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Together for Africa
Ensemble pour L'Afrique

UNAFAS is about Africans standing straight and tall. It is about Africans doing things for themselves and not waiting for others to do it for us. It is about regaining our dignity and our pride. It is about seeking our own solutions to our own problems. It is about building our own societies with our own moral and our own social values.

What we must do first is for Africa and Africans to accept responsibility for our present state of affairs. .... and in accepting it, all Africans must also accept that the future of our continent lies in their hands.

One of the first tasks of UNAFAS therefore shall be the promotion of democracy in Africa. African governments must be established on strong constitutional and legal foundations and African people must be educated to defend their human and democratic rights wherever and whenever they are threatened.

UNAFAS must ... **promote solidarity** among the peoples of Africa. The promotion of **peace and understanding must remain at all times the main and principal preoccupation** of UNAFAS.

United Africa Association seeks to act as a catalyst in the effort ...

We will start in the schools, colleges and universities, ...

It requires .. the conception of sustainable development policies and programs which create opportunities for Africans while at the same time protecting the continent's vast human and natural resources.   .. .. through sharing knowledge and experiences as well as encouraging wiser exploitation of Africa's resources.

What we have lacked has been a collective sense .. ..

Let us rise that our young men and women may not hide their kindness or hide it behind fierce and frowning eyes. Let us rise that love may govern the action of our young men and women and that tomorrow will not be too late and that when we have found them, they would not have turned to hating.

Extracts from the speech made by UNAFAS Executive President, Bernard Acho Muna, at the association's inaugural conference in Yaoundé Cameroon, November 1994.

Promoting democracy and democratic rights
Starting in schools, colleges and universities

School election reform
To promote and build values of justice, fairness, open debate, negotiation and peaceful conflict resolution, of a social and moral responsibility and political literacy.

In 2008 UNAFAS carried out an innovative project with ISTP, the In Service Training Programme of two education authorities (CBC and PCC), researching and producing guidelines for school elections (school elections for student prefects). The guidelines were produced using a thoroughly participatory approach – thirty four colleges were surveyed, to understand the practices in use, reasons for these, perceived advantages, disadvantages, and suggestions for change: one hundred and twenty four school administrators, one hundred and twenty four teachers, two hundred and forty students and one hundred and twenty prefects contributed, from Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, government and lay private schools. Students said what they had learned from having elections in schools – good and bad things. All of the responses were studied and discussed in round table meetings. The discussion enabled us to come out with a framework of modern, standardised guidelines, codes of conduct, background information and notes, that were then tested in six additional colleges during the 2009 elections. Feedback and comment from the student, staff and administration in the pilot schools was studied and discussed and incorporated into a series of final booklets that was published in 2009. Students, school administrators and staff were then trained and annual elections to select student leaders subsequently monitored as part of the new school elections policy that was put in place by the education authorities.

The school election guidelines addressed:
– Responsibility of school administrations
– Requirements for prefect ship
– General rules and regulations for prefects
– Prefect posts, roles and responsibilities
– Stages in the running of school elections
– Check list of election materials
– Code of conduct for student election campaigns
– General provisions
– Application form for prefect position
– Sample Application form for prefect posts
– Ballot papers
– Ballot paper – sample
– Recording sheet
– Post election coordination, management and smooth running of prefect teams.

The second booklet **School elections – Notes for students**, has more information, for students:
– Why have student government and elections in schools?
– Democracy – background, Democracy in our schools
– The responsibility of students during the election process
– Why be a prefect?
– How to select who you will vote for.

The third booklet **School Elections Monitoring and Evaluation** publication covers the 'why' and 'how' of observing elections, has rules for observers and an example observation form. The fourth edition of our 2009 student leadership series, **School Elections - Vocabulary,** was widely used by civil society and general readers as well as in schools. It is an alphabetical list of selected election related terms with definitions. We received feedback from many adult readers noting how informative they had found this glossary.

