

Cameroon



Connection

The Newsletter of the Friends of Cameroon · June 2008

AFRICA: Soaring Food and Fuel Prices May Hurt Growth

April 7, 2008 (IRIN) - Tayech Ali arrived half an hour before the grain distribution centre in Gojam Berenda, in the capital, Addis Ababa, opened, but still had to queue for three hours before she could buy some wheat.

"I cannot afford to buy wheat from the market," Tayech, a single mother of five, told IRIN. "It is too expensive."

A beneficiary of an Ethiopian government programme that supplies 25kg of subsidised wheat monthly to low-income urban dwellers, Tayech has experienced this routine every two months since the initiative started in March 2007.

She qualified for the programme because she is a widow and former street vegetable vendor with no regular income. Standing in the queue at the grain distribution centre - one of 77 in the capital - Tayech said she was worried about possible disorder from the crowd, a frequent occurrence.

"I am not worried about the long line," she told IRIN. "But unex-

pected disorder could extend my stay in this place."

Ethiopian officials say the grain-subsidy programme was a response to the hardships faced by low-income urban dwellers because of escalating inflation rates - which they blame on the rising costs of oil and other commodities, including grain.

Speaking in parliament on 18 March, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said: "While our current economic development is encouraging, worsening inflation has created a difficult situation for the low-income urban dwellers."

commodity prices

Ethiopia is just one of the many African countries reeling from the impact of rising global commodity prices. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, rising food and energy prices could hurt Africa's growth in the 21st century.

"Rapid escalation in food and energy prices, if not managed properly, could pose significant threats

to growth and employment, good governance, peace and security," it stated in a paper, Meeting Africa's New Development challenges in the 21st Century, prepared for the annual conference of African finance ministers in Addis Ababa at end-March.

It attributed recent social disturbances in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mauritania to rising staple food prices. The situation could also erode progress on

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Cameroon Connection

Cameroon Connection is the newsletter of the Friends of Cameroon (FOC). It is published quarterly and distributed to members. Readers are invited to submit articles and other information about Cameroon. Submissions must arrive by the first day of the last month of each quarter for inclusion in the next issue.

Emma Stephens, *Editor, Layout*
Steven Durbano, *Editor*

FOC was founded in 1988 as a collection of individuals who are interested in the people and culture of Cameroon. FOC seeks to assist Cameroonians in Cameroon by funding in-country activities, to assist Cameroonians in the U.S., to inform and educate Americans about Cameroon and to assist members to renew linkages with Cameroon and with those with whom they have lived and worked.

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Cultural Festival!

When: Saturday June 21st (from 2 p.m. on)

Where: The Show Place Arena (14900 Pennsylvania Ave., Upper Marlboro, MD 20772)

ACCDF
All Cameroonian Cultural Development Foundation
Free Grand Cultural Festival
Sat, June 21, 2008 - Time: 2:00pm

One People, Diverse Cultures, One Vision...
Venue: The Show Place Arena
14900 Pennsylvania Ave. Upper Marlboro, Maryland, 20772
For More Information Please Call 1.877.222.3310 or 301-952-7999

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Continue to Follow MD-4 South- go 0.04 Miles; Take ramp towards WAYSONS CORNER/ MD-408 E/ ANNAPOLIS- go 0.40 Miles
Turn Left on MD-408-go 0.90 Miles; Turn Left to take ramp onto SOUTHERN MARYLAND BLD (MD-4N) - go 0.45 miles
Continue to follow MD-4N- go 0.51 miles; Arrive at 14900 PENNSYLVANIA AVE. UPPER MALBORO, MARYLAND 20772

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Best time to arrive is from 5 pm to witness all of the activities, dancing, and experience the sounds and foods!

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sands of people being displaced and dozens killed.

But it had been largely restricted to rural areas, especially those which had switched allegiance from Mr Mugabe's Zanu-PF to the MDC. Harare, traditionally an opposition stronghold, had remained relatively quiet.

However, at the weekend a local journalist reported a growing campaign of violence carried out by supporters of Zanu-PF in townships close to the capital.

Earlier, the president threatened to arrest opposition leaders for allegedly inciting political violence ahead of next week's run-off vote, in which he is due to face Mr Tsvangirai.

