

# Reality pokes through at White House Conference on Africa

by Lydia Cherry

The last weekend in June was the occasion of the first-ever White House Conference on Africa, at which 175-200 hand-picked participants—a veritable “Rainbow Coalition” of American Africa-experts—were asked their views on how U. S. policy toward Africa could be improved. Although the proceedings will not be available in book form for several months, interviews that *EIR* conducted with some of the working group leaders and other participants have made clear that the International Monetary Fund’s “structural adjustment” policy toward Africa is simply no longer palatable, and there are indications that this policy is being reevaluated by the Clinton administration. So far, however, the participants have no set prescription on what to replace the IMF-World Bank system with.

Invited participants included 15 university professors, predominantly from African Studies and Political Science departments; 30 individuals from business and finance; 15 from think-tanks; 20 state and local government leaders; 30 from non-governmental organizations, 7 religious leaders; half a dozen journalists; 5 representatives from foundations, including Ford, MacArthur, and Carnegie; and 5 African “observers.”

This “free for all” process of debate within the Clinton administration was harshly criticized by the U. S. policy faction associated with George Bush on June 21 at the Heritage Foundation. Through this process, the critics said, “the power of the State Department is being eclipsed. . . . Clinton becomes the only actual decision-maker.”

The event was just a sop to the black community, “a highly political operation,” said one World Bank-connected, high-level participant, who nevertheless did concede “the Clinton people probably want to do something but are so constrained on the budget side” that they will not succeed. The head of the political science department at Howard University in Washington, D. C., Ronald Walters, reads it differently. “The agency people—not only State [Department] but also Commerce and Treasury and so forth—gave us the standard line. I saw the administration saying: ‘We can do better than that,’ ‘Can’t we do better than that?’ ”

Even more categorical was Max Arthur DeShazer, director of African Affairs at the National Security Council, who

told *EIR*: “The administration, as far as I know, is not committed to [the IMF’s] structural adjustment and there haven’t been any statements about structural adjustment from [National Security Adviser] Tony Lake or from the President, I think primarily because it is being looked at. I can’t say at this point where all of that is.” DeShazer added: “There is a widely held view that the structural adjustment is an impediment to progress in Africa. . . . Countries have found that trying to adhere to the austerity measures associated with structural adjustment is just too difficult.”

Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers “was criticized quite harshly for arguing that structural adjustment is *the* way to go—the only way to go,” according to Walters from Howard University. “At the time that he spoke, there were four people who stood up in the audience and said that this had not worked for most of the countries, and so the question is, what next?”

## Calls for a Marshall Plan

The conference heard a videotaped message by South African President Nelson Mandela, who called on the United States to take the lead in a Marshall Plan-style economic development project for Africa. (A similar recommendation several weeks earlier had emerged from a meeting of the Organization for African Unity). “For the United States of America, the world’s leading nation, there is no better time and place to play a pioneering role,” Mandela told the gathering. Nigerian head of state Sani Abacha last December had called for a Marshall Plan for Africa.

The Marshall Plan conception also came through in a paper delivered by Stephen Lewis, president of Carleton College in Minnesota, who was chairman of the working group on trade and investment ties with Africa. Lewis noted he had been actively working with various African governments for 23 years, but that the White House conference was the first time that anybody from the U. S. side “ever asked my advice.” Lewis insists, as does Walters, that the key is a regional solution and that “southern Africa presents a unique opportunity to look at regional solutions.” “In some ways there are substantial parallels to the development of western Europe after World War II,” he said.

Walters told *EIR* that the second nucleus area is West Africa. He said that, in spite of the fact that the United States is having problems right now with its relationship to Nigeria, "one of the points that was made is that you have to normalize relations with Nigeria, because if you are talking seriously about pursuing a continental policy then Nigeria is *extremely* important to the continent. Nigeria is an economic power." It is particularly important that Nigeria was discussed in this manner, because last January, the Nigerian government drew the line against the IMF's destruction of that country, and for the last six months the Nigerian government has held to that stance, despite heavy pressure from the international financial institutions.