The School Elections work is widely considered to be transformational. Our initial survey in the colleges revealed that many teachers and students found elections, both in school and nationally to be demoralizing. From the time of our first working session the education authorities saw that badly run elections were damaging, and that they were unwittingly teaching bad habits.

A follow up survey after the first round of elections using the new guidelines showed that the new policy introduced as a result of this work with UNAFAS had demonstrated to teachers and school administrations, both the ease and benefits of using democratic principles. Perhaps most importantly it taught them that free and fair election process is not something to fear. The students, many of them in boarding schools, know that a prefect who is unfair and unregulated can make the lives of every student very unpleasant. They know that with no formal route for expressing their complaints or concerns in school they become frustrated. They engaged with the election reform process with unexpected enthusiasm and commitment. We were all surprised at their seriousness.

Our goal was to establish a culture of democracy in Cameroonian students and youth, to provide experience of free and fair democratic (election) process, and the benefits of living and learning in environments run on democratic principles. Our belief was that if students understand and believe in democratic process and know how to exercise democratic rights, that on graduating they will expect and respect and stand up for democratic process and human rights.

In subsequent editions we will publish the views of current and past students who have attended these schools – to learn how well our goals have been achieved?

CBC Education Secretary at the time, Mr Tetevi Bodylawson (left) discussing elections with one of our sponsors;
at a training course for school administrators held in Bamenda

The Challenge of Democracy in Africa:
establishing democracy in multi-ethnic and multi-tribal societies.

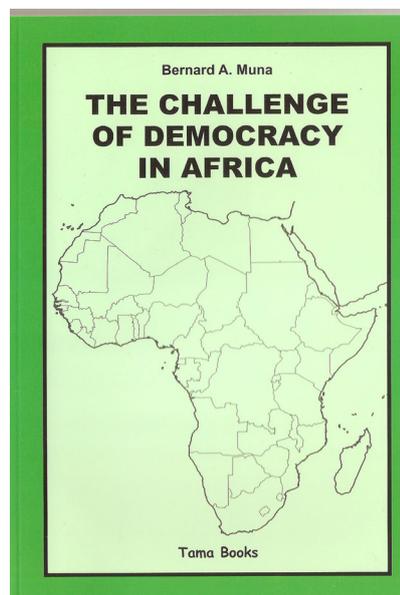The apparent difficulty of most African states to establish democratic societies that do not only produce multi-party political systems of government but also violence free changes in government, is a fact that few can deny. African leaders and politicians themselves recognise that western systems of democracy have failed to take root in many African countries. This failure is the root cause of the lack of security and peace in many countries. However, in addition Western nations are putting pressure on African governments to establish democratic political systems that produce good governance and a liberal economic system. But an all too frequent response is a struggle to establish 'democratic' systems that will perpetuate an incumbent in power.

The creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a recognition by participating African governments and political leaders that there is a common problem and a need to find solutions. There is a collective consciousness and vision that if African countries are to develop then a way must be found to enable Africans and their nation-states to extricate themselves from the cycle of insecurity, political conflict and violence as well as from the endemic diseases that are together depriving the people from participating fully and making them increasingly excluded from the global economy.

One of the principal objectives of NEPAD is raising awareness that peace and security, through good governance and democracy are the principal conditions that will bring about sustainable development in Africa. It is now generally acknowledged by many African political leaders and intellectuals that development is impossible in the absence of democracy, respect of human rights, peace, good governance and political stability. The democracy and good governance initiative, which is part of the action plan, is thus an important plank in the NEPAD programme. It seeks to strengthen the political framework of participating countries in line with internationally established and recognised principles. The initiative will involve capacity building and institutional reforms by focusing on the areas of administrative and civil services, strengthening parliamentary control, participation in decision making, combating corruption, embezzlement of public funds and judicial reforms. NEPAD intends to strike at the root causes of instability and insecurity in Africa.