"There is now a pattern readable across the country and that has now to

Cameroon News

Not quite back to normal

IRINnews.org
March 6, 2008

YAOUNDÉ—Traffic jams and urban bustle have returned to main towns and cities in the west and centre of Cameroon, belying the violence that just weeks earlier left many people there dead and a general population so scared most did not leave their homes for several days.

Yet human rights groups remain concerned that the government is employing heavy-handed tactics in clamping down on the media and arresting and imprisoning hundreds, possibly thousands, of youth who they say are not receiving due process.

“The arrests [of those accused of taking part in the violence] continues,” human rights advocate Madeleine Afité, of House of Human Rights, told IRIN

The number of arrests is in dispute. A government spokesman said the total is around 1,500 but Afité said the number is much higher. “Around 2000 people were arrested in Douala alone,” she said.

A lawyer in Yaoundé, Me Francis Djonko, told IRIN that those arrested are not receiving due process. “The accused should have at least three days to prepare their defence but that is not being respected in the cases I have had to defend,” he said, adding some of the accused have already receiving prison sentences of up to three years.

A source close to Cameroon’s President Paul Biya said that some members of the government are suspected of fermenting the violence and may soon be taken into custody. President Biya went on state media on 27 February during the rioting to say that “certain politicians” were seeking to overthrow his government in a coup d’état.

Figures on the number of dead also remain unclear. The government spokesperson Jean-Pierre Biyiti Bi Essam told the French Agency Press (AFP) on Wednesday that only 24 people had been killed but human rights groups say the number is far higher.

“We are still trying to cross-check information but we can already say that a hundred or so people must have died,” Afité said.

International media monitoring groups have accused government of censoring the media and beating and intimidating journalists as well as confiscating their equipment.

The government has also closed down at least three media houses but denies that it is part of a general effort to censor the press. “[The media houses] either carried out certain broadcasts which are insensitive, provocative, or controversial and obviously certain administrative decisions have been taken in order to ensure that these broadcasts do not endanger the stability or social order,” government minister Elvis Ngolle Ngolle told Voice of America.

The riots started in the economic centre Douala in the west of Cameroon on 25 February, and quickly spread to the political capital Yaoundé and other cities as youths protested against rising fuel and food prices and efforts by President Biya to change the constitution so that he could run again in the 2011 elections.

Refugees from N’djamena still fearful of returning

IRINnews.org
February 14, 2008

KOUSSERI—Fighting ended in Chad’s capital N’djamena almost a week ago but many of the tens of thousands of Chadians who sought refuge across the River Chari in northern Cameroon say they are not planning to return for now.

“We are afraid to go back,” 20-year-old N’djamena resident Patrice Djerane who is camping out near the dusty border town of Kousseri, told IRIN. He went there with his mother while his father remains in N’djamena keeping the family abreast of conditions there. “We’ll go back when peace comes. Until then, we’ll wait.”

Rebel groups who laid siege to the capital have since fled east. But the fighting that occurred in the city has evoked fears that ethnic rivalries could widen and erupt into a new type of violence.

“There was an ethnic difference in the violence [last week],” Rim-

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woyal Beasoe Charles, one of N'djamena's younger refugees, told IRIN, "even enough to see a civil war".

Beasoe and his compatriots said when the rebels came they mostly pillaged neighbourhoods known to be Zaghawan, the ethnic group of President Idriss Déby.

President Déby is accused of favouring Zaghawans at the expense of the Tama, the ethnic group of one of the main rebel leaders, Mahamat Nour. Last week, Amnesty International issued a press release warning that the Chadian president may be purging the capital of his political rivals. A handful of opposition figures are currently in detention, their status unknown.

One aid worker said he suspected many of the refugees currently in Cameroon were from either the Tama or Zaghawa ethnic groups, rather than the many other groups that make up the population of N'djamena.

But humanitarian officials say they are yet to categorise the ethnicities, ages, and genders of the refugees with much accuracy. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said that of the more than 30,000 refugees thought to have fled across the river, many have already returned, though the agency could not claim to know how many remained.

Kousseri, the main town in Cameroon where the Chadian refugees fled to, is just a stone's throw from Chad's capital and the two populations are always crossing between the two cities. Many of the refugees

have blended in, choosing not to sleep outdoors in the makeshift refugee camps designated by Cameroon's local government.

Yet they are no less reluctant to return home. Speaking off the record, officials in Kousseri have expressed fears that President Déby is tightening his grip on the capital and recruiting younger and younger soldiers to fill the army.

