

# African Voices

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Hello Everyone! It is with great pleasure that I present you the first issue of *African Voices* for this year. As it is the tradition, I would like to welcome all new Africans and new members to *Afrika!*

From the coast of war ravaged Somalis, to the village of Sierra Leone to the skirmish of Party politics in South Africa this issue presents you with an opportunity to be part of what is unfolding in today's Africa, stories of deconstruction and reconstructions. Be sure to indulge in "Ananse" and my chronicles of a brief stay in



## **SOUTH AFRICA'S THABO MBEKI RESIGNS: WHAT ARE THE RAMIFICATIONS?**

*By Jimmy Longun*

For those who follow political developments from around the world, this topic needs no introduction. It has been roughly two weeks since Thabo Mbeki's ship capsized in the midst of a heavy political storm in Pretoria. To be honest, I initially didn't believe what I read in the papers because I thought it was nothing more than a hoax. But it wasn't. The truth was, indeed, that senior members in the ranks of the African National Congress (ANC) had called for Mbeki's resignation. Without creating too much of a scene, Mbeki graciously stepped

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## **DOWN THE DEMOCRACY HIGHWAY: GHANA'S DECEMBER 2008 ELECTIONS.**

*By: Tomefa Asempa*

In a matter of a month and a half, Ghanaians and the African continent will be holding their breath as Ghana's presidential elections commences. Will the 7th of December 2008 be a watershed or will the 'African anti-democracy syndrome' rear its ugly head once more?

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) are the two major parties in contention in this election although the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) and the Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) are beginning to amass support. On December 21, 2006, former Vice-President John Atta-Mills, who unsuccessfully ran as the NDC presidential candidate in 2000 and 2004, was overwhelmingly elected by NDC as its candidate for the 2008 presidential election with a majority of 81.4%, or 1,362 votes. John Mahama has been nominated as his vice-presidential candidate.

Former Foreign Minister of the current government, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo was elected as the 2008 presidential candidate of the governing NPP at a party congress on December 23, 2007, receiving 47.96% of valid votes (1,096 votes). Although he fell short of the required 50%, the second-place candidate, John Alan Kyeremanten, conceded defeat and backed Akufo-Addo.

By all means democracy must prevail, however we know all too well of scenarios whereby the ruling party decides to hold on to power. This 'African anti-democracy syndrome' has been the downfall of many countries such as the infamous Zimbabwe and Kenya and Nigeria.

In order to answer the question of whether Ghana's elections will be successful and peaceful or not we must ask the following questions: Will the opposition accept the finality of the outcome for the sake of unity and the strength of our democracy? Will the opposition honor the would-be President Elect and do everything possible to help him rule effectively? If 'YES' then we can comfortably say we will have a peaceful election and smooth transition into a new government.

*Tomefa can be reached at: [tasempa@macalester.edu](mailto:tasempa@macalester.edu)*

# A HUMBLE BEGINING TOWARDS PEACE AND STABILITY IN SIERRA LEONE

By Arthur Sillah

Peace is the state of prevailing in harmony and without stress and anxiety during the absence of war. The people of Sierra Leone have undergone a painful and brutal war for eleven years and they are now in the process of healing. Yes, it is true that the war has ended but peace is not only defined by the absence of war but also restoring community to a state in which it was before the war. A lot of schools were destroyed and so far, the government and most other NGOs have been able to rehabilitate schools to an appreciable level, in the urban areas only. Little has been done for schools in the more underprivileged regions in Sierra Leone. One such region is the rural areas of Kenema Districts. Most of the schools lack enough furniture and school supplies to adequately run the school one such school is the Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood (SLMB) Primary School in Boijibu Kenema District.

With this in mind, Zainab Mansaray'09 and I went home this summer to rehabilitate the SLMB Primary School and to organize workshops that will introduce civic engagement and enable the students to engage in constructive community service. The overall intention was to provide a proper, comfortable learning space for the students that will foster education and

In addition, we were able to provide scholarships for 10 students, which included a full year of tuition, cost of books, and school supplies. The school building provided a permanent space for the school and will increase the enrollment in the school. The workshops motivated the young students who immediately started planning different projects they would like to implement in their communities. The workshops, presented to both students and teachers, included our presentation on an introduction to civic engagement, malaria prevention tips from the Red Cross Society regional public health representative, and HIV/AIDS education by YAI representative and environmental sustainability by an environmental consultant from Bumbuna Hydro Project in Sierra Leone. At the end of the workshops, the group headed into the community to complete several hands on community service projects. One project involved cleaning the local hospital. We were also able to secure some malaria nets from the Malaria Control Program, which we distributed to students between the ages of four and seven.

