has been on-and-off-again civil war in Liberia. This amounts to a massive refugee problem, given the relatively small size of the population.

Nyanseor: The neighboring countries are bearing the brunt of the problem, like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, the Ivory Coast. They have a lot of refugees, over 200,000 people. There are going to be more than that, and some international relief organizations are doing their best. But it shouldn't have become an emergency. An infusion of food would have helped, but perhaps they felt it was an African problem, and that Africans should help themselves. So most of the western countries did not come to alleviate the problem, so it has become much worse.

So we have a lot of refugee problems. In Monrovia [the Liberian capital], most of the people came from the interior part that has been controlled by Taylor. They fear for their lives, and they have to come to central Monrovia. And we have a water problem, no light, electricity. Malaria is becoming rampant, and people are just dying. There's no medicine. . . .

EIR: The situation in Liberia, like the situation in Somalia and many other African countries, has reached this point because over the past 5 or 10 or more years, what you find is that the United States and other western governments, including the Soviet Union, at one time or another will support one ruler, then arrange for him to be toppled, then come in and support another ruler. There has been a great deal of manipulation in many countries, including Liberia, and then, the only time people find out about it, is when the starving faces are put on the TV sets and on the front pages of the newspapers. But this is very much, it seems to me, a manipulated situation created by the Anglo-Americans, the Soviet Union, and the Israelis.

Nyanseor: Africa as a whole is caught in this Cold War politics. We are a victim of the Cold War politics. Liberia, since its independence in 1847, has always been pro-West. Strangely, the formation of the Organization of African Unity also can attest to that; you have factions within the OAU who wanted the OAU to be non-aligned, in the sense that it should not support anyone in one country; and then you have African countries which say that they want to be in the eastern interests.

So what happens is that, if American interests are at stake, they destabilize that government and install a puppet government. And if the puppet government is infringing on the human rights of the people, they don't care about how they treat their own people. Once their interests have been

served, that's all they're concerned about.

After World War II, those in the African countries who wanted to bring about genuine development—infrastructure development and democratic societies—all those people were killed, because the [foreign interests] didn't want the country to be developed, infrastructurally, or the economy to be developed in a way that it would not be dependent on the periphery, the external forces. The International Monetary Fund [IMF] comes in, the World Bank comes in, and they change the way things are being done.

Nkrumah is one example. He was killed. He was overthrown, because he was preaching nationalism, in the sense that Africa should unite as a federation, that Africa should have a standing military to protect its sovereignty, and Africa should have its own economic community, like the European Economic Community, that sort of thing. The western press took it out of context and made it seem as if Africa was going to go off by itself. That's the problem I think we have.

EIR: You've brought up a couple of interesting points. Concerning the IMF: Many of the African countries were controlled either by colonial powers or by other foreign powers; then some of them became independent, and then they found themselves under the control of the IMF and World Bank. Could you describe how the IMF conditionalities and the structural adjustment programs working together with the international cartels, have destroyed the ability of a country such as Liberia to maintain itself?

Nyanseor: Cheryl Payer wrote a book about the World Bank and the IMF, and one of the things that she highlighted, was that the IMF, alongside the World Bank, has become the chosen instrument for imposing imperialist financial discipline upon poor countries, with a facade of multilateralism and technical competence.

You see, why one of the purposes for the formation of the IMF, was to prevent devaluation. What it did was to give the devaluated countries' exports an unfair price advantage. . . . It will tell you that it's bringing in conditionalities, that you have to cut your health services, you have to cut education services, you have to cut infrastructure development, all this, just to service your debt. And when you do that, you create a serious problem internally. Because in most African or Third World countries, the government is the sole employer. The government in most countries may employ 70-80% of the people.

Now if the government is going to do such a thing, then who is going to provide for all these people? This is one of the problems that we have on the continent. And in so doing, the IMF also will try to supervise the way the government should be run; it will supervise how you manage your money. In Liberia, on two occasions, the IMF has sent people to supervise our Finance Ministry, to tell us how to run our government, what to do. And as a result of that, you have serious problems. All these things are not being told to the

western population. They always see the African governments as just incompetent to run their own government or run their own show; but we are being supervised from the extension of a foreign country.

This is just colonialism revived in a new image.

EIR: Liberia has been very rich in rubber production, and yet the country has been denied the ability to actually use that rubber. So you have a very clear case of direct colonial exploitation of the rubber production in Liberia. Could you tell us more about that?

Nyanseor: Firestone established its plantation in 1926 in Liberia. It was not an investment in the interests of the Liberian people. You remember, during World War II, Great Britain had the monopoly over rubber in the Philippines; they had a lot of plantations. But during the war, they inflated the price of rubber, because the Americans were using it for their war matériel. I think the American government felt very angry about the situation, so they talked to Harvey Firestone, to find somewhere where they could plant rubber.

Liberia was chosen because, after all, it was a colony of the United States. I strongly feel that America has always thought of Liberia as a colony of the United States. So they decided to farm somewhere in Liberia. And the money with which it was done, was forced upon the leadership, because they needed that money to do some work in the country. So, Harvey Firestone used the Liberian government. The government gave Liberia its first loan during World War II, about \$99 million, because of the fertile land for rubber planting. People were earning slave wages, that is, somebody would work for about 45¢ to \$1.25 a day planting rubber. The government had to use forced labor, because the people who had their own farms, planted rice; they uprooted these people to go and work on the plantations for slave wages.

One of the striking things about the western way of seeing development, bringing people into the money economy, is that what it did, instead of building the factories to manufacture the finished product—the same thing they're doing now by moving Americans' jobs across the border to Mexico where labor is cheaper—is that the latex that is taken from the tree [is sent abroad, to where they choose] to manufacture the rubber, then the rubber product, the tire, would be brought back to Liberia and sold with a 1,000% markup.

For instance, you buy a tire here, and we provide the latex for the tires, for the rubber. You buy tires for \$35; we buy tires for almost \$200—for one tire. The common person cannot afford this. And that's how Africa comes to be underdeveloped, where the countries are sucking the resources out of our country.

Africa has had no reason to be where it is today, if it had genuine development on the continent, development of infrastructure.