That is also a concern expressed by refugees. "There are young recruits in the national army now," Katherine Ressum, who took her children and fled over the border by night last week, told IRIN.

In addition to ongoing violence, many of the refugees said they worry what has happened to the homes and livelihoods they left behind. Boye Roberts, a 30-year-old teacher from N'djamena, told IRIN he will only return once he knows he has something to return to. "Are there salaries? Water? Something to eat? It's not possible for me to leave [Kousseri] now," he said.

Providing for refugees upon their return is a crucial part of ending the crisis, spokesperson for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Kousseri, Maurizio Giuliano, told IRIN. "We must make sure there is aid available for people when they want to return," he said. Plans are under way for as many as 50,000 returnees, both from Cameroon and from within Chad.

Agencies say they will know more about the number of refugees and their needs by the end of the week when the Cameroonian government

has asked that all refugees be moved to a camp in Maltam, 32km from Kousseri.

UNHCR spokesperson in Kousseri Francis Kpatindé said he expected many of the refugees would rather return to N'djamena but he acknowledged: "[Many] fear for their security [and they] know better than anyone. The day that things are stable, they will go. It all depends on how things are in N'djamena."

Cameroon makes way for a king
Will Ross
BBC News
April 11, 2008

Whilst attention has been focused on Robert Mugabe's attempt to stay in power in Zimbabwe, elsewhere in Africa another president is quietly making moves to lengthen his time in office.

The Cameroonian president, Paul Biya, has been in power for 26 years, but members of parliament voted on Thursday to scrap presidential term limits and enable him to run for the presidency again in 2011 and stay in power until 2018 (or beyond) when he will be 85.

Once before parliament, the bill to remove presidential term limits was always likely to be approved - the governing party has an overwhelming majority in parliament.

The main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front, SDF, has just 15 of the 180 and decided to boycott the debate.

The whole issue is a complete fraud. We do not want to legitimise

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it by taking part
SDF's Joseph Banadzem

When asked whether it would not be better to take part and put forward a case against amending the constitution, the leader of the SDF parliamentarians, Joseph Banadzem, told the BBC: "The whole issue is a complete fraud. We do not want to legitimise it by taking part."

Mr Banadzem predicts more disorder and violence in Cameroon.

"The amendment is paving the way for very difficult times in Cameroon.

"Instead of working in the efforts of the general public, the regime is only concerned about one individual - President Paul Biya - and the effort to prolong his stay in office," he said adding that most Cameroonians oppose the change to the constitution.

There is at least one lonely voice of disapproval amongst the governing Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM).

Paul Abine Ayah, an outspoken CPDM MP, slammed the bill predicting it would set the country back 200 years.

He said money was being paid to party members to encourage them to approve the bill.

The effort to extend President Biya's time in office is widely unpopular amongst Cameroonians many of whom feel the politicians are not doing enough to tackle the

widespread poverty.

In February, some 100 demonstrators were killed by the military and police during rioting.

Although they were protesting against the high cost of living, their action was also fuelled by the speculation that presidential term limits were to be removed.

In his end of year state address, Mr Biya said having presidential term limits was unconstitutional and added that there were popular calls for him to stay in power.

It is no longer mere speculation - but the violent response from the security forces is likely to dissuade many Cameroonians from mounting any further protests.

President Biya, who came to power in 1982, revised the constitution 12 years ago, extending the presidential term of office from five to seven years.

One of his achievements has been to oversee relative stability in a country comprising more than 200 tribes.

However past elections in Cameroon have been marred by allegations of fraud and vote rigging and it would be fair to say that Cameroonians have become increasingly disillusioned with the political process.

But the 75-year-old is by no means the first African president to tweak the constitution in order to stay in power.

In Uganda, President Yoweri

Museveni, moved past the 20 years in office landmark after parliament scrapped the two-term limit on the presidency in 2005.

The move was controversial, especially after MPs queued up to receive around \$3,000 in what was regarded as an attempt to bribe them to approve the move.

After term limits were removed in Chad, President Idriss Deby, a former army chief who seized power before winning two elections, said the change was not meant to benefit him personally.

In Malawi and in Zambia, former leaders Bakili Muluzi and Frederick Chiluba respectively tried and failed to change their constitutions to get a third term in office.

Nigeria's former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, also tried it but law makers stood firm and rejected the plan.