Initially we encountered some difficulties interacting with community members. We had to get past the fact that we were there to help them and not to use their needy situation as a means fulfilling our selfish desires as

## BRING BACK THE ISLAMISTS!

*By: Said Guled*

Exactly two years ago, in 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) had brought peace and stability to southern Somalia. They ousted the warlords, restored the airport and ridded the sea port of pirates. Unlike any other warlord, regime or bandit fighting for power, they managed to restore confidence and people went about their business without any clan hostilities. At that time, the entire Diaspora was glad that at last, life could return to normal. People were making plans to go back and visit their friends and families that they had long lost contact with. The constant threat of fear which loomed over Mogadishu vanished within the six months the Islamists were in control. People of different clans were even permitted to get married, while as before, the hostility that existed between the clans prevented that. The only ones that reeled with fear from the Islamists were the thieves, the rapists, the murderers, Ethiopia's leader, Meles Zenawi, the US and folks who watched TV.

One has to understand the history, the culture and the beliefs of Somalis, if they are to ever establish peace in a land that has been lawless for close to two decades now. Some Somalis have lots of tribal and clan tensions between them, but they are unified under the banner of Islam. As a matter of

The Islamists had accomplished such a magnificent feat. They should have been lauded by the international community and their horn of Africa neighbors. Instead, they were ousted by the warlords under the disguise of an interim government, with the backing of the Ethiopian government, which in turn was being funded by the US. An Islamic state posed a threat to Bush's US, and for this reason the Islamists were blamed for harboring terrorists without any solid evidence. After the ousting of the Islamists, Somalia has spiraled further into anarchy and despair. Mogadishu, once a famous trading coastal city has become a war zone devoid of inhabitants, a ghost town. To this day, fighting continues between the interim government and the insurgents claiming to be fighting on behalf of the Islamists. Although starvation and ill health are rampant, aid workers are shot at and this means that Somalia does not get much assistance from the international community.

The only way forward for Somalia is for the Ethiopians to leave, and the Islamic courts to return to governing the country. Peace is at the top of the agenda for Somalia and the Islamists know how to achieve that. Peace is in the best interest of the Somali people, the neighbors of Somalia

## THE TRAGEDY OF DEVELOPMENT-PART I

*By: Dawit Mulugeta*

This May I had the opportunity to return home after a two-year stay in the US. It was exciting to be home and meet family and friends. Babies I left behind have started speaking and a hundred Ethiopian Birr does not mean much anymore. In a two part series, I'll recount on my observations.

On arrival, it is almost not too difficult to notice the number of constructions going on. Addis is pregnant with new or soon-to-be-new roads and skyscrapers. I swear that I could not recognize the road to my uncle's house. A narrow road that had always been over-crowded with street vendors, most of them considered illegal, has magically transformed itself into a four-laner, complete with psychedelic street lamps. There are only tail-tale signs of makeshift buildings that have obviously been bulldozed off the side of the street. For a visitor, it was a site to behold--a clean, well-marked street with no sight of rowdy human activity that is the hallmark of every major street in Addis.

As I ventured downtown Addis, special lights installed for the Millennium celebrations, retain the remains of the millennium mood. Huge government posters claiming that in the new millennium, we'll make poverty history are ubiquitous. The Ring Road constructed by the Republic of China around the city is fully functional. Inner-

shelter Addis's growing population that does not have the means to own a property. In fact, my uncle is one of the beneficiaries.

The government's efforts to modernize the country and catch up with the urgent needs of globalization is definitely laudable. The housing problem especially had been a major problem for an average Addis dweller. In other sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture, a lot is being done to make the country competitive on the world stage. Long-term project deals are being brokered with Saudi investors, the Netherlands, Djibouti, China and France to bolster the country's agricultural sector. On my road trip to the south, I saw enormous green houses along the roadside. My curious inquiry, why, was answered by an indifferent driver who said it belonged to foreign flower investors. When I dug a little dipper, I found that flower export had become a \$100 million lucrative business in the country with foreign investors from Israel to India clamoring over it and pouring millions of dollars every year.