According to Pat Johns of the Africa Department at Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Marshall Plan idea was not discussed seriously in any of the six working groups and there was much more discussion of "appropriate technology"—pre-industrial technologies. Noting some of the ideas that CRS Executive Director Kenneth Hackett brought into the conference, Johns said that CRS is supportive of the Marshall Plan idea. "This is what it would take. A huge effort must be made to help these countries get off the ground once and for all. Everyone is tired of the band-aid approach. . . . Whatever is done is always too little, too late."

### Single-minded approach questioned

Although there was wide representation from human rights groups with tunnel vision, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, there were also those in attendance who expressed the view that the focus on human rights, to the exclusion of the vital issue of economic development, is counterproductive. Johns said that CRS holds this view, as does CARE, among other relief organizations. "This doesn't mean to ignore human rights violations, which exist probably in every country in Africa," as well as other places, Johns added.

Vice President Al Gore, who apparently is going to be the point-man for Africa within the administration, issued a challenge to the single-minded approach. In the vice president's prepared remarks, he recounted a conversation with Gwanda Chakuambaphiri, Malawi's minister of home affairs, "where he rightly pointed out that support for democracy evaporates if a representative government fails to deliver the goods. Election achievements are meaningless if people continue to suffer under poor leadership, ethnic hatred, and economic failure." Gore went on to say that "Africa is worse off now than it was at the beginning of the 1980s."

Was this conference simply a sop to the black community, as some critics have charged? "We are in a particular way tied to Africa, the 12% of the American population who are black Americans," Lowery-Derryck, president of the African-American Institute noted. Describing her own history, she noted her reaction "as a kid during the years of JFK" when "I saw, standing on the White House steps with John

F. Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy, the President of Ivory Coast [Félix Houphouët-Boigny] and his wife. That gave me something." She added, however, that it is now a question of "black and white America acting intelligently together to save this continent, because if we don't attend to this continent, it will destroy us—all of us."

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## Documentation

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### 'We need a new policy for Africa'

*President Clinton made these remarks on June 27 to the White House Conference on Africa:*

It seems to me that a lot of what we would like to see occur in Africa is what we would like to have happen everywhere. We'd like to see more prosperity and more well-functioning economies and more democracy and genuine security for people in their own borders. . . .

We need a new American policy based on the idea that we should help the nations of Africa identify and solve problems before they erupt. Reacting is not enough, we must examine these underlying problems. I know one of the underlying problems, and I've been following this on the television—your meeting—is the enormity of outstanding debt. Last year we announced a policy at the G-7 meeting of writing off 50% or more of the debts of selected African nations that carry the heaviest debt burdens, and we will continue that. But we are actively searching for new solutions to that problem as well. . . . One of the difficulties the United States has, that a lot of our partners don't have in writing off debt, is that debt, even if it is not worth very much, is required under our budget rules to be scored with a certain value. And we have to really work on that, because we often find ourselves, because of the mechanics of this, in a position that can be quite counterproductive.

This is a problem not just in Africa, but elsewhere as well. We are actively searching for new solutions to this problem. And I believe that we have to do something about it. Even though we know lightening the debt load won't solve all the problems, we can't solve a lot of the other problems unless we do it. . . .

I do know we need a new policy [toward Africa]. I do know we need a policy. I do believe Africa matters to America.

*Vice President Al Gore, who sat through many of the proceedings, addressed the conference on June 27:*

I remember a conversation with Gwanda Chakuambaphiri, Malawi's minister of home affairs, where he rightly pointed out that support for democracy evaporates if a representative government fails to deliver the goods. Election achievements are meaningless if people continue to suffer under poor leadership, ethnic hatred, and economic failure. And while there are examples of peace, progress, and stability, Africa is worse off now than it was at the beginning of the 1980s. Per capita income has dropped drastically. Debt has ballooned. . . .

