

# **Rebuilding The Pan African Movement, A Report on the 7th Pan African Congress.**

Don't Agonise, Organise.

## **Guest Editor's Introduction**

Twenty Years ago, the 6th Pan African Congress convened in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. That meeting gave a stronger voice to the liberation movements and moved beyond the nationalist agenda of the Organisation of African Unity in defining the principles of African liberation. The 7th Pan African Congress was convened in Kampala, Uganda, in April 1994, under the shadow of the dramatic changes to overturn white superiority in South Africa, when most of the colonial territories had gained formal independence. The push for political independence and an end to racism had been the guiding principles of the Pan African movement from the time of slavery. Since 1900, when the first Congress was convened, these historic meetings sought to carry forward a body of thought and action for emancipation which was shared by the African peoples at home and abroad.

The 7th Pan African Congress benefited from the rich experiences of the African peoples and from the strength and weaknesses of the movement since the period of the Sixth Pan African Congress. Under the theme, "Facing the Future in Unity, Social Progress and Democracy" the Congress brought together over 800 delegates representing Pan African Organisations from Brazil to Botswana.

In total there were over 2000 participants in all of the events to mark the Congress: the Women's Pre-congress Meeting, the cultural expressions at the Uganda National Theatre, the African Art Exhibition, the Opening of Africa Freedom Park and the Congress itself. There were three outstanding characteristics of the Congress: (a) the fact that the meeting took place despite the internal and external contradictions of the movement (b) the formation of the Pan African Women's Liberation Organisation and (c) the establishment of a permanent Pan African Secretariat. The debates and actions of the Congress signalled a firm commitment to the idea that the Pan African Struggle was "one struggle, many fronts."

## **The Convening of the Congress.**

The objectives of the Congress, as declared in the call, were *inter alia* to "articulate a vision for the 21st century and a programme of action for the Pan African Movement." Despite the internal debates within the movement as to the definition of an African and the external pressures whether Africa could afford the meeting, the force of the demand to resist recolonisation dictated that the meeting should take place. The internal contradictions of the movement dictated that before the meeting there were two initiatives called the 7th Pan African Congress. The original initiative, originating from concerned Pan Africanists in Nigeria, had become bogged down over the question of the definition of who is an African. The question of the ideological direction of this initiative was overtaken by the political struggles for democracy in Nigeria.

At the opening of the Congress, one definition of an African was presented by President Yoweri Museveni, the Patron of the Congress. This definition listed five different criteria for those who could be called Africans and included those living on the continent and those abroad. Museveni's definition included (a) black Africans south of the Sahara (b) Africans who live in North Africa who had migrated from other continents and have made their home in Africa (c) Dispersed Africans in the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Pacific (d) white settlers in Africa who have decided to settle permanently and make their home in Africa and (e) those who are ideologically attuned to the struggle for dignity by African people everywhere. This definition of the African in the opening speech made a major breakthrough in rising above the racist definitions of humanity bequeathed by four centuries of European nationalism. Despite this definition, throughout the meeting, there were speakers who wanted to use racial definitions; this surfaced on the question of the former settler elements in Southern Africa and in the major debate in the conference on the Sudan.

The largest governmental delegation in the meeting was from both sides of the war in the Sudan. The sentiment that Arabs were oppressing Africans was carried forward by those from Southern Sudan and from societies where the class and racial contradictions were collapsed. The anti "Arab" views were contested by many forces and was ultimately defeated in the Congress when the final resolution on reparations was tabled. Progressive women demanded that the reparations issue break with the conceptual poverty of the property relations of Europe.