I can attest that a lot is being done that I did not directly witness. All along my 'wows' there was a part of me that kept on asking: is this good for the country? The question was always met with a definite 'yes!'. But the question that lingered was "how good?" If there was

## ...South Africa's Thabo Mbeki Resigns

First and foremost, politics will always be politics. The best players win, and those who manage to escape with only minor bruises often come back in full force—barking, biting and kicking—ready to engrave their names in the history books. And for that matter His Excellency Mbeki had throughout his political career rode the storm to near perfection but not this time. It was his turn to be lost at sea once and for all. My reference may seem metaphorical but let's face it; this is the kind of politics that has been unfolding in South Africa in recent years. As you might know, there had been continuous political wrangles between Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki in the months prior to Mbeki's resignation. Zuma, a highly controversial but popular character among South Africans, chose to go head-to-head with Mbeki in a bid to dislodge him from the helm of power. And as a matter of fact, Zuma will be the ANC's candidate in the forthcoming elections having beaten away challenge from other aspiring candidates including Mbeki himself.

Now, at the heart of Zuma's growing popularity, lay Mbeki's Achilles heel—a touchy issue that eventually led to his demise. Like anyone would do when in his shoes, Mbeki used his executive powers as president to derail court trials pertaining to Zuma's corruption scandal, a cheap shot aimed at tainting his opponent's political career. And guess what

The whole world turned its back on Mugabe because no body can stomach his hideous deeds any longer. But rather enigmatically, one man in the shape of Mbeki offered Mugabe a crying shoulder. Much as Mbeki's resignation has caused pandemonium across South Africa, it is a blessing in disguise for the people of Zimbabwe because without a strong ally, Mugabe will struggle to fan the flames of tyranny.

Another lesson learnt is that no president should be bigger than a country. Whether or not Mbeki's resignation amounts to well orchestrated political theatrics, it's clear that the ANC put party interest ahead of individual interest. To restore credibility in the party, Mbeki had to go. Now, what message does Mbeki's resignation send to incumbent African leaders who have wronged their countries and their political opponents time and again? Leaders like Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Kenya's Mwai Kibaki and Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi. To them it is pure comedy, and I am sure they must have been laughing at Mbeki because the display of such perceived "cowardice" is a rare trait among African leaders. If this had happened in either Uganda or Kenya or Ethiopia, it would have needed highly powered bulldozers to drag any of these three out of office. The last time Uganda's Museveni was questioned about his prospects of leaving power, his response

## ...A Humble Beginning

Sierra Leone is indeed still recovering from the long civil war and the level of poverty in the country is still of a huge concern as was evident in the number of people who requested for help from just that small community. This was a strong barrier that we had to go through since we had to focus on the project goal. However, some stories were too touching to just let them go by without helping out in some way. Upon evaluating the budget we realized that we could touch the life of a 15-year old student who has been crippled due to the lack of finances for medical treatment. Moses Konneh (the student) is a hard working, bright boy who had to travel to another town to take his Basic Education Certificate Examination. His parents could not afford to pay for his transportation or his cost of living there. Therefore, we helped with his transportation and food and other expenses for the duration of his exam. This not only assisted and encouraged this boy, but further helped to project to the community the importance of education in empowering the younger generation help rebuild the country.

Most of our hurdles were with the furniture production and acquiring the government

Finally, we were both happy about how things worked out concerning our interaction with the students and community members. We were both motivated by the enthusiasm of the students and their eagerness to get into the community to help others. Knowing that we left a tradition that will be so beneficial to this community was worth the hard work that went into the planning and implementation of the project. The physical structure of the school will provide a comfortable space for the future generation of students, which will encourage the enrollment of more students in the future. The excitement of the students to form student groups to work on community projects will bring the community together in various ways that will help maintain the fragile peace in that region of the country. Broadcasting what we need on national TV and radio in Sierra Leone will serve to capture the heart of other Sierra Leoneans who have the upper hand in following our footsteps. I believe it will take people who have the country at heart in bringing about an effective recovery from the long civil war by taking initiatives directed at poor communities.

*Arthur can be reached at:  
asillah@macalester.edu*

### ...The Tragedy of Development

The cars on the road are monuments of rust, old age and a testimony to the ingenuity of the local repairman. Most of all, they are a testimony to the extreme poverty of the man behind the wheel. What is most farcical about the New Road is that its white streetlights that look like they have been copied from a post-modern art museum, never light. That is because there is no electricity to run them. For the past year, the government has not been able match the energy demands of the country that has tripled over the past two years. My stay in Addis was marred by continuous power rations every day. The government blamed the power shortage on reduced rainfall than expected the year before. But I believe the problem arose primarily due to the disproportionately large constructions that are going on. They are sucking more than half of the energy supply and the common populous is paying the price. Small business are literally running on deficits. A few lucky ones are breaking even. Added to the woes are rising food prices and energy costs.

