



## Africa Action Stands with African Voices on AFRICOM

February 2008

***“The stand that many African countries have taken against the military command is one that needs to be supported and needs to be explained to the U.S. public so there is a greater understanding as to the implications of U.S. policy and why it is being rejected.”<sup>1</sup>***

*- Bill Fletcher Jr., Former President of TransAfrica Forum*

Due to the perceived importance of Africa in the U.S. “war on terror” and the increasing U.S. dependence on African oil, President Bush announced on February 6, 2007 the establishment of a Unified Command for U.S. military forces in Africa, known as AFRICOM. According to Bush, “*The Africa command will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa.*”<sup>2</sup> Africa Action challenges the veracity of this assertion in a recent statement, available at: <http://www.africaaction.org/newsroom/docs/AFRICOMStatement082.pdf>.

African nations have repeatedly declared their opposition to the hosting of U.S. bases on the African continent and the militarization of their relations with the United States. As a result of this dissent, AFRICOM is currently based in Stuttgart, Germany. Civil society leaders and journalists in Africa have objected that AFRICOM will pursue narrowly defined U.S. interests at the expense of both the sovereignty and welfare of the African nations.

**Africa Action stands in solidarity with Africa’s leaders and their citizens against an expanded U.S. military footprint in Africa.** This Africa Action resource provides examples of statements from African leaders from multiple regions who stand opposed to this shortsighted re-visioning of U.S-Africa relations.

### **African Governments React to AFRICOM**

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Regional organizations have been most vocal in their critique of AFRICOM, and last August, **the Southern African Development Community (SADC)** was the first to issue a clear message of dissent against the Bush initiative. SADC is made up of 14 African nations including South Africa, Angola, Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo. On August 29, 2007, SADC announced its position “*that it is better if the United States were involved with Africa from a distance rather than be present on the continent.*” The SADC Defense and Security Ministers further stated “***that sister countries of the region should not agree to host AFRICOM and in particular, armed forces, since this would have a negative effect. That recommendation was presented to the Heads of State and this is a SADC position.***”<sup>3</sup>

The initial reactions of African leaders to President Bush’s declaration last February were characterized by confusion and distrust. While the U.S. Department of Defense made clear that AFRICOM was moving forward at full-speed, its objectives and specific details of what it would



entail had not been enunciated clearly. In September 2007, half a year after the Bush announcement, President Festus Mogae of Botswana said, *"We have not taken a position [on AFRICOM] because we don't know how the animal will look like. We are still discussing the issue."*<sup>4</sup>

While individual countries within SADC are allowed to reach their own decisions regarding AFRICOM, none have since strayed from the official position of this important regional body. Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa reaffirmed his country's stance on October 2, 2007, when he stated *"none of us is interested"*<sup>5</sup> in hosting the command.

Other key regional organizations made up of nations across Africa have declared their condemnation of AFRICOM and its implications for U.S.-African relations. **The 25-member Northern African Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)** has backed SADC's position on the establishment of U.S. bases and stated that CEN-SAD *"flatly refuses the installation of any military command or any foreign armed presence of whatever country on any part of Africa, whatever the reasons and justifications."*<sup>6</sup> The Arab Magreb Union also voiced strong opposition to the placement of U.S. bases anywhere on the continent.

**The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has stated resolutely its opposition to American bases in the region.** At the forefront of this effort stands **Nigeria**, whose leadership unequivocally denounced the possibility of American troops being based in West Africa.

However, several months after first coming out with this stance, Nigerian President Yar'Adua issued a statement during his December 2007 visit to Washington that seemed at first to dramatically shift the Nigerian position on AFRICOM: *"We shall partner with AFRICOM to assist not only Nigeria, but also the African continent to actualize its peace and security initiative, which is an initiative to help standby forces of brigade-size in each of the regional economic groupings within the African continent."*<sup>7</sup>

**In response to these controversial remarks, the Nigerian public and members of parliament expressed their outrage at this apparent shift in position.** Consequently, the day after President Yar'Adua's initial statement, he retracted his comments and announced that he had been misquoted.

On, December 14, 2007, Yar'Adua reiterated Nigeria's original position on AFRICOM by stating, *"I did not agree that AFRICOM should be based in Africa. What we discussed with Bush is that if they have something to do for Africa that has to do with peace and security, they should contribute. I told him that we African countries have our own plan to establish a joint military command in every sub-region (as we) have in economic groupings."*<sup>8</sup>

Nigeria's Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe clarified this confusion: *"President Yar'Adua's statement on the proposed AFRICOM is consistent with Nigeria's well-known position on the necessity for Africa to avail itself of opportunities for enhanced capacity for the promotion of peace and security in Africa; Nigeria's position on AFRICOM remains that African governments have the sovereign responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security in the continent, especially in the context of the proposed African Union Stand-by Force and in this regard, the need for*



*support and assistance by Africa's development partners, such as the United States, in the provision of training, funding and logistics for African militaries was duly acknowledged.”<sup>9</sup>*

The only member of ECOWAS to break from this position is Liberia. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has pledged her support to the new command, stating that “**AFRICOM is undeniably about the projection of American interests – but this does not mean that it is to the exclusion of African ones.**”<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the government of Liberia, a country with a unique historical relationship to the U.S and a fragile democracy still emerging from the challenges of civil war, stands alone in its support for AFRICOM.

