

# South Africa's President Mbeki mobilizes for Africa's development

by Douglas De Groot

South African President Thabo Mbeki opened the three-day Commonwealth Business Forum in Johannesburg on Nov. 9, by challenging the government and business leaders there "to expedite the process of development among the countries of the South, including those that are in the Commonwealth," by finding "the road that will lead to sustained and sustainable growth and development throughout the world."

The forum, which preceded the Nov. 12 opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, in Durban, South Africa, was entitled "Making Globalization Work." But, rather than extolling the benefits of the "global economy," Mbeki pointed to the extreme poverty in Africa under the current system, and called for a strategy for development: "We also want to work with both the public and private sectors of the developed countries of the North, as we grapple with such critical issues as our international debt burden," and "a more equitable global trading system," he said.

Mbeki is also not reluctant to put his peers in the developing countries on the spot. He told the Commonwealth Forum, where 50 out of 54 nations participating are developing countries: "Our practical actions will answer the question whether we have the will, the courage, and the sense of human solidarity in fact to end the human tragedy to which billions are condemned."

## Change the institutions

Since he was inaugurated on June 16 as the second South African President of the post-apartheid era, succeeding Nelson Mandela, Mbeki has worked to mobilize the nations of Africa to reverse the conditions of economic collapse affecting them, due to the systemic global crisis. During his visit in September to the United States and to the United Nations General Assembly, Mbeki called for changes in the institutions controlling world trade and economic activity, and urged the nations of the South to mobilize to make this happen. The standpoint is clear: Even though the apartheid system is gone, South Africa will not be able to develop its economic potential unless these institutions that govern world trade and international relations are changed.

The only way Mbeki's vision can be realized, however, is if U.S. President Bill Clinton were to back up Mbeki, by leading the way in setting up a new international financial system in line with Franklin Roosevelt's intentions for the

post-World War II, post-colonial era, as has been proposed by U.S. Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, in his call for a New Bretton Woods system. Such a nation-saving alternative would end the ability of the British-led financier oligarchy to prevent the development of Africa, and thus finally bring to a close the current system, in which Africa is condemned to being only a poverty-stricken exporter of its raw materials and human potential.

*EIR* has been documenting the manner in which the British Queen and her oligarchic allies, or "The Firm," have been fomenting nation-wrecking wars and insurgencies in Africa, facilitating their raw materials grab, as they try to get in a stronger position for the post-economic-collapse world. U.S. backing for Mbeki's perspective, would pose an unusual threat to the Queen and company. Threats to British control over African resources have been rare. The Paul Kruger-era effort to wrest South Africa away from British-dominated mining interests, and industrialize it instead, led to the British "Boer War" against South Africa 100 years ago, a war that the British did not begin until they were certain that Germany had dropped its commitment to Kruger.

## Apartheid and the Cold War

Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, also campaigned for African industrialization, at the time that the former colonies throughout Africa were becoming independent. In the late 1940s, when it was clear that Franklin Roosevelt's legacy would force the British to relinquish their colonies, the British Crown realized that its style of indirect rule in South Africa, through the local English population, would not keep mineral-rich South Africa under its control, after independence had swept through the rest of Africa and the colonized countries of Asia. So, the British facilitated the victory of the National Party in South Africa, which led to the establishment of the apartheid policies there.

Nkrumah was stymied by the combination of the anti-industrial apartheid in South Africa, Africa's strongest economy, and the Cold War. The manner in which the oligarchy turned the independence of the Belgian colony, the Congo, into an arena for superpower showdown, buried the issue of development, and made the superpower conflict, in all dealings between the industrialized world and African nations,



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the primary item on the agenda.

Aware that it is going to take a U.S. commitment to a new financial system to make development possible, Mbeki, in his speech to the Commonwealth Forum, made a point of reminding Clinton of what Clinton had said about dangers presented by the world economic crisis on Sept. 14 last year, when the American President spoke to the New York Council on Foreign Relations. With the end of the Cold War, and of apartheid, the development question must be placed squarely on the table, as Mbeki has repeatedly been telling African audiences.