The housing development: did I mention my uncle is a beneficiary? There is another side to the story. He is subletting it from a lady because she does not need it.

to an Internet café, the owner told me there was no connection and I can't use his computers. Before I stepped out of the café I noticed someone had a page open. Bewildered, I asked him why he told me that there was no connection when I see that someone actually has a page open. His reply astonished me. He said, he would rather tell people that there was no connection than see the frustration on their faces after putting their hands over the mouse. He said he was closing his café and looking for other jobs. The reason he survived this long, he told me, was due to remittances from his brother in the US. A further inquiry revealed that Ethiopian Communication, the monopoly, is doing upgrades on Internet service provision.

Outside Addis it was not uncommon to see, lines of cars along gas stations. Apparently, the country is experiencing energy shortages on every front. Contrary to all these, official figures indicate an astonishing 11% growth rate. I was puzzled as to how this growth did not translate into the lives of ordinary Ethiopians, and most importantly, where this growth came from. It was not long before I came across a headline in one of the Sunday editions of *Capital*: "EPRDF's Guna Trading made \$4 million in profit." Guna Trading, mind you, is a private business conglomerate owned and operated by EPRDF (Ethiopian

We all love growth and like to see our countries rub shoulders with big economies but when the growth loses its meaning in the jungle of numbers and corrupt governments it becomes a tragedy. A tragedy not even the most able bodied capitalist like the US can reverse. Listen to the recent rhetoric on presidential debates. "Middle-Class", "Income distribution", "Greedy Investors" are few of the many words that never leave company of the both presidential candidates. It took Americans more than a century to see the major flaw in their system and repairing it is not going to come at a small cost. It is going to take a dozen Obamas to reverse such a major flaw. Meanwhile, we the poor are too content, too busy with our achievement to see where our path to 'development' is taking us.

*To be continued in the next issue. I welcome comments. I hope this opens a discussion point for all of us African since I know this is not just an issue that pertains to my country. You can reach me at: dmulugeta@macalester.edu*

## **"Oooh, Ananse!"**

*By Seyram Addom*

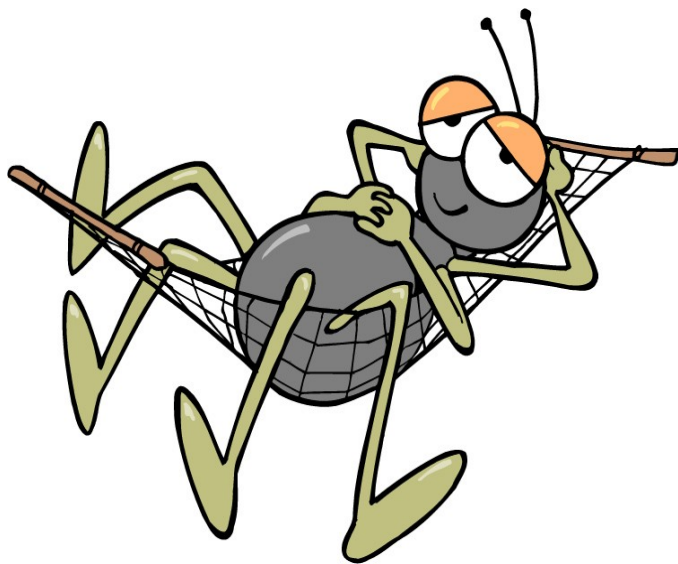
*Tradition is still held in high regard in most parts of Africa. Story telling, an integral part of a community's tradition, is found woven in the fabrics of social life. Under the nim tree, the palaver hut, the village tavern, and TV sets of today's metropolitan household, stories are told and retold. Seyram recalls her childhood days listening to Ananse stories. (Ananse is the central figure of Ghanaian lore who is known for his rather shrewd and tricky persona.)*

"Sii sii sii, sii dada koo..." As soon as you heard that, on Saturdays at about 5 in the afternoon, you know where you'll find most children in Accra. They will be in front of the TV watching one of their favorite TV shows, "By the fireside". When I was a child and back when TV was "good", my country tried to modernize the art of oral tradition and story telling by putting in on TV because literally sitting by a fireside was not happening anymore and the stories that were shared in the past by the elders by those fires remained with them. In this modern way of telling the story, the show would open, often with two adults sitting on chairs and children sitting at their feet, with eager looks on their faces.