Early in this administration, National Security Adviser Tony Lake emphasized our commitment to support Africa in three key areas, reiterating the President's priorities. We want to promote trade and investment; we want to leverage capital for basic development and infrastructure; we want to support effective government and democracy. . . .

Both this President and Vice President speak for 25 million Americans whose roots are in Africa. . . . Decades from now, when we look back on what we will accomplish, let it be said that this was the generation that helped Africa achieve the peace and prosperity that has eluded it for so long. . . . Africa is the continent where human beings began. Help Africa become a testament to the best human beings can achieve.

*Max Arthur DeShazer, director of African affairs, U.S. National Security Council, told EIR on July 12:*

It is true that there is a widely held view that the [International Monetary Fund's] structural adjustment is an impediment to progress in Africa, particularly in Africa, I should say, because I guess it works in other parts of the world, and I think there are a few countries that have gotten their houses in order through structural adjustment. I think for the most part, you will find that countries have found that trying to adhere to the austerity measures associated with structural adjustment is just too difficult.

I think you state correctly that the IMF and the Clinton administration are certainly not one and the same, although people will associate structural adjustment and the administration with Africa policy. The administration, as far as I know, is not committed to structural adjustment, and there haven't been any statements about structural adjustment from Tony Lake or from the President, I think primarily because it is being looked at. But I can't say at this point where all of that is.

*Vivian Lowery Derryck, president of the African-American Institute and one of the chairmen of a working group at the White House Conference on Africa, told EIR on July 5:*

Undersecretary of the Treasury Larry Summers attempted to defend against those who believe that there should be some alternative to SAP [the IMF's structural adjustment programs]. He said when countries are truly committed to implementing structural reforms, they can succeed; he gave

as an example Ghana. However, when you talk to the ordinary Ghanans, they are having an extremely hard time. The jury is still not in. There is enormous skepticism among private voluntary organizations of the United States about how appropriate to these countries SAP programs are. . . . You can't tackle these global issues without a stable financial system.

*Elliott Berg, who heads Developmental Alternatives, a consulting firm that does work for the World Bank and the State Department Agency for International Development (AID), was a chairman of the working group on sustainable development at the White House Conference on Africa. About the "Berg Report," which he authored 14 years ago, Berg told EIR on July 7:*

That was a report on Africa that I did for the World Bank. It called for free markets, and downsizing the state, private sector growth and so on. . . . That's where policy went in most of the '80s, and now, increasingly, there is a lot of movement away from it. Now people are talking more about basic needs; they are talking about poverty—like in the 1970s. There has been a decided movement back in the last couple of years. There is still an awful lot of market-oriented policy reform in the air, but it is strongly under attack. A lot of people, influential people, are saying it is not the right medicine for Africa—or anybody.

*Ronald Walters, head of the Political Science Department at Howard University in Washington, D.C., explained to EIR on July 7:*

We would like the administration to take some bold departures, because it is obvious that in some respects current policy has not worked. Lawrence Summers, for example, was there and he was criticized rather harshly, by myself and some other people, for arguing that structural adjustment is the way to go—the only way to go. That obviously has not worked for most of the countries, and so the question is, what next? Some of us are saying that there ought to be a departure. At the time that he spoke, there were four people who stood up in the audience and said that, so I have to assume that the sentiment in the audience in this particular group was quite strong; that structural adjustment is *not* the only way to go, and should not be. I don't think you are going to be able to find anybody who thinks it is working.

*C. Payne Lucas, president of Africare, was one of the chairmen of a working group. Lucas told EIR on July 7:*

The issue of structural adjustment and the [World] Bank was brought up a lot; people on the panel said: "We need to look at this thing again." Can we do something that can accommodate the people and yet still make the kind of economic reform in order for a country to take off? The medicine is painful. Nobody was ever saying it was painful back here [in the United States].