While all eyes are currently focused on Mr Mugabe and Zimbabwe, Cameroon receives far less attention - despite a very poor human rights record and a reputation for being one of the most corrupt countries on the continent.

Observers point out that an increasingly entrenched elite which seems out of touch with the population is a recipe for instability.

Bambili Wins Cleanest Village Award

Chris Mbunwe
The Post (Buea)
May 30, 2008

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The Mayor of Tubah Council, Stanislaus Sofa Meji, May 20, awarded prizes in cash circa FCFA 600,000 to the cleanest villages and compounds in the subdivision.

This was to kick-start a campaign to keep the villages of Tubah void of dirt. The Mayor handed the prizes at the Tubah Municipal stadium on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of National Day.

Bambili village emerged first with a cash prize of FCFA 200,000; Kedjomkeku (Big Babanki) received FCFA 150,000 for the second position, Bambui village got FCFA 100,000 and Kedjom-Ketingoh FCFA 50,000. Four compounds namely; Mallam Foncha of Sabga village, Richard Muketsi, James Manjoh and Peter Gemoh each received FCFA 30,000, 25,000, 20,000 and 15,000 respectively.

It would be recalled that in 2000, the then Ministry of Territorial Administration initiated the novelty of the cleanest subdivision and Province competition throughout the country. But the competition was short-lived.

The *raison d'être* of the competition, according to Tubah Mayor, is to create awareness amongst the populace of his municipality about the importance of clean environment, which includes proper drainage systems to avoid the breeding of mosquitoes which would eventually spread malaria.

It is also to instil in the population the significance of maintaining potable water and protected toilets to avoid water-borne related diseases like typhoid, diarrhoea and dysentery and cholera.

While stating that the prizes were just a token, Sofa said the exercise recorded some setbacks as some church authorities didn't want it to succeed. "Some church authorities mostly the Catholic, did not help in publicising the information in their newsletters or disseminate the information to Christians," said the Mayor, "these church authorities ought to know that if there are no healthy inhabitants we cannot have Christians and hence no alms would be collected by them on Sundays and other religious feast days."

In a word of caution to the recipients, Sofa said the money received "should not be converted into drinks. These case prizes are meant to be ploughed back for development projects in each village."

He insisted that each village would forward to the council a report on how the money was used.

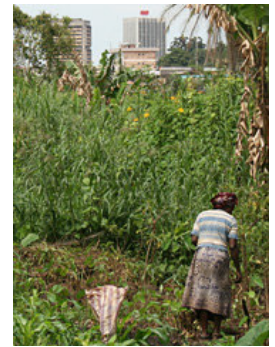
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is providing the government with funding to support urban farming but he did not know of any effort to stop the polluting of the land.

"I know it's a very dangerous situation," he said, "but it is not a matter for the agriculture ministry. The health ministry needs to take responsibility."

A woman farmer in Yaounde

Photo: David Hecht/IRIN



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stop," he told a campaign rally in Kadoma, south of Harare.

"We are warning them that we will not hesitate to arrest them, and we will do that in broad daylight. They think they are protected by the British and the Americans. The law of the country has to be observed," he added. MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa dismissed the allegations.

"He is the one who has gone about threatening to go back to war if he loses. So while he is accusing us of violence, he is responsible," he told the AFP news agency.

Mr Tsvangirai won the presidential election's first round in March, but failed to win enough votes to avoid a second round, according to the official results.

Africa News

Bad economic policies driving migration

IRINnews.org

March 21, 2008

DAKAR—If West African governments are serious about reducing migration from their countries they must invest in improving living conditions and reducing inequality, according to sociologists, economists and other experts meeting in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, this week.

"As long as governments do not attack the longstanding and structural problems that make people leave, I think they are completely off-track," Cheikh Omar Ba, a Senegalese sociologist with the Initiative for Rural and Agricultural Futures said.

Ba was among technical experts and government officials at a 17-19 March conference on migration and development in Africa.

A principal aim of the conference - organised by the International Organization for Migration, the Dakar-based foundation TrustAfrica and the UN's African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) - was to urge African governments to incorporate migration into their national development strategies.

Conference participants noted that migration was inevitable and had both negative and positive effects for countries of origin. But many at the conference said too many people in West and Central Africa were

unnecessarily being forced out of their home regions or countries because of bad policies.