"Once upon a time..." begins the adult. "Time time!" all the children respond, even those responding only to a TV set. "There was a man and his name was Kweku Ananse. He lived in a little village with his family

The show always began with one of the adults starting the story. The children would then act out parts of the story. So it flowed from the narration into the story where we left off. Ananse would be shown thinking hard about what he would do. He might have a conversation with his wife or child about what he is thinking but many times he was selfish and kept the idea to himself.

"Moving on with the story, Ananse gets a brilliant idea, at least in his mind. One night after the whole village had gone to sleep anticipating the next day when harvest would begin, he goes to the farmland and surveys everything they grown. His mouth watered just thinking about how delicious everything would be." A child might ask, "But Auntie, why did Ananse do that?" The other adult would respond "hmm, let's see what happens." "Ananse then puts his plan into action. He quickly builds a fire, selects the best from every farm and puts together a wonderful meal and sat and ate it all by himself. UOOOH, Ananse!" the children exclaim. "Then he went back to his house and went to bed with a full belly. The next morning, the whole village woke up and went to the farm to begin the harvest but lo and behold, some of the produce was gone. They were really surprised and the news quickly spread through the village that someone had been through their farms. It was still the main topic of discussion at every family house. 'Who could have done this?' the people wondered.



"That night, Ananse got up again and in the same manner, picked the best produce and put together a fabulous meal and enjoyed the food all by himself. He was proud of himself for having such a brilliant plan. He knew if he had just done it the way it has always been done, he would get some good produce yes, but he would get some not so great ones too. Everything had to be fair but with his plan, he could choose the best for himself. The next morning the village woke up to find

That night, Ananse got up as usual and went to the farm to do his business. He had figured that no one would catch him so he whistled as he went excited about the food he was planning on cooking that night. As he approached the farm though, he saw someone standing there. He stopped suddenly. He contemplated whether or not to go ahead and confront this person or to just go back but the thought of his sumptuous meal ahead kept him from returning. 'Hey!' he yelled across the farm at the person. 'What are you doing out here at this time of the night?' He got no response. 'Won't you mind me?!' he persisted. There was neither sound nor movement from the person. By this time, Ananse was fuming. He walked closer, 'I have tried to be decent to you but I can see you have no intention of respecting me in the same manner by at least answering my question.' When he still did not get a response, Ananse could not take it anymore. He walked up to the person and said, 'You clearly do not know who you are dealing with. Take this.' He reached out and slapped "the person". When he tried to take off his hand and continue slapping him, he found that he could not. 'Let me go! Let me go!' Ananse said. But when it made no attempt to let him go, he reached out with his other hand and slapped "the person" again. "

At this point all the children are laughing at the predicament Ananse got himself into. "What does he do now?" they all want to know. 'Well, he keeps trying to hurt "the person" by kicking with his right leg and then with his left and finally as a last resort he used his head. As we all know, Kweku Ananse had glued himself to the statue. Morning came by and Ananse realized his mistake but it was too late. Soon, all the villagers came to the farm and they realized it was Ananse who had been taking their food all along. 'Ei, Ananse!', everyone exclaimed. They all stood around the statue and shook their heads and scolded Ananse and there was nothing he could do. The elders came and deliberated and decided to find an appropriate punishment for Ananse. The adults then ask, "So children, what lessons did you learn from today's story?" "I learnt that you should not steal from family and people you are close to." "I learnt that we shouldn't be greedy and think about only ourselves like Ananse did." "I also learnt that when you are selfish, in the end, you suffer because no one likes you." One of the adults would then take what the children said and summarize into something like this, "Yes children. You are all right. We learnt from Ananse's story not to steal from anyone at all, not to be greedy and selfish because we would get no where when we only think about ourselves." Many of the stories I grew up listening to and watching on this show I

-- CONVERSATIONS --

*In this volume of African Voices, I intend to introduce a platform where readers get the chance to respond to some of the issues raised by contributors. As a means of facilitating a discussion on some of the topics voiced, I will put some prompts to allow readers be part of an on-going conversation. Readers may choose to write a short informal response that will feature in this section on the next issue of African Voices, or they can write a full-blown article that can feature in the main section.*

The Editor.

Would the Union of Islamic Courts that brought a brief moment of peace and stability in Somalia have been better for the long run peace and stability of the country than the transitional government? Could they be compared to other regimes that came to power through coup d'états and populist movements but later turned out to be tyrannical?

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Is there a hierarchy of development? Should infrastructural developments gain the upper hand? Are African countries becoming victims of their own development?

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Is "What Mbeki did an audacious move that no incumbent African president would have done"? What lessons can be learned from Mbeki's resignation? Can this be the beginning of new political era in Africa?

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