

AFRICA AND THE UNITED NATIONS.

The role and impact of Africa in international affairs and its participation in international forums is a recent development which has to a large extent coincided with the hurricane of decolonisation and the African Revolution which swept throughout the Continent in the past decade.

During the years when the greater part of Africa was raped and colonised, oppressed and exploited, degraded and humiliated and its peoples rendered voiceless and voteless in the conduct of their own affairs, they were similarly ignored in the shaping of world affairs.

In fact it would be hardly any exaggeration to say that during the period of the League of Nations and the first decade of the U.N.O. Africa was regarded as a factor of no consequence in international affairs.

With the exception of South Africa which was, as it still is, a white minority dominated state, completely unrepresentative of the indigenous African majority, the African States represented on the League of Nations were Liberia, Egypt and Ethiopia. There is clear evidence that these states were not regarded as equal members with other League States.

In the case of Ethiopia in particular its very admission to the league was obstructed for two years, ironically by Great Britain one of the greatest colonialist powers on the grounds that slavery existed in Ethiopia and reforms were necessary before her admission to the League. Even during the Italian aggression against Ethiopia the League wavered and vacillated to take effective action to protect an African state against a European aggressor. Instead France, Italy and Britain were formed into a body to settle the problem. Ethiopia was both excluded and ignored demonstrating once more the inferior and humiliating status to which an African state was relegated in the League. Only the Soviet delegation protested in favour of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia was conquered by Italy and it was Britain again which called upon the League Council (already on the verge of collapse) to recognise the sovereignty of Italy over Ethiopia, to endorse a dastardly aggression of a European power over an African state, and to ratify a brazen and blatant act of colonisation and enslavement of an African country by a foreign power.

African aspirations, their interests, security and dignity had no place in the League of Nations, the forerunner of the UNO. Their petitions and pleas for protection against the banditry of stronger European powers fell on deaf ears and were ignored.

The UNO initially inherited some of these negative, completely erroneous attitudes of the League of Nations.

Once again excluding racist South Africa, the African foundation members of the U.N.O. were Egypt, Ethiopia and Liberia.

Racist South Africa though its Prime Minister J. C. Smuts played a leading role in the formulation of the foreamble of the Charter which pronounced the lofty ideals of humanity, which had emerged victorious from the most destructive and horrible wars ever known.

The preamble which J.C. Smuts proposed and for which South Africa under white minority rule was acclaimed was in direct conflict with the policies and practices pursued by General Smuts and his white racists against the indigenous peoples of the country. Yet because African interests and aspirations were of little or no consequence this did not affect the high esteem with which Smuts was regarded at the initial meeting of the U.N.O.

During the very first year of the U.N.O. the question of the treatment of the peoples of Indian origin in South Africa was raised, but it was discussed on the grounds that in terms of Article 2 (7) it was a domestic issue of a member state which precluded discussion by the United Nations.

At this same session, the late Dr. A.B. Xuma, then President of the African National Congress of South Africa attended the General Assembly meeting with the view of discrediting the claims of the white minority Government to represent South Africa on the grounds of the flagrant racial discrimination policies it was pursuing, but this was of no avail.

The importance which the U.N.O. attached to the problems of Africa can be assessed from the fact that in the first annual report which consisted of 66 pages, only two sentences referred to Africa.

At the first General Assembly meeting there was not a single resolution on Africa. Although that Continent like Europe and Asia has been the arena of fierce conflict between the Nazi and fascist hordes of Hitler and Mussolini on the one hand and the progressive and anti-fascist forces of the world on the other. African men and women together with the rest of the world took up arms and sacrificed their lives in the grim war to destroy the forces which were determined to enslave the whole of mankind. The graves of African combatants lie not only on the African Continent but even in Europe.

Yet after victory and when one of the most historic international organisations was established, on the flames of a devastating war, an organisation whose fundamental purpose was to preserve international peace and security, and to promote cooperation among nations; to save future generations from the horrifying experience of a world war, Africa and its peoples were ignored, treated as non-existent.