## **Civil Society and Citizen Responses**

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Though the government of Liberia has been very supportive of AFRICOM, many in Liberian civil society have objected. Ezekiel Pajino of the Center for Democratic Empowerment in Liberia, calls AFRICOM “**a deadly plan of U.S. military expansion on African soil.**” Pajino states, “*AFRICOM will be the legacy of Bush's failed foreign policy that threatens future generations throughout our continent.*”<sup>11</sup>

Other African civil society leaders, academics, bloggers<sup>12</sup> and journalists across the continent share this unease. Ikechukwa Eze in Nigeria's *Business Day* writes, “**Apprehension exists about the extent to which AFRICOM may violate rules of sovereignty and its attempts to replace the AU.**”<sup>13</sup> This comment and others like it raise a number of issues, including the sovereignty of African countries, the role of private military contractors (PMCs), the function of the U.S. military in administering development assistance, and U.S. interests in controlling access to African resources at the expense of ordinary Africans.

Professor Hamza Mustafa Njozi of the University of Dar es Salaam warns that “*if what has befallen other countries is any barometer, the Americans will need a military base in Tanzania.*” With reference to potential oil deposits currently being explored by multinational corporations in Tanzania, he said, “**Military presence is necessary to ensure total control of this vital resource as well as the continued pillage of our gold mines.**”<sup>14</sup> Commenting on President Bush's February 2008 trip to Africa, Sakin Dato, chairperson of the Editors Forum of Tanzania, said, “**Bush is being portrayed as a savior of Africa due to the dollars he is bringing along with him on his trip. But Tanzanians are able to see through this façade. Bush only cares for his own interests and nothing else . . . any illusion that we will provide a military base for the U.S. army should be erased.**”<sup>15</sup>

Africa Action stands in solidarity with the many African voices speaking out against AFRICOM and urges the U.S. to base its foreign policy towards Africa in a similar respect for the African people.

*Brooks Harris and Matt Levy contributed to this resource.*



## More Reading on AFRICOM

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- **AFRICOM: The Militarization of U.S.-Africa Policy Revealed**, February 2008  
<http://www.africaaction.org/newsroom/index.php?op=read&documentid=2763&type=15&issues=256&regions=32>
- **Africa Action's 2008 Africa Policy Outlook**, February 2008  
<http://www.africaaction.org/resources/docs/AfricaPolicyOutlook2008.pdf>
- **[resistAFRICOM.org](http://www.resistAFRICOM.org)** – a project of The Hip Hop Caucus, Africa Faith and Justice Network, Africa Action, TransAfrica Forum, Foreign Policy in Focus and the Institute for Policy Studies. A joint backgrounder answering frequently asked questions about AFRICOM is available here:  
[http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1552/t/5734/content.jsp?content\\_KEY=3855](http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1552/t/5734/content.jsp?content_KEY=3855)

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article\\_3720.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_3720.shtml)
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1644.cfm#\\_ftn6](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1644.cfm#_ftn6)
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07083016151001.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/200709121003.html>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://zambianchronicle.com/category/africom/>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=16567>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/nvs/pictures-yaradua-in-white-house-12-12-07.html>
- <sup>8</sup> <http://businessdayonline.com/Analysis/Features/1718.html>
- <sup>9</sup> [http://www.nigerianmuse.com/nigeriawatch/I\\_Didn\\_t\\_Approve\\_AFRICOM\\_In\\_Nigeria\\_Says\\_Yar\\_Adua](http://www.nigerianmuse.com/nigeriawatch/I_Didn_t_Approve_AFRICOM_In_Nigeria_Says_Yar_Adua)
- <sup>10</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/200706251196.html>
- <sup>11</sup> Africa Action correspondence with author.
- <sup>12</sup> For noteworthy examples of African weblogs criticizing AFRICOM, see:  
<http://crossedcrocodiles.blogspot.com/2007/11/why-does-us-need-to-have-enhanced.html>  
<http://www.blacklooks.org/2007/11/africom.html>  
<http://www.zeleza.com/blogging/african-affairs/africom-strange-fruit-mercy-industrial-complex>
- <sup>13</sup> [http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article\\_4289.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_4289.shtml)
- <sup>14</sup> <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/46049>
- <sup>15</sup> Africa Action correspondence with author.