The British Queen, along with her husband Prince Philip and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, arrived in South Africa for the Commonwealth summit on the same day that Mbeki appealed to the Forum to make its top priority the common good of the peoples of Africa and the South. At a state banquet in her honor the next day, Mbeki toasted the Queen, but stuck to his agenda, speaking of "the new challenges that face all humanity," and calling on the Commonwealth to "focus on the issue of making people-centered development the center point of our strategies to deal with the impact of the process of globalization." He added that "this

must mean the sustained pursuit of the goal of a better life for all. This encompasses eradicating poverty, fulfilling people's basic needs, and protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the basic right to development. Accordingly, the creation of an international climate and the necessary institutions and processes conducive to such people-centered development as the central purpose of social activity has to be an integral part of the process of reconstructing the system of international relations."

### **Who is President Mbeki?**

Thabo Mbeki joined the Youth League of the African National Congress (ANC) when he was 14 years old. His parents were both teachers, anti-apartheid activists, and members of the South African Communist Party. In 1962, at age 20, when his father, Govan Mbeki, was imprisoned for life, along with Nelson Mandela, and the ANC was banned, the ANC sent Mbeki into exile.

While in exile in several different countries, Thabo Mbeki continued his education in economics and worked his way into the ANC leadership ranks. During the 1980s, he became head of the ANC Department of Information and Publicity, while coordinating campaigns to win more white South African sympathy for the ANC cause.

In 1989, he became head of the ANC's Department of International Affairs, and he played a critical role in the negotiations between the ANC and the South African Nationalist Party government. He finally returned from exile in 1990, and was part of the negotiating team. In 1993, he became ANC National Chairman, and then Deputy President during Mandela's first term, beginning in 1994.

Mbeki had not spent most of his life fighting to bring into existence a South Africa that was free for all its citizens, only to then be content with governing a population that would be unable to improve its lot in life, but would continue to live in the same poor physical conditions as during the apartheid era.

The economic problems in South Africa are severe, while people's expectations are high. More than 40% of the South African black population are unemployed, and 61% live below the poverty line. This, in the most powerful economy in Africa—but one dominated by powerful conglomerates. The only "solution" offered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the local financial establishment, is more privatization, which will only increase unemployment.

In an interview with *Time International* in 1996, Mbeki saw economic collaboration with other nations of the South as crucial for South Africa: "Our traditional markets, western Europe in particular, are important. But I think we are going to see faster growth with regard to other Third World countries. There is a great keenness to build a relationship between the countries of the South—Africa, Asia, and to some extent Latin America. It's a kind of national consciousness: Here is a South Africa that is now free; why don't we all help each other?" he asked. "We cannot sustain growth and develop-

ment in South Africa when the rest of the continent is moving in the opposite direction.”

### **A new system of relations**

In September, Mbeki took his campaign to reverse the increasing disparity among nations to the United Nations General Assembly and to the Non-Aligned Movement, which he is chairman of. In speeches to both organizations, he laid out a strategy for sustained development, to reverse the destruction caused by speculation, globalization, and regional conflicts, and, in order to carry this out, called for reviewing “the functioning of all multilateral institutions including those that belong to the UN family.” South African media pointed out that this reference was to the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization.

In his speech to 40 heads of state who addressed the 54th annual UN General Assembly, President Mbeki said that the UN Charter, and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at the time of their adoption, “reflected the international determination to ensure that the catastrophe occasioned by the rise of fascism and Nazism should never recur.” These UN goals have not been reached because of the suffering imposed on the nations of the South under the current catastrophic economic crisis, he said, and leaders now have a “historic challenge . . . to ensure that we work together to reconstruct human society in a manner consistent with this perspective.”