Elements from the 1992 Abuja Conference on Reparations had come out in full force and their position had been forcefully represented both at the plenary and in the workshops. Professor Ali Mazrui had led a special workshop on the crusade for reparations, and there were documents in African languages on this question. However, despite the popularity of the reparations question among sections of the Pan African movement, the divisiveness of this debate came out in the final day

of the conference. There were progressive women who were willing to locate the reparations debate beyond the damages inflicted by slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

There was a wide diversity of views in the conference, and this divergence was reflected both in the character of the resolutions and in the content of the declaration of the Congress. In reality, however, the fact that the Congress was dominated by grassroots organisations meant that the position of the African governments was not the dominant one in the meeting. Basically, only those countries in Africa which considered themselves progressive and anti imperialist bothered to turn up or to financially support the meeting. Apart from the Ugandans themselves, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Cuba and Libya sent high powered delegations. The largest delegation of a government was from the Sudan, but their sterile anti imperialism was an attempt to silence the large delegation from the Southern Sudan.

The Congress attempted to conciliate the emotional and vitriolic outbursts from the Sudanese government by presenting a resolution calling on all parties to demonstrate maximum commitment to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Sudan. This position was fully supported by those elements of the popular organisations from the Sudan who were in exile in Egypt. The intensity of the debates on the Sudan and the emotional speech by General Aidid, from Somalia, to the Congress gave delegates from North America, the Caribbean and Europe a taste of the intensity of the political, military, ideological and religious struggles on the African continent.

The exposure of different sections of the Pan African world to the issues and questions of different regions was one of the high points of the meeting. One whole day had been dedicated to sub regional networking with reports in a plenary from different regions. One of the most important aspects of the conference was the country reports. These reports directly addressed the first objective of the conference, that is, to locate the concrete condition and on going struggles of African peoples continentally and in the diaspora.

The most cohesive and unified presentations were from the Caribbean and Southern Africa. The Caribbean delegation had been in the forefront of calling for the unity between the Kampala initiative and the initiative of Naiwu Osahon of Nigeria.

The Caribbean delegation reported on the level of activities, the mobilisation and the nature of the representation from the region. Collectively, this delegation came forward with the issues of the outstanding vestiges of colonialism and the issues of the blockade against Cuba, along with the question of the restoration of democracy in Haiti.

The question of South Africa has kept the Pan African world united since the Fifth Pan African Congress in 1945. The OAU Liberation Committee and

member states had supported the anti apartheid struggle, but even in this support there were many African leaders who benefitted from the survival of apartheid. One major question for the movement was how to define the tasks of the Pan African struggle for the twenty first century. In this effort, the report of the Southern Africa regional conference assisted in clarifying the ways forward in relation to enriching the popular search for Pan African Unity. The resolutions on the tearing down of the borders in Southern Africa was one which resonated throughout the meeting. The question of real peoples cooperation beyond the governmental initiatives was presented on Sunday morning at the workshop on different regions of the Pan African World. Despite the noted absence of elements from the African National Congress, the report of the Southern Africa regional meeting of the Congress outlined the practical measures which should guide the regional initiatives and be the base of the Pan African movement internationally.

The cohesion of the Caribbean and Southern Africa reports were missing in the reports from other regions. The Pan African World had been divided into 11 regions for the purposes of the meeting. The regions were: 1. Africa: North, 2. Africa: East, 3. Africa: West, 4. Africa: Central, 5. Africa: Southern, 6. Caribbean, 7. North America, 8. Central and South America, 9. Middle East, 10. Europe, and 11. Asia and the Pacific. Of these regions, West Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia were underrepresented. The absence of large delegations from those societies formerly under French colonialism reflected both the dominant cultural and ideological role of the annual Franco African summit and the weaknesses of the Secretariat in distributing materials in French and Arabic.

The largest delegation in the Congress was the North American delegation from the United States and Canada. The Canadian representatives, like the representatives from Germany, France and Britain, spoke to the increased racist attacks against Africans and the fact that African governments and the OAU are silent on this intensified racism in the aftermath of the cold war. Many of the delegates raised the issue of the treatment of asylum seekers in Europe and the need for African governments to give dual citizenship to all Africans in the diaspora.

Pan Africanism has always been a major political and ideological force among Africans in the United States. From the period of slavery, Pan Africanism was manifest in religious, cultural, political and philosophical forms. Yet, the intellectual poverty and the individualism of American society has always affected the Pan African movement in the United States.