"The distribution of economic gains is still largely inequitable, leaving the vast majority of the people below the poverty line," IDEP's Aloysius Ajab Amin told participants, blaming economic policies that are failing people in much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Amin said youths across the continent lived in "misery" caused by soaring unemployment and inadequate basic infrastructure while seeing their peers who have migrated sending money back home. "What readily comes to their mind is how to join the migration train."

Abdoulaye Kane, who is with the University of Florida's Centre for African Studies, said he was concerned that in many societies in the Sahel region of West Africa where migration has become the norm, other options were dissolving.

"If you go to the border area of Senegal, Mali and Mauritania now you have a whole social pressure on young people to move, to migrate, to go out, because it's seen as the only way to succeed socially speaking," Kane told IRIN.

"People are now saying you don't need to go to school, because they compare those who went to school and those who have migrated in terms of their buying power. I think African states have to find a way to promote education and also find a way to retain people they train by

giving them better working conditions and higher salaries."

The fallout of climate change is increasingly seen as a driver of migration. While global effects from climate change are inevitable, in this area, too, participants said, governments can help rural communities adapt so they can continue to feed themselves.

"Governments must focus on what they can tackle themselves," sociologist Ba said. "They can put in place more equitable policies, invest more in rural infrastructure, including roads and water supply; they can invest in better agricultural production at the small farmers' level."

African governments have developed plans for adapting to climate change - covering several sectors including agriculture - but they have yet to be implemented.

"Migration is a reaction to scarcity - scarcity created by external forces but also by government policy," he said.

Emergency Food Summit-AfDB Underscores Need for Smallholder Agricultural Revolution in Africa

African Development Bank (Tunis)
June 5, 2008

TUNIS—The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group has underscored the urgent need for a "Smallholder Agricultural Revolution in Africa," as the continent's

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best option for tackling the escalating global food crisis which is the focus of the just concluded United Nations Emergency Food Crisis Summit in Rome, Italy.

In a speech delivered at the 2-4 June Summit attended by some 44 world leaders and high-level representatives from 151 countries, the AfDB President, Donald Kaberuka, noted that the escalating global food crisis was a major setback, threatening to throw back millions into poverty and rolling back many of the gains in human development and macro-economic stabilization of the last decade.

Mr. Kaberuka noted that both the causes and the consequences of the crisis were well known and that the political will to tackle it was no longer in doubt. He said while the immediate response for bilateral organisations and UN agencies was to provide emergency support and food to vulnerable people and countries most at risk, this should be followed by measures to deal with macro economic stress and the longer term challenge of enhancing agricultural productivity and food security, especially in Africa.

He said it was impossible to create food security anywhere without a smooth trading system at local, national, regional and global levels, and reiterated the call by other participants for the reduction of trade barriers and the need for collective action on finding a lasting solution to the food crisis.

Mr. Kaberuka commended the swift international action to provide food supplies to protect the poor and the

vulnerable, saying the people most at risk were urban migrants, rural families who purchase food, and people in fragile states where markets do not function well.

"The world has the means to prevent starvation in the 21st century! We have the means to feed the hungry and save millions at risk," he said, adding that it is not enough to feed hungry people, but rather to provide them with the means to feed themselves.

In this regard, he said, the Bank Group was restructuring up to US\$ 250 million of its agricultural portfolio to help accelerate agricultural production in the short term by facilitating the purchase of fertilizers and inputs.

For Africa, he explained, the food crisis could also be the opportunity for poor African farmers to turn farming into a business, rather than a way of scraping for a living, through irrigated farming or simply through intensive agriculture.

"A smallholder agricultural revolution in Africa is desirable, feasible and long overdue. We know what to do. But for it to happen, it will require not just resources, but also a rethink, based on our experience in the past," he emphasized

"To achieve this, there will be a need for crowding in more private investment and quality support by the State. We must devise ways of attracting and supporting more private sector agriculture. Private businesses which have been successful in growing flowers can surely grow cereals. The time for agriculture as a business, is now."

Mr Kaberuka cited the Bank Group's consistent support to agricultural development in Africa, noting that the Group, together with the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), account for over 50 percent of all multilateral agencies' interventions in African agriculture, with an ongoing active portfolio of about 3.8 billion dollars.

"In response to the current challenges, we will be committing another US 1 billion in support of agricultural infrastructure, rural finance and support to research and extension," he said

The AfDB President also emphasized the need to use this opportunity to clearly bias policy in favour women and girls who account for over half of Africa's farmers, tilling the land with their bare hands to scrape out a living. He said this was a condition for the success of an agricultural transformation on the continent.

