

Latifa Perry



SI Africa Committee meets in Niamey

The Socialist International Africa Committee met in Niamey, the capital of Niger on 1-2 June, gathering delegates from a score of parties across the continent and from other parts of the world under the main theme 'The Social Democratic Agenda for Africa'.

THE NIAMEY DECLARATION

The first meeting of the Socialist International Africa Committee for the year 2001 took place in Niamey on 1-2 June 2001. The debate on the main theme "The Social

The meeting was hosted by the Party for Democracy and Socialism of Niger PNDS, chaired by Ousmane Tanor Dieng, PS Senegal, Chair of the Committee and focused on issues of democracy, peace, security, the struggle against poverty and sustainable development throughout the

Democratic Programme in Africa" included the three points below:

1. The advancement, strengthening and consolidation of democracy on the continent.

region. The gathering, addressed at its opening by the leader of the PNDS, Mahamadou Issoufou, the SI Secretary General and Ousmane Tanor Dieng, brought out a strong and detailed programme for the strengthening of democracy in the continent.

2. Achieving a future of peace and security for all the peoples of Africa.

3. Giving priority to the fight against poverty and securing a sustainable development for all the peoples in the region.

Following a rich and rewarding debate, the following conclusions were drawn with regards to:

The first theme: The advancement, strengthening and consolidation of democracy on the continent:

1. Although the process of democratisation initiated on the continent a decade ago is now irreversible, it is still hindered by some key factors. These include:

The material and intellectual poverty of many citizens, which affects their ability and faculty to deal with civic issues and does not allow them to devote much of their time or, more essentially, skills to the management of public matters. This is highly detrimental to the emergence of a truly civil society.

Once in power, some political parties tend to make use of the machinery of the State not to consolidate democratic principles and to serve the public interest, but to act in the interest of a chosen few. In this instance, this is a gross perversion of the alternation of power which grants undue rights to supporters of victorious parties and denies legitimate citizens' rights to the supporters of the parties that have lost in the elections.

In order to get to power, some political parties often resort to the covert manipulation of ethnic or religious sentiment for reasons of pure self-interest, which leads to the emergence of a sense of identity severely detrimental to national unity and cohesion.

Finally, the primacy accorded by African traditions to the collective and the community

at the expense of the individual as an autonomous agent can confound a democratic process founded on the principle of liberty and equality between men and women as citizens.

2. All of these obstacles, however real, do not make democracy an unattainable goal on the African continent. They bear witness to the fact that democracy represents a major challenge, which makes the responsibility of African social democrats all the greater. Of all the existing political forces social democracy is best qualified to set up measures for ensuring the promotion of democracy as well as its development on the continent. These qualifications are:

The universal nature of its aims, opposing any kind of discrimination, to secure unity and cohesion within countries, particularly in these times of great upheavals.

Its modern approach based on its tradition of openness, tolerance and integration. Openness in the sense of adhering to the ideals of a constitutional state, but also in the sense of its ability to effectively incorporate the current imperatives of the economic and institutional integration of the continent.

Its essentially humanistic aims, particularly in this era of ultra-liberalism, when States are literally forced to submit to the injunctions of international financial institutions. The principles of solidarity inherent in social democratic values are of considerable benefit when it comes to defining a strategy capable of combining economic rigour with social imperatives.

Finally, its total commitment to democratic ideals within a constitutional framework

represents a major safeguard against the current corrupt practice of using a change of power as a means of taking possession of the State to exclusive ends which leads to the exclusion of others and results in serious political tensions.

3. Resolutions

The establishment of a deep rooted democracy on the continent necessitates greater involvement on the part of all socialist parties, particularly with regard to mobilising the available mechanisms and resources or their updating within the framework of the existing collaboration. To this end, the member parties of the Socialist International are expressly invited to contribute to the effective mobilisation of the support necessary for the optimum development of democratic organisations, notably with the aim of strengthening political parties and the civil society, financing the overhaul of electoral systems, etc., and supporting training programmes in order to raise the level of education and public awareness of the population.

The establishment of democracy necessitates a modicum of material well-being. The effective promotion of development programmes also necessitates systems for the production of goods and rendering of services within the context of a newly liberated global market.

The member parties of the Socialist International support the rethinking of all the ways and means of the mechanisms and procedures to facilitate the effective use of skilled intellectual resources of nationals of African countries.