The Second World War was the most ghastly manifestation of racialism. Its driving ideological force was the supremacy of one race over another and the right of the so-called supreme race to dominate, colonise, enslave, and even exterminate the so-called inferior races. Under the banner of rabid racialism the most heinous atrocities and crimes against humanity were committed.

It is an irony that in a world which fought and survived against the insane manifestations of this ideology, the UNO at its inception whose fundamental task was to bury once and for all the causes which threatened peace and security should neglect and ignore the one continent, Africa, which had for centuries, been the victim of genocide, slavery, colonialism and racialism.

However, as the years went by and in one Country after another colonialists were forced to retreat and the nations of Africa wrested their independence, the African Continent exerted its influence and impact on international affairs and in international forums. The African states and nations

imposed themselves in an arena for peace, national self determination and security in the U.N.O.

Originally, there were 51 members of the U.N. of whom only 4 were African states. Today there are 126 of whom 42 members are from the Continent of Africa. This is the largest representation of states in any single Continent. Combined with the Asian independent states. The balance of power in the U.N. has changed radically. The only question of course is whether this increased force is being organised and used to its full potentiality.

As country after country from the so-called dark continent took its rightful place in the U.N. The imperialist and reactionary racist lamented that this august body was being polluted by immature, inexperienced and virtually inferior nations and peoples. The prophets of doom predicted that the U.N.O. would deteriorate and ultimately fail in its noble objections. This was one more demonstration of the contempt and inequality with which African and Asian independent states were regarded by the colonialist and racist powers.

The emergence of Africa in the international scene has been no easy and smooth path.

Originally the main participation of African peoples in collaboration with other progressive peoples of the world was in such mass organisations as the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the International Union of Students, The World Federation of Trade Unions, the Women's International Democratic Federation.

All these organisations had as their fundamental objectives the unity of the peoples of the world, for peace, friendship, cooperation, national Independence and human rights.

In these organisations all, irrespective of colour, race, and creed were regarded as equals and contributed as equals.

The objectives of these organisations were consistent if not identical with those of the U.N.O..

It is in these organisations that the African people found both a platform and audience to express their views about their specific problems and world affairs. But even more important they experienced the warm comradeship and friendship which was in direct contrast with the relations which their colonialist and racist rulers imposed on them.

From the early days of the World Peace Council the dominating principle was that world peace and National independence were inseparable.

These mass international organisations in which the African people participated with ever growing interest and vigour threatened the very foundations of colonialism and racialism. The growth of these organisations which rallied an evermounting number of people dedicated to the cause of uniting mankind against aggression and man's inhumanity to man, oppression and exploitation struck fear in the hearts of the enemies of peace, security and freedom.

It is little wonder therefore that the racists and colonialists tried all forms of subterfuges and machinations to discredit these organisations as "communist fronts" and to discourage the participation of Africans in them by falsely labeling them as spearheads or agents of communist infiltration

and so-called "Communist imperialism". The imperialists and racialists used all forms of subversion, blackmail, and bribery to divert African participation in these organisations.

Rival international bodies were established directly controlled by the western powers like ICFTU, Moral rearmament, World Assembly of Youth, etc. A cold war was deliberately generated with the anti-communist bogey expressed in anti-Soviet sentiments as its main weapon.

All this exercise was an attempt by the imperialists to maintain their position of political and ideological domination over their colonies and in particular Africa which was becoming their last outpost. All the imperialist slanders and sabotage failed to stem the rising participation of Africa in progressive international bodies. Through these organisations Africa began to find its rightful place in world affairs.

But perhaps further impetus of Africa's impact on international problems and the problems of colonialism and racialism are to be found in the convocations discussions and resolutions of the historic Bandung Conference which was held from the 18 - 24 April 1955.

24 Asian and African states were invited including representatives of Liberation Movements. The resolutions and spirit of the Bandung Conference were a significant milestone in the history of both Africa and Asia in creating the basis for these continents to be a force in international Affairs.

