

Africa Unites Against Iraq War

by David Cherry

“There is an alternative to war,” says the terse statement of the 22nd Heads of State Conference of Africa and France, issued on Feb. 20 in Paris. It states, “The use of force, which entails serious risks of destabilization of the region, for Africa, and the world, should only be a last resort.” Of Africa’s 53 nations, all but Somalia were represented there by a head of state or government.

South African President Thabo Mbeki told the French daily *Le Monde* on Feb. 22 that the Franco-African summit’s declaration was a reaffirmation of the one issued by the African Union (AU) summit in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia on Feb. 3. But it was also, he said, a response to “a request of the three African countries currently on the UN Security Council: Angola, Guinea, and Cameroon. Each of them came to me to get the African position on Iraq clarified,” before the AU summit. Afterwards, he said, “I told them, ‘You asked for a mandate and you got one. Now stick to it.’ Today, things are even more clear cut, because we have reaffirmed this position in a plenary meeting” at the Franco-African summit.

Le Monde asked, “Are the three countries bound by this common position?” Mbeki answered, “They represent the African continent and must therefore express to the Security Council what Africa as a whole has decided.”

There is also a mandate behind the mandate: It is the mandate of certain knowledge, on the part of a significant number of African leaders, that an Anglo-American invasion of Iraq will “deliver a deadly blow,” in Mbeki’s words, to billions of impoverished people, most of them far from Iraq, because of the war’s effects on the world economy, starting with a skyrocketing oil price. The consequences are far more serious than anything U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and the chicken-hawks can threaten or promise. There is, therefore, much passion behind the laconic words of the Paris declaration, throughout Africa.

Across Africa, Rejection and Anger

Dr. Jibril Muhammad Aminu, Nigeria’s outgoing ambassador to Washington, spoke against war with unusual frankness—unusual for someone who still represents his government—in an interview in Washington published at www.allAfrica.com on Feb. 14.

The events of 9/11, Ambassador Aminu said, “made people sympathize very much with the U.S. But we don’t under-

stand how this has been translated into war against Iraq. . . . You have a feeling that people are digging . . . to find excuses.” Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, he said, calls the Palestinian freedom fighters “terrorists” and finds great sympathy in the United States with the idea that his struggle against the Palestinians is equal to America’s, or the world’s, struggle against terrorism. “That doesn’t really sell very well with us. . . . Now they have advanced that you have to ‘pre-empt’ in order to stop terrorism from aligning itself to a rogue state with weapons, finding evidence of a relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda. These things worry people! Whatever the UN people say—the inspectors . . . or the Secretary-General—is all just brushed aside. . . .

“If you go to Nigeria, you will find many people admiring the United States. . . . But you will also not find anybody sympathizing with the American position on Iraq.”

Across Africa, rejection and anger take their various forms. President Paul Biya of Cameroon expresses his “complete adherence” to the decisions of the Paris summit. Angolan Ambassador to the UN Ismael Martins speaks of the terrible consequences of such a war for the entire world, and favors the French-German-Russian approach. Fradique de Menezes, President of São Tomé and Príncipe, who prefers his country’s status as a U.S. client state, opposes the war, and says so. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe asks, in addressing the Non-Aligned Movement, why should the United States determine whether Iraq builds nuclear weapons? As part of the massive demonstrations against the war in South Africa, Christians and other non-Muslims attend Friday prayers at one of Johannesburg’s largest mosques.

The Ugandan people’s recent lesson in identifying terrorism is symbolic of what Africans are learning all across the continent. Twenty organizations in Kampala planned an anti-war demonstration for Feb. 18, but it was called off at the last minute, “after police warned organizers they would be held responsible for utterances that would upset relations between Uganda and the U.S.,” according to the African Church Information Service (ACIS) on Feb. 24.

The intensity of opposition to the war in Uganda is so great, said ACIS, that U.S. Ambassador Jimmy Clocker complained that Kampala was nearer to Baghdad than it was to Gulu district in northern Uganda, where the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has been launching attacks. Here’s the lesson: In 2001, the State Department put the LRA on its list of terrorist organizations, where it belongs. For years, the LRA has sought to overthrow the Ugandan government and set up a government “based on the Ten Commandments.” Toward this end, it butchers Ugandans by the thousand, or burns them alive in their thatched huts, forces young boys to join in this bestiality, and takes their sisters for sexual playthings. But since late January, Ambassador Clocker and the State Department have been insisting that the Ugandan government must enter a “dialogue” with the LRA!