The ideological divisions within the Pan African movement which had lingered since the period of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) and the Sixth Pan African Congress erupted in the North American delegation. There were Pan Africanists of the Afrocentric mold, elements from the grassroots, workers, urban youth and the homeless, and members of the Nation of Islam and

other religious formations. The struggles for the leadership of this delegation spilled over into the main meetings of the Congress to the point where the heated interventions interrupted one of the principal presentations on the impact of the transition from fordism to just-in-time production for Africans in America and in Africa.

So intense were these differences that some sections of the North American delegation were not able to benefit from the experience of freedom fighters and grassroots activists from all over the Pan African world. The one section of this delegation which escaped this intense polarisation were those women who were intent on learning from the strengths of African women who wanted to carry forward the ideas communicated in launching the campaign to protect African women everywhere from the growing religious and cultural fundamentalism. The ideological struggles of the Congress not only spoke to the content of meetings such as the 7th Pan African Congress, but also to the form of the meeting which could inhibit genuine participation.

The differences in the North American delegation did not obscure the fact that the United States government had learnt the important lessons of the importance of the Pan African movement.

That an African American had been promoted to become the Chairperson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US military was one indication of the attempt by the ruling elements in the USA to manipulate the Pan African sentiments among the African American population. To pursue this manipulation, the African American who is the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs turned up in Kampala during the Congress. However, the loud ovation which was given from the conference floor to General Aidid from Somalia reflected the fact that US governmental officials, whether African or not, were not welcome at this Congress.

That the Congress was able to debate and clarify its views on the content of the present leadership in Africa, on the struggles against racism in Europe and America, on the impact of the reorganisation of GATT, NAFTA and the European Union and on the impact of structural adjustment was a step forward. This was all the more important because the mentality of the international financial organisations such as the IMF was that neither Uganda nor any other African country could afford a Congress of this nature.

## **The Intervention of Women.**

Fatima Babiker Mohamoud, a Sudanese political exile, gave one of the most profound presentations in both the Women's Pre-Congress Meeting and in her major address to the Congress focusing on the need for a Pan African Women's Liberation Organisation.

Her presentation was even more significant because the issues raised by the debate on women in the Pan African movement cut through the divisive debates on the Sudan and the question of the relationship between Pan Africanism and Islamic Fundamentalism. The intervention of the women opened up the issue of those religious and cultural forms (traditions) which were practised to reinforce the oppression of women.

The Pre-Congress Women's Meeting was historic because prior to the meeting, one of the major demands was that if Pan Africanism was to be relevant in the 21st century it had to break out of the male centred mold of the 20th century which celebrated great leaders such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, George Padmore, C. L. R. James, Cheik Anta Diop, Patrice Lumumba, Franz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Malcolm X, Walter Rodney, Bob Marley and Nelson Mandela. The women brought to the fore the fact that the past representation of the Pan African movement tended to silence women, and that while the past Congresses were meetings of men calling for independence, women were at the forefront of the Pan African struggle on a day to day basis.

At the Pre-Congress meeting, there were seven workshops with intense discussions and papers on the impact of structural adjustment on African women, on the African Women and her environment, the position and status of African women African women, and the law, increasing the survival of the African woman and child, the role of women in cultural development and the building of a Pan African women's liberation movement.

More than 70 recommendations came out of this Meeting, ranging from the issues of the environment to the struggles of domestic workers. The principal advance of the Pre-Congress meeting was the fact that the meeting facilitated the positioning of women's issues clearly on the agenda throughout the Congress. The main resolution of the women was to "give total support to political struggles for equality undertaken by black women and called upon state and other organisations participating in the Congress to tackle the problem of the oppression of women thoroughly and profoundly."

Throughout the Congress, women met daily to discuss the logistics of the formation of the Pan African Women's Liberation Organisation. The ultimate formation of this organisation was a clear attempt to move beyond the state centred women's organisations which are usually led by the wives of the political leaders of Africa. The issue of engendering Pan Africanism took new force as women from North America, Europe, the Caribbean, South America and Africa undertook to give organisational form to the most important struggle for the twenty first century after majority rule in South Africa: the struggle for the transformation of gender relations among the African peoples everywhere.