"Recovery of our agriculture, which does not frontload the interest of the women majority farmers, is doomed to fail," Mr. Kaberuka said. He said the Bank Group would focus on access to productive assets, rural financing, and economic opportunities for women, including off farm activities, in collaboration with the Bank's partners.

Pledges of almost 3 US\$ billion of emergency aid were made at the Summit on Wednesday, but UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon said more than US\$ 20 billion would be needed each year to avoid

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disaster.

Also, new funding totalling some US\$2.7 billion was announced on the second day of the summit in Rome, where Mr. Ban has already demanded a 50 percent increase in food production by 2030.

The UN World Food Programme announced US\$1.2 billion dollars in new food aid to the millions of people hard hit by the crisis.

The Islamic Development Bank said it would spend US\$1.5 billion on agriculture in the poorest countries.

The World Bank said food prices had doubled in three years, sparking riots in many countries including Egypt and other African countries as well as Haiti. Brazil, Vietnam, India and Egypt have all imposed food export restrictions. Meanwhile, the World Bank President, Robert Zoellick has called for the lifting of trade barriers that contribute to food price inflation.

John Holmes, head of the UN task force on the food crisis, said a "broad consensus" was building around the action plan, which should be completed by the end of June for presentation at the G-8 meeting in Japan.

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UN envoy set for Zimbabwe talks
bbc.co.uk
June 16, 2008

Haile Menkerios is expected to

meet politicians to discuss the situation in the run-up to the election on 27 June.

Violence is reported to have spread to urban areas near Harare, with opposition activists complaining of being attacked near the capital.

The UK has meanwhile called Zimbabwe's government a "criminal regime".

Prime Minister Gordon Brown, meeting US President George Bush in London, said: "[President Robert] Mugabe must not be allowed to steal the election."

He also called for the UN to send a human rights envoy to Zimbabwe and for the country to accept international election monitors.

Meanwhile, the secretary-general of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Tendai Biti, did not make a scheduled appearance in court on treason charges.

His lawyer, Lewis Uriri, said Mr Biti had yet to be asked by police to make the formal written "warned and cautioned" statement required before he can be arraigned.

Mr Biti was arrested when he returned from neighbouring South Africa on Thursday and briefly appeared in court on Saturday, after his lawyers obtained a court order for the police to produce him and justify his detention.

At the time of his arrest, national police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena said Mr Biti would be charged with treason "for publishing a docu-

ment that was explaining a transitional strategy around March 26". The charge carries a possible death sentence.

Mr Uriri said the police were also planning to add a further charge of making statements intended to bring about disaffection in the security forces.

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai has been repeatedly detained during his presidential election campaign, but has so far faced no charges.

The visit of Mr Menkerios - the first by a UN envoy since 2005 - comes after sustained pressure from foreign countries and opposition politicians on President Mugabe to allow in international observers.

Last week the US ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, released a strongly-worded statement on Mr Menkerios's visit.

"If [Mr Mugabe] does not cooperate with Mr Menkerios and the current trends continue, we will have to deal with it. And we'll deal with it as quickly as we can."

The police have imposed a 12-hour curfew in parts of Masvingo province - one of those worst affected by recent violence.

A local police chief said most political violence was carried out at night and so ordered villagers to remain indoors after 1800 in Bikita and Zaka districts.

Political violence related to the presidential polls has swept the country in recent weeks, with thou-

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Feature: Some Pros of Rising Food Prices for Cameroon

Urban farmers profit from rising food prices

IRINnews.org
May 27, 2008

YAOUNDÉ—Jacques Biyiha came from the countryside to the big city to seek his fortune in the 1970s when the country was in the midst of a construction boom. He continues to live there today, but he hasn't worked in construction for 15 years. He is an urban farmer, as are many people in Cameroon's largest city.

"It can be quite profitable," Biyiha said, showing IRIN his lush fields of corn, cassava and beans which lie between electricity poles and houses. "Farming in the city means it's easier to get produce to market because the market is right here."

For Biyiha the current market is bullish. He and other urban farmers IRIN spoke with said they were ecstatic about the rising price of imported food.

"Now our produce is competitive," Biyiha said. "With the coming harvest I hope to earn more money than ever."