The Bandung Conference met amongst other things, to consider problems relating to national sovereignty, racialism and colonialism. The object of the conference was also to consider "the position of Asia and Africa and their peoples in the world and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and cooperation". This latter aspect showed the determination of the peoples of Africa and Asia to define their role in international Affairs.

The Conference in its resolutions condemned colonialism and demanded its speedy end. The Conference also affirmed that foreign domination and exploitation constituted a denial of fundamental human rights which was contrary to the Charter of the U.N. - an impediment to World Peace and co-operation.

Another important resolution was the declaration of support for the cause of freedom and independence for all peoples and called upon colonial powers to grant freedom and independence. The spirit of Afro-Asian unity, anti-imperialist and anti-racialist foreign policy and a concern for world peace and security was firmly unplanted at the Bandung Conference.

Although only three of the African states which participated in the Bandung Conference were members of the United Nations, the Conference laid the basis for an Afro-Asian group in the U.N..

By 1957 Ghana became the eighth African state to be admitted to the United Nations.

In 1958 Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah convened a Conference of Independent States which met in Accra from 15 to 22 April 1958. The Conference was of great significance. Item 1. of the agenda was of particular importance. It referred to the "exchange of views on foreign policy, especially in relation to the African Continent; the future of African Independent territories; the Algerian problem; the racial problem; and steps to be taken to safeguard the independence, sovereignty

and territorial integrity of African states".

The fourth point of the agenda was "consideration of the problem of international peace and of conformity with the Charter of the United Nations; and reaffirmation of the principles of the Bandung Asian-African Conference.

The fifth point on the agenda was the establishment of a permanent machinery for consultation on foreign policy after the conference.

This unique conference of African States which brought together Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia - states with different cultures, languages, economy, political institutions, and linked to different colonial powers, France, Britain and Italy, succeeded in finding Unity in their diversity. And what is even more important shaped their foreign policies and united their concerted efforts to assert African opinion on African problems, African interests, and African aspirations in international forums. The Accra Conference proclaimed and resolved on a wide range of problems affecting Africa, on the questions of foreign policy, colonialism and self-determination; racialism; safeguarding the independence sovereignty and territorial integrity of independent states; the future of colonised states in Africa; international peace and security; the danger of thermo-nuclear weapons; the reduction of the arms race; and world peace.

The Conference also decided that the permanent representatives of African states at the U.N. should create a permanent machinery for consultation and coordination. A procedure and schedule for the meeting of foreign ministers and heads of Independent states was agreed upon.

After years of virtual silence and muzying, the African voice emerged from the jungle and wilderness of enforced suppression to assert itself in the battlefield of international diplomacy and to throw in its weight in the United Nations organisation.

It is true that Africa has not been as united as it should be. Divisions and even conflicts have occurred.

Imperialist powers have done their damnest to ferment these divisions and conflicts. Yet on the whole the growth of the number of African independent states have continued to increase the impact, role and influence of Africa in the U.N.

The change of the balance of forces since 1960 "the year of Africa" has seen not only a quantitative changes in Africa's position in the U.N., as correctly reflected inter-alia, by the recent convocation of the recent Addis Ababa session of the U.N. Security Council but also radical changes in outlook and the preoccupation of the U.N. with African problems, both political, Economic and social which have become the dominant feature of U.N. activity, in direct contrast to what the position was at its inception.

The establishment of the O.A.U., which united African states although perhaps on slightly shaky foundation was a further milestone in the consolidation of African unity. The solution of African problems; and the formulation of a foreign policy on common issues.

This has been and still is no easy task, partly because

Africa/6....

Africa is not yet wholly and completely free and independent. There are still areas under colonial and white minority and racial rule. Africa as a new emergent Continent in the world finds itself divided economically, culturally, linguistically, tribally, geographically and ethnologically. It faces problems of poverty and underdevelopment, ignorance, and disease - a heritage of Centuries of colonialism.

The imperialist powers which raped and blatinised the African continent, together with their ally and their bridge-head, racist South Africa, spare no efforts and intrigues to drive a wedge between the African states as well as the Liberation Movements through economic and financial blackmail and neo-colonialism.