Pointing to the “growing inequality” accompanying the “process of globalization,” Mbeki focussed on the dangers resulting from speculation on short-term capital flows: “We have also seen how movements of short-term capital have produced disastrous economic consequences in some countries,” he said. He asserted a role for national governments to prevent this: “There is no automatic or inherent mechanism with the operation of the markets to enable both capital and technology to make the sort of impact . . . [desired] on all countries of the globe,” he said. “The functioning of the markets does not and cannot exclude conscious interventions being made both to increase economic opportunities and to raise the standards of living and the life possibilities of many in the world denied their human dignity by the scourge of poverty.”

While in New York, Mbeki addressed a Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, and emphasized that the NAM membership is the majority of the UN, and has the potential to determine “the new global agenda.” “We need to debate and challenge anew, many of the assumptions made in the past about the rules of engagement of the international relations system,” he said. Because of this unprecedented crisis, “we have no excuse to permit the further postponement of the meaningful restructuring of the United Nations,” he said. Although he advocated dialogue with the North, he declared that “it is vital that the NAM and the Group of 77 plus China should have a common, coordinated and strategic approach in their interactions with organizations of the North

such as the G-8 and the European Union.”

He continued to point out the need for a new monetary system, stating: “It is to our mutual benefit that we continue advocating for a new, transparent, and accountable financial architecture. This obligation is also connected to the need to restructure the parameters of the international economic system to ensure that the recent economic crises, triggered mainly by economic speculation on short-term financial flows, do not recur. We must also ensure that ‘emerging,’ and all other developing economies, are not held hostage by the albatross of market and commodity speculation.”

### **Labor strife in South Africa**

In South Africa, the effects of the current monetary collapse are not hard to find, and the political base of the ANC is being hit the hardest. Two days after Mbeki’s UN speech, the 12 public-sector unions in South Africa met to determine whether to continue negotiating with the government, or to go on strike. To the surprise of many, Paddy Padayachee, chairman of the 12 unions’ central committee, announced a union agreement to give the ongoing second round of negotiations another lease on life, averting the “alternative of a public service shut-down, at least for the time being.”

The dispute between labor and government, which has intensified in the three months since Mbeki became President, has been called the biggest challenge to the government since the end of apartheid. The tripartite alliance of the ANC, the Communist Party, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), the trade union umbrella group made up of 17 affiliates and 1.7 million members, and which was instrumental in bringing about an end to apartheid—is under great strain due to the South African ramifications of the global economic crisis.

As of October, the 12 public-sector unions had been fighting for eight months over a contract for this year, and had been supported in one-day strike actions by some of the private unions, whose members are being hit hard with massive layoffs. On Aug. 20, for example, 9,000 Hartebeesfontein gold mine workers were fired after going on strike. There have been other retrenchments since then, which the government has not been able to do anything about. The government’s position toward the public workers has been that its offer of a 6.3% wage hike is its final offer, and it will only negotiate now for the years 2000 and 2001. The unions were demanding 7.3%. A day of protest was organized by Cosatu on Aug. 24, which brought out thousands of public- and private-sector workers; 30,000 were reported to have demonstrated in the capital, Pretoria, and thousands in other cities. In one city, there were reports of clashes with police, who reportedly used rubber bullets and stun grenades against the demonstrators.

Much of the conflict has centered around economic demands. Johannesburg radio reported that, in an earlier demonstration in Cape Town, thousands marched “in protest against

the rate at which import tariffs are being abolished.” There have also been reports of attacks on “free trade.” On the evening of Nov. 8, Labor Minister Membathisi Mdladlana emerged from a meeting with Cosatu’s leadership, reporting that areas of agreement on labor legislation far outweighed the areas of disagreement. The government had initiated a policy of discussing concerns over labor legislation with labor and business. Although other unions had met with government representatives, this was the first time that Cosatu had agreed to such a meeting.

In a Nov. 7 rally in Cape Town marking the 82nd anniversary of the Russian Bolshevik revolution, South African Communist Party General Secretary Blade Nzimande attacked the IMF and World Bank for foisting large-scale privatization on developing countries, which he correctly said had worsened unemployment. But, he then excoriated “capitalism,” rather than the oligarchy’s transformation of the global financial system into a speculation-based casino, as the biggest threat to South Africa.