The second theme: Achieving peace and security in Africa:

1. The armed conflicts currently taking place in Africa can be grouped into the following categories:

Conflicts relating to the transition to democracy arising from difficulties in reaching a compromise between the forces in power and the new forces claiming power in accordance with democratic principles. Countries in this category include the Democratic Republic of Congo (DROC), the Congo, Togo, Guinea, and the Central African Republic.

Conflicts relating to a sense of identity, where different ethnic groups or even tribes are pitted against each other, as is the case in Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, and Somalia. These crises centre on the question of power and the difficulties associated with creating new mechanisms for dealing with it.

Conflicts resulting from wars primarily motivated by the wish to access mining resources and control their trade. Countries in this category include Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola.

Regional conflicts resulting from a context of global insecurity and leading to a geopolitical reorganisation, for example in the Great Lakes region.

2. The solutions to these conflicts must come as a result of a double effort, both on the

part of every country concerned on the one hand and the involvement of the international community on the other. Both parties must aim for:

A genuine constitutional State, which will establish and respect the strict rules of democratic governance based on free and regular elections, which if implemented, will result in the alternation of governance. Such a State must also scrupulously respect the rights of the individual and implement an economic order capable of bringing about social well-being.

An institutional guarantee of the rights of minority groups.

Internationally backed measures to eliminate the factors responsible for the trafficking in mineral riches.

Dialogue and sponsored initiatives by the UN, the OAU, as well as regional and sub-regional organisations (ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD) with the aim of bringing about regional peace and controlling conflicts based on a strong consensus. The SI can play an important role in this regard, in its capacity as an advisor both to African States and to European States governed by socialist and social democrat parties.

On the third theme, the following points were highlighted:

Poverty is the biggest challenge the world faces at the start of the 21st century. The scourge of humanity, it poses the problem of survival

when globalisation has become so prevalent and solidarity so rare.

Strategies for eradicating poverty must be a combination of several measures, of which the most important are, in our view, the following:

Cancellation of the debt of under-developed countries.

Working towards the ideal of sustainable human development in every respect, particularly with regard to the protection of the environment.

Establishing a more just international economic order in order to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth and work among countries in the southern hemisphere.

Promoting democracy and good governance through effective methods.

Encouraging the promotion of frameworks of economic and political integration, particularly on the African continent.

Using effective measures of solidarity to try to stem the spread of AIDS.

Promoting equality among the sexes in order to give women back their place in the development of societies.

The Socialist International must support all the initiatives of the emerging international civil societies, notably by introducing a tax on the transferral of hot money, with the aim of establishing rules on international solidarity founded on principles other than those of globalisation with their sole aim of boosting the

profits of large multinational companies.

Specific cases

At the Niamey meeting, some of the conflicts in Africa were discussed by the SI, with particular reference to the situations in:

Chad, where it condemns the events after the last presidential election, whilst expressing its solidarity with the political parties in opposition, the victims of repression.

Mauritania, where it condemns the banning of the UFD-New Era, whilst expressing its solidarity with and support of the cause it has courageously fought. The SI is urging the authorities of this country to take effective measures, in discussion with the parties in

opposition, to guarantee the implementation of free, fair and transparent elections.

Côte d'Ivoire, where it welcomes the rise to power of the Côte d'Ivoire Popular Front, FPI, and expresses its full support of and solidarity with the government in its endeavours towards national reconciliation and the democratisation of the country.

Burkina Faso, where it is urging the authorities to commence a genuine dialogue with all democratic organisations and political parties in order to strengthen democracy and banish impunity from economic and bloody crimes.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, where it supports democratic forces, notably the UDPS, in its fight to build a democratic society.

Cameroon, where it condemns the seizure of power and the violence leading to the execution

of nine children in Bependa, and expresses its support of the SDF in its remarkable struggle.

Guinea, where it welcomes the liberation of Professor Alpha Condé, President of the RPG, following the major campaign of support organised by the SI. The SI demands that all civil rights be restored to Professor Condé immediately.

Togo, where it expresses its concern over the ongoing political crisis that risks developing into a conflict capable of threatening peace in the sub-region. It vigorously encourages holding the anticipated legislative elections planned for October 2001.

Africa, where to avoid interminable fratricidal conflicts, it must continue to be extremely mindful of the intervention of local forces serving foreign interests.



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