Land is often fertile in Cameroon's towns and cities which tend to be spread out so there is plenty of it. With good rains, urban farmers often have two growing seasons a year.

Since Cameroon was hit by an economic crisis in the 1980s unemployment has grown dramatically while salaries for those with jobs have dropped by an estimated aver-

age of 70 percent.

Even people with jobs often have plots of land they farm on the weekends, an advisor to the minister of agriculture Rabelais Yankam Njomou told IRIN. "In recent years almost everyone farms. It is what keeps this country going."

Yankam Njomou said that many city dwellers started farming to subsist but have expanded and are now selling what they don't eat. One such person is Clémentine Diapa who has taught at the public high school in Yaoundé for the last 22 years.

"After my husband died I realised that I would never be able to look after my seven children on my salary," she said.

Diapa now has a 2000 sq metres of farmland in Yaoundé, where she grows corn, cassava and garden vegetables.

"We don't worry about the recent food price rises," she told IRIN. "We grow so much that I now earn more money from farming than from the salary I get from the school."

Urban farming had mostly been for older people but it has increasingly attracted youth.

"It's not that we are shelving our ambitions," Hiol Cyrille, who studied business management and is part of an association of youth raising pigs. "It's that farming gives us stability so that we can prepare for

our futures," he said.

The association, which is based in the Doaula neighborhood known as PK8, has its own pig farms where youth work. But once its members learn how to run a pig farm they go off and start doing it on their own.

Hiol Cyrille studied business management but is now part of an association of youth who raise pigs "Many youth here were planning to leave Cameroon and go to Europe saying they had no hope of making a living," he said, "but now all of them intend to stay"

One problem with farm produce from urban areas is it is often polluted. People in Yaoundé mostly reside on hills encircled by swampy valleys which are used as farm land, but untreated sewage often drains into them.

Nzegan Martin, a representative from the non-governmental organisation Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (SAILD) took IRIN to Yaoundé's hilly Ngouso's neighbourhood which has a large hospital complex.

Untreated waste water from the morgue flowed into a field of corn below.

"A lot of waste water flows into farm lands here and eating the produce is extremely risky," Martin said.

Yankam, the agricultural advisor, told IRIN that the European Union

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achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The number of food-insecure people, it noted, could rise worldwide by more than 16 million for every percentage increase in the real prices of staple foods, meaning 1.2 billion people could be chronically hungry by 2050. That is 600 million more than previously predicted.

In response, the ministers urged the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank to study the feasibility of setting up an oil fund to assist the continent's low-income oil-importing countries to mitigate the effects of high prices.

They also committed to undertake "vigorous measures" to implement the comprehensive African agricultural development programme.

In December, the Famine Early Warning Systems warned that high cereal and commodity prices in Addis Ababa, and several other monitored markets, including Bahir Dar, Mekelle and Dire Dawa, would affect food security for many of Ethiopia's urban dwellers.

Market-related factors and decreased production would render an estimated eight million Ethiopians food-insecure this year, while 2.4 million acutely food-insecure people would require food and cash assistance.

Of these, 825,000 Ethiopian urban dwellers, including Tayech, already rely on wheat supplied through the government's distribution centres.

"There is food on the shelves but people cannot afford it," Josette Sheeran, executive director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), said during a recent visit to Ethiopia and Kenya. Food insecurity among urban dwellers had created "a new face of hunger".

"People who were not previously vulnerable have become vulnerable in many different countries around the world," she said. There was more urban hunger than traditionally thought and it tended to hit hardest those earning less than a dollar a day.

Many African countries reeling from the impact of rising global commodity prices
Funding gap

The situation has also affected aid agencies. WFP, in an appeal to donors on 20 March, said soaring food and fuel prices had created a critical funding gap of US\$500 million in its programmes as at February.

"In the three weeks since that announcement, food prices have increased another 20 percent and such increases show no sign of abating any time soon," the agency said.

Sheeran said WFP would try to assist the urban hungry by partnering with governments to break the hunger cycle. The plan would involve a shift from being a purely food-aid to a food-assistance agency.

"We will have broader tools to help countries deal with urgent hunger pressures that can be more sensitive to markets," Sheeran told journalists after addressing the African finance ministers.

Experts predict more difficult times ahead. "All indicators suggest that food prices are unlikely to fall any time soon and, in fact, may rise much more depending on countries' decisions about biofuels," says Mark Rosegrant of the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI).