### **Infrastructure desperately needed**

President Mbeki has a different view: The government must intervene to bring into being the cross-border development projects in the entire Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), as he outlined in his address to a World Bank meeting in September. The construction of desperately needed infrastructure is a precondition to the region’s industrialization. Mbeki discussed his plan with his partners in a SADC summit meeting in Mozambique in August, according to Mbeki’s economic adviser Moss Ngoasheng.

“It is mainly the infrastructural development that will link the region together,” Welile Nhlalaho, Deputy Director-General for Africa of the South Africa Foreign Affairs Department, said in a recent interview.

Traditionally, the World Bank has refused to support cross-border projects. In a speech to American business executives, Mbeki stressed the importance of building solid regional infrastructure to facilitate trade within the SADC, and pointed to port-rail and transport-aluminum smelter projects and related spin-offs, between cities in South Africa and Maputo, Mozambique, as one example. He also referred to the Beira development corridor, a hydroelectric-centered project involving Zimbabwe and Mozambique. He referred specifically to the importance of spin-offs of such projects, especially for the 50% of the South African population who live in rural areas, which today contributes only 5% of the economy.

But, hamstrung by overwhelming debt, by the inundation of refugees fleeing London’s instigated wars on the continent, the SADC countries are in no position to finance such projects under the current financial collapse. The revitalization of the South African economy, so important for launching all of Africa into the 21st century, cannot be realized without the “creation of a new financial architecture,” as called for by LaRouche.

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## Documentation

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### President Mbeki calls for ‘titanic struggle for African Renaissance’

*EIR presents here excerpts from the speech by South African President Thabo Mbeki, delivered on Oct. 11 on the occasion of the launching of the African Renaissance Institute in Pretoria, South Africa. The speech calls for a mobilization for an African Renaissance by all Africans, including those in the diaspora. The ideas of the speech stand in stark contrast to those presented, for instance, at the 1994 Pan-African Congress held in Kampala, Uganda, which put forward an idea for African unity based on the theories of violence that the Algerian writer Frantz Fanon taught at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1960s. Under that rubric, the London-sponsored “new breed” of leaders—led by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and including Paul Kagame of Rwanda—set out the blueprint for a process of unifying the African continent through warlord violence, a strategy that within the short span of five years, has cost more than 1 million lives.*

*President Mbeki, on the other hand, calls for “the forces of change to be built up and consolidated within each country” (emphasis added), and for unity to be achieved through cooperation on cultural exchange, trade, diplomacy, and economic cooperation. Further, Mbeki, while putting forth a direct challenge to Africans to take the future into their own hands, excoriates the total lack of solidarity toward Africa coming from the countries of the North, noting that it is the African Renaissance which can “end a long and dark night without whose ending no human being anywhere in the world can claim to be fulfilled as a human being.” Subheads have been added.*

I am very pleased indeed to welcome you to the launch of the African Renaissance Institute. Once more, we would like to express our profound appreciation to you all for the contribution that you made to our own struggle for liberation. Liberated South Africa is therefore your home, not merely because it is an African country, but because without your determined struggles, perhaps we would not be a free people today.

The sacrifices the peoples of our continent made to end the apartheid crime against humanity, which denied the very humanity of everybody who was African, were many and varied. Among other things, the countries of Southern Africa also paid a very high price in human lives lost, as well as property and infrastructure destroyed, as they withstood the campaign of aggression and destabilization conducted by the

apartheid regime. Undoubtedly, Angola and Mozambique paid the highest price in this regard. I would like to take this opportunity, once more, to reiterate our profound appreciation to their governments and peoples for their extraordinary solidarity, which our people will never forget.