Despite it all, the O.A.U. has survived as a unique organisation in any continent. Nothing like it exists anywhere else in the world. At every session some crisis is created to thwart and frustrate its convocation. But each time the progressive states rally to thwart the attempt.

France attempts to direct the policy of its former colonies to weaken the unity and militancy of the O.A.U., South Africa with the full support of her western allies pursues a northward policy to try and dominate certain African states both internally and in so far as their foreign policies are concerned. Yet each Session of the OAU has produced some minimal agreement on vital foreign policies, relating to questions of African security and peace, world peace and struggle against colonialism and racialism.

The vital role of Africa in the fundamental problems of world Affairs, world peace, and security is demonstrated by the fact that for a number of years now the U.N. has sent its Secretary-General and observers to Sessions of the OAU.

In addition, the General Assembly has given audience to authorised delegates from the OAU.

The impact and presence of Africa as an important force in the U.N. is further revealed by the fact that African representatives have been elected to leading positions in the organs of the U.N., as Presidents of the General Assembly, members of the Security Council and the position of Chairman in those Councils.

African representatives have served in other important Committees of the U.N. in leading positions. The Committee of 24, or Decolonisation Committee, The Human Rights Committee, The Economic and Social Committee, The Special Committee on Apartheid, etc. Today there is hardly an organ of the U.N. in which Africans are not participating in one capacity or another.

It has now become a common practice for various U.N. Committees to meet in Africa. There are some valid criticisms in respect of this practice. Yet on the other hand it demonstrates a new and important approach towards the Continent and its significance in the problems of world peace, security and cooperation.

The U.N. Organisation as a body has had its influence on the development of the situation in Africa. The Declaration of Human Rights; the Convention Against Racism; The Declaration on the granting of Independence to Colonial peoples; The designation of the Year 1971 as a Year of intensification of Action Against

racism, Nazism and racial discrimination. All these have stimulated changes. On the other hand, developments in Africa and the changes in the balance of power have had their profound effect on the U.N.

Throughout the period of its development and even up to the present day there is much which Africa can lament and genuinely feel disappointed about the U.N.O. On numerous occasions African interests and security have been frustrated and even jeopardised by the lack of action on the part of the U.N. - an emasculation and paralysis deliberately ~~engineered~~ engineered by the imperialist powers.

The African people have watched with dismay the gross violation of the Charter by western imperialist powers; the abuse of the U.N.O.; and what is even worse the encouragement and given to the racist South African Government to arm itself to the teeth, annex with impunity a whole country like Namibia, and to pursue an aggressive and expansionist policy against the rest of Africa, in complete defiance of every tenet and precept, resolution and declaration of the U.N.O.

The 25th Anniversary of the U.N.O. was an occasion when the positive and negative aspects of this mighty International Organisation was subjected to scrutiny.

The U.N. has a duty to Africa which is unequivocal in terms of its Charter, Resolutions and Conventions. But Africa as part of the U.N. equally has a duty to exert its united and concerted effort to ensure that this historic organisation is not diverted or abused in its noble task of preserving world peace, and security, Human rights and national independence, international cooperation and equality; and the wiping out of colonialism, racialism and nazism.

Africa, which now has the biggest representation as a continent has a great obligation and responsibility. This can only be fulfilled by maximum unity and a foreign policy which is strictly in conformity with the Charter, and the noble resolutions of the U.N.

There are many allies who have and will continue to reinforce those progressive African states who are genuinely committed to African interests. These interests are consistent with the interests of the overwhelming majority of humanity. There are also powerful enemies.

Africa has emerged to determine not only its own destiny but together with the progressive forces of the world in the /world forefront of which is the /socialist system, the anti-imperialist forces, inside and outside the U.N.O., the destiny of mankind.

A new era has been unfolding and the African states and people must rise to meet the challenge.

Alfred Nzo
Secretary-General.

African National Congress (SA),
Provisional Headquarters,
P.O. Box 680,
MOROGORO.
Tanzania.