## **The Permanent Secretariat.**

The creation of the Pan African Movement was consistent with the efforts by those present to break the individualism of the movement where the ideas of great

persons would be celebrated as that of the movement. This thrust to move beyond periodic congresses to create a movement permeated the Congress. There were deliberations and resolutions on all aspects of the Pan African struggle, on the emancipation of women, the political education of the youth, on the rise of racism and fascism in Europe and America, on Angola, Somalia, Libya, Palestine, the Sudan and Haiti and on the economic blockade against Cuba. There were resolutions to remind the Congress of the anti colonial struggles in Martinique, Cayenne, Puerto Rico, Aruba and the over 20 colonies where African peoples did not have the right to self determination. Of these resolutions the most important was the question of the breaking down of the borders in Africa and the creation of a Permanent Secretariat to ensure sustained activism in order to achieve the goals of the 7th Pan African Congress.

There was a clear indication that it was important in the context of the new world order to improve the effectiveness of the political work of the movement. At the outset of the Congress, there were those who lamented the absence of the leading academics from across the continent. None of the principal academic centres in Africa took the Congress seriously, and their absence was conspicuous. Academic and political activists such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo who were in exile from the continent made invaluable contributions on the questions of education and culture.

This issue of cultural liberation was also highlighted by positions presented by those youths who participated in the meeting. Youths from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania along with the youths in the Southern African delegation held special meetings within and without the Congress on the special place of the youth in the reconstruction and renewal of the African peoples. The 7th Pan African Congress resolved to call upon Pan Africanists and their institutions to individually and collectively uphold the rights of children. The meeting called upon governments, including those in the diaspora, to guarantee our children an adequate standard of material, emotional and psychological well-being, comprising security, food, clothing, health-care and an African-conscious education.

The energies of the youth and the possibilities of harnessing the most advanced technology to carry forward the work of liberation was demonstrated during the Congress by youths who published a daily bulletin in French, English and Kiswahili on the major debates and struggles within the Congress. African leaders have pontificated about science and technology, but the practical possibilities of using this technology for political networking and liberation was brought out in the open.

The Ugandan government offered to host the Permanent Secretariat, and this organisation will be the first of its kind with representation from all corners of the Pan African world. The Secretariat will be convening meetings in the nine designated regions of the Pan African world. The International Preparatory Committee was dissolved with a new governing council formed.

The Secretary General, Tajudeen Abdul Raheem, was given the task, along with the interim management committee, to merge the movement with the national committees so that there will be activities and meetings in all parts of the world so that the Pan Africanism on the streets can inform the political struggle for dignity and freedom.

The Congress was considered a success by all those who participated as delegates or as participants and observers. Grassroots representation from the Ugandan Pan African committee ensured that the meeting was not an OAU type meeting. From the outset, there were debates in the governing body of the meeting, the International Preparatory Committee (IPC), as to whether the Congress would be guided by principled political action or by protocol. The diversity of views did not detract from the fact that the main thrust was to reverse the depoliticisation and the demobilisation of the African peoples in this period of the reorganisation of the international system. That there were major struggles ahead was signalled on the last day of the conference by the death of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. The ensuing carnage in Rwanda sharpened the urgency of the Pan African Movement to give clear leadership beyond the rut of the politicisation of ethnicity, regionalism and religion in Africa and beyond.

In the declaration of the Sixth Pan African Congress in 1974 in Tanzania, the call was that henceforth Pan Africanism was informed by the class struggle internationally. The declaration of the 7th Pan African Congress was that African peoples everywhere should resist recolonisation. Delegates left the Congress energised "to take action that will rid the world of the curse that has plagued humanity for over five centuries. We the African people are our own liberators and thinkers whose task is to make a mighty stride towards genuine freedom by any means necessary."