I am convinced that all of us present here share a common vision in favor of African unity and solidarity, African development and renewal and an end to the marginalization of our continent in world affairs and development processes. It would seem to us vitally necessary that whereas, for some time, the achievement of these objectives has been left to our governments, it is necessary that we return this vision to the people. We are therefore of the firm view that there is a critically important and urgent need to develop a Popular Movement for the African Renaissance. . . .

As all of us know, the word “renaissance” means rebirth, renewal, springing up anew. Therefore, when we speak of an African Renaissance, we speak of the rebirth and renewal of our continent. . . . Accordingly, what is new about it today is that the conditions exist for the process to be enhanced, throughout the continent, leading to the transformation of the idea from a dream dreamt by visionaries to a practical program of action for revolutionaries.

What, then, are these conditions? These are:

- the completion of the continental process of the liquidation of the colonial system in Africa, attained as a result of the liberation of South Africa;
- the recognition of the bankruptcy of neo-colonialism by the masses of the people throughout the continent, including the majority of the middle strata;
- the weakening of the struggle among the major powers for spheres of influence on our continent, as a consequence of the end of the Cold War; and,
- the acceleration of the process of globalization. . . .

We speak of a continent which, while it led in the very evolution of human life and was a leading centre of learning, technology, and the arts in ancient times, has experienced various traumatic epochs; each one of which has pushed her peoples deeper into poverty and backwardness.

We refer here to the three periods of:

- slavery, which robbed the continent of millions of her healthiest and most productive inhabitants and reinforced the racist and criminal notion that, as Africans, we are sub-human;
- imperialism and colonialism, which resulted in the rape of raw materials, the destruction of traditional agriculture and domestic food security, and the integration of Africa into the world economy as a subservient participant; and,
- neo-colonialism, which perpetuated this economic system, while creating the possibility for the emergence of new national elites in independent states, themselves destined to join the dominant global forces in oppressing and exploiting the masses of the people.

During this latter period, our continent has experienced:

- unstable political systems in which one-party states and military rule have occupied pride of place, leading to conflict, civil wars, genocide, and the emergence of millions of displaced and refugee populations;
- the formation of predatory elites that have thrived on the basis of the looting of national wealth and the entrenchment of corruption;
- the growth of the international debt burden to the extent that, in some countries, combined with unfavorable terms of trade, it makes negative growth in national per-capita income inevitable; and,
- actual declines in the standard of living and the quality of life for hundreds of millions of Africans.

### **The tasks**

The tasks of the African Renaissance derive from this experience, covering the entire period from slavery to date. They include:

- the establishment of democratic political systems to ensure the accomplishment of the goal that “the people shall govern”;
- ensuring that these systems take into account African specifics so that, while being truly democratic and protecting human rights, they are nevertheless designed in ways which really ensure that political and, therefore, peaceful means can be used to address the competing interests of different social groups in each country;
- establishing the institutions and procedures which would enable the continent collectively to deal with questions of democracy, peace, and stability;
- achieving sustainable economic development that results in the continuous improvement of the standards of living and the quality of life of the masses of the people;
- qualitatively changing Africa’s place in the world economy so that it is free of the yoke of the international debt burden and no longer a supplier of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods;
- ensuring the emancipation of the women of Africa;
- successfully confronting the scourge of HIV/AIDS;
- the rediscovery of Africa’s creative past to recapture the peoples’ cultures, encourage artistic creativity, and restore popular involvement in both accessing and advancing science and technology;
- strengthening the genuine independence of African countries and continent in their relations with the major powers and enhancing their role in the determination of the global system of governance in all fields, including politics, the economy, security, information and intellectual property, the environment, and science and technology.

These goals can only be achieved through a genuinely popular and protracted struggle involving not only governments and political parties, but also the people themselves in all their formations. Such a popular movement for the fundamental renewal of Africa would also have to take into account

the multifaceted reality that:

- it is engaged in an extremely complex struggle which would be opposed by forces of reaction from both within and without the continent;
- it would achieve both forward movement and suffer occasional setbacks;
- the continental offensive can only be sustained if the active populations of all countries are confident that none of the countries of the continent, regardless of the extent of its contribution to the Renaissance, seeks to impose itself on the rest as a new imperialist power; and,
- the forces for change have to be built up and consolidated within each country, without ignoring or underestimating the imperative and the potential for an increasing coordinated transnational offensive for the mutually beneficial renewal of the continent.