For Africa's poor, whose meagre earnings are being eroded by inflation, the choices are often limited to either buying less food or buying cheaper, less nutritious food. "The result is the same - more hunger and less chance of a healthy future," notes WFP.



*Low-income residents of Addis Ababa queue to buy wheat from a state-owned grain centre
Photo: Tesfalem Waldyes-IRIN*

Music Notes: Cecile Doo-Kingue



Soul, Versatility and Passion compose the triumvirate force behind Cécile Doo-Kingué's sound. Born and raised in New York, first generation from Cameroon, educated in the French lycée system, Cécile stems from a meeting of cultures, which is reflected in the eclecticism of her music.

The last of eight children, she benefited from her parents' and siblings' love of music, which ranged from jazz to rock to chanson française to all 'world' music. This musical versatility has enabled Cécile to feel at ease in a variety of styles. Inspired by her brother JC, Cécile taught herself to play guitar listening to such greats as Freddie King, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Robert Cray, Wes Montgomery, Larry Carlton, and John Scofield.

Check out Cecile's Website at:
<http://myspace.com/ceciledookingue>

Her musical education was topped off by a B.A. in Music from Concordia University. Through gigging with Graham Chambers and funkateers The Aliens, Cécile genuinely came into her own, adding extra dirt and seasoning to her slick style.

In 2000, Cécile cofounded Dibondoko, an original project melding R&B with afro and latin rhythms. During its 6-year run, the band participated in many international festivals, including Festival International de Jazz de Montréal in 2004 and 2005, as well as Festival International Nuits d'Afrique in 2003 and 2006 where the band opened for both Manu Dibango and Youssou N'dour. As a side-woman, she has backed or recorded with artists as diverse as Montreal Jubilation Choir, Ismael Isaac, Sister Sledge, Bernard Purdie, Syncop, Corneille, to name but a few.

Behind the scenes, Cécile has mixed or produced several albums including the United Steel Workers of Montreal's albums Broken Trucks and Bottles and Kerosene & Coal, Andre Kirchhoff's debut album Nowhere and Main, as well as Dibondoko's album Dibondoko. She currently plays with Tricia Foster with whom she cowrote and arranged several tracks on the album Commerciale, Lou Simon, and the Bisquit Blues Band. Cécile is presently working on her debut solo album expected for January 2009.

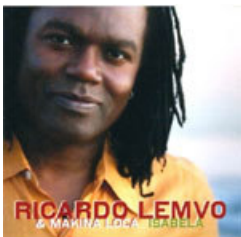
More Music Recommendations from Afropop.org



Bassekou Kouyate and Ngoni ba "Segu Blue" (Out There Records) (Mali)
An extraordinary debut from ngoni (spike lute) maestro Bassekou Kouyate, a superstar African picker. Session showcases a range of Malian vocal stars to span earthy African blues and heavenly praise jams.



Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective "Wátina" (Cumbancha) (Belize)
A high water mark for Garifuna music, born of a fateful cohabitation of shipwrecked Africans and Carib and Arawak Indians. Andy Palacio's soulful, reedy voice interweaves rich guitar, percussion, and vocal. Unforgettable melodic hooks.



Ricardo Lemvo "Isabela" (Mobiato Music) (Congo)
On his fifth album, Lemvo returns to his "root mission," to explore connections between Congolese and Cuban music. He sings in Lingala, Kikongo, Portuguese and Spanish, and supplements his tight, versatile band with Congolese legends: Nyboma, Papa Noel, and more.



Dee Dee Bridgewater "Red Earth" (Emarcy) (USA)
Legendary Lady of Jazz, Singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, journeys back to her Malian roots. With star guests Bassekou Kouyate, Oumou Sangare, Kasse Mady Diabate and others, this summit of strings, percussion, piano, and voices sets a new benchmark for Afro-jazz.



Vusi Mahlasela "Guiding Star" (ATO Records) (South Africa)
The best yet from this soulful, swinging, honey-voiced champion of South African song. Selection spans gospel, storytelling balladry, old-school SA pop, and original songs.



Erol Josué "Régleman" (High Times Records/Mi5 Productions) (Haiti)
Initiated as a vodou priest at 17, Josué moved from Haiti to New York to create this hypnotic, hauntingly beautiful and unique set of songs. His debut merges the rhythms, melodies, and mysterious wisdom of his spiritual life with jazz, pop, ambient trance music and more.

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