From all this, it is clear that the achievement of the historically vital African Renaissance requires that the peoples of our continent should adopt a realist program of action that will actually move Africa toward its real renewal.

### **An ‘African Century’**

Accordingly, ways have to be found to ensure that:

- the OAU [Organization of African Unity] is further strengthened so that in its work, it focuses on the strategic objective of the realization of the African Renaissance;
- links are built across Africa’s borders among all social sectors to increase the levels of cooperation and integration;
- steps are taken to ensure that both Africa and the rest of the world define the new century as an “African Century,” in furtherance of the objective of the mobilization of the peoples of the world to support the offensive for an African Renaissance; and,
- work is done to persuade the rest of the world, including such important institutions as the UN, the IMF [International Monetary Fund], the World Bank, the WTO [World Trade Organization], NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], the EU [European Union], Mercosur [South American trade group], ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], and others, to the point of view that we share with them the strategic view that it is obligatory that we all support the vision of an African Renaissance and that they should lend support to this process, guided by what the peoples of Africa themselves want.

The difficulty we will face with regard to the accomplishment of the last of these tasks is illustrated by the problem we are facing even as we stand here, of arriving at the point when we can conclude the bilateral agreement between our country and the European Union. Stripped of all pretence, what has raised the question whether the agreement can be signed today or not, is the reality that many among the developed countries of the North have lost all sense of the noble idea of human solidarity. What seems to predominate is the question, in its narrowest and most naked meaning—What is in it for me!

What is in it for me!—and all this with absolutely no apology and no sense of shame.

None of us were present when the slaves were forced into the dungeons on the Isle of Goree in Senegal and on the island of Zanzibar. But we would not be wrong if we came to the conclusion that those who survived these dungeons as well as their transportation across the oceans, did so because of a strong will to survive.

None of us were present when the people of the Congo were slaughtered in their millions, to satisfy the rapacious and insatiable greed of a Belgian monarch. But we would not be wrong if we came to the conclusion that the Congolese people did not resort to mass suicide to escape the horror, because of a firm conviction that, in the end, as a people they were indestructible.

We were present when the colonial and racist powers put up the most determined resistance to deny the people of Algeria, Kenya, the Portuguese colonies, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa their freedom.

We know that the peoples of these countries and our continent as a whole were not discouraged by what seemed to be overwhelming odds against them, because they were determined that the people’s cause for national emancipation could never be defeated. We bore witness to the unspeakable genocide that descended on the people of Rwanda in 1994. We know that, in the end, these extraordinary Africans ended the slaughter themselves because they took it upon themselves to make the determination that Africa will not perish at the hands of her own sons and daughters.

That same spirit of optimism and commitment to overcome must inform all of us now as we build on the victories we have scored, to engage what will clearly be a titanic struggle to achieve Africa’s Renaissance. What will decide the outcome is not the strength of our opponents but our own determination to succeed.

Stretching through the mists, for a millennium, our common African history is replete with great feats of courage, demonstrated by the heroes and heroines and the heroic peoples, without whose loyal attachment to hope and the vision of a bright future for Africa, her people would long have perished. The moment is upon us when we should draw on this deep well of human nobility to make this statement in action—that Africa’s time has come! We, in all our millions, including those of us who are in the diaspora, will ensure that Africa will not be denied what is due to her! The African century will not be proclaimed! It will come to be through struggle! The struggle continues! Victory is certain!

We wish the African Renaissance Institute success in the historic mission we are all called upon to carry out, to end a long and dark night without whose ending no human being anywhere in the world can claim to be fulfilled as a human being.

The only ailment that has no cure is the spawn of a curse. I thank you for your attention.