In his essay the author has chosen to focus on the same areas because he believes they are most connected to the questions of good governance, political stability, accountability and transparency. Unless Africa can create societies that are characterised by their fairness, their openness, the respect of the rule of law and democratic governance it will not be able to carry out any meaningful development, much less unite. Africans not only need to gain confidence in each other, they need first of all to gain confidence in themselves. Without this, the continent can not respond meaningfully to the pressures that the international community, especially western nations are putting on it in the economic as well as political fields.

The Bamako Declaration is another parallel attempt, this time by African governments and political leaders mainly of francophone Africa, meeting with their counterparts from across the francophone world, to examine the ways and means of building truly open and democratic societies. One of the most important points that came out of the Bamako Declaration, according to the author, is recognition that western systems of democratic governance may not necessarily be suitable for every country, especially those of the developing world. Acceptance that there could be many forms of democracy and that each should reflect certain established and accepted universal principles, according to the author, constitutes an important step in the liberation of African society from the apron-strings of western thinking and institutions.

The Bamako Declaration was followed two years later by a program of action adopted by heads of states and governments of the francophonie at their 9th conference held in Beyrouth in October (18-20th) 2002. There again it was decided that priority areas included strengthening democratic institutions, rule of law, parliaments, judicial systems, administration, local governments, control and regulatory mechanisms, as well as institutions for mediation and conciliation.

The Bamako Declaration and NEPAD are attempts to face this challenge and to find adequate solutions to it. African intellectuals are also rising up to the challenge and this is reflected in the many papers on democracy and good governance appearing frequently at the many conferences organised on the same themes. One such conference was a sub-regional seminar on 'Democratic Institutions and Peace in Central Africa'in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in May (18-22nd) 1998. At that conference Prof. Mwayila Tshiyembe, Director of the Institute of African Geopolitics, based in Nancy, France made the following observations in his opening address: **"The debate that we are engaged in, will surely be futile, if it is limited to lyrical recitations, on the rule of law,**

democracy, participation, elections, multi-party politics, the separation of powers and other well known gestures that are lacking in real significance. The futility of such an exercise is even more apparent because about eight years ago, sovereign national conferences and similar forums on the establishment of democratic societies, drew up new constitutions, which were meant to provide solutions to most of the issues that are now subject of our present conference. The fact that these same issues are again the subject of this conference is enough proof, if ever one was needed, that the process of democratisation in black Africa, has been a complete fiasco. Instead of stubbornly refusing to face this fact, common sense requires us first of all to examine the reasons for this failure and then to propose a means of finding a way out of the present exercise that is getting us nowhere."[1]

These observations of Prof. Tshiyembe may at first sight appear too severe, especially to those who believe that here and there some progress and successes have been achieved in the process of democratisation in Africa. Indeed, the author feels that all is not doom and gloom, political leaders and a majority of the population are becoming more aware and conscious of the fact that genuine efforts have to be made in the building of democratic societies. In a limited number of cases there have been genuine attempts to hold free and fair elections, which have resulted in fairly peaceful changes of government. But there is much more to democracy than the peaceful transition of power. This essay deals with difficulties that have been faced, recognises that a change of attitude and perception is required, that the culture of blame and excuses must be abandoned, in favour of an honest and critical examination of the colonial and post-colonial society against pre-colonial African societies. He expresses the need to study how

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[1] *Off the cuff translation from original French version, by the author.*

pre-colonial African society was organised in order to understand the true nature of present societies and the social and political forces that are a carry-over from pre-colonial times and are still active and strong. It is in this context that Prof. Tshiyembe, in addressing the Bata conference, had this to say: **"History has taught us that no people can take on the challenge of survival and development, by relying only on the history and culture of other people as the unique source of inspiration, while at the same time denying their own history, culture and creative genius."[1]**

This essay is about building true democracies in the multi-ethnic, multi-tribal and multi-cultural societies that make up Africa's many nation states. It begins with the issue of human rights, which the author regards as tangible but often misunderstood or misinterpreted birthright of every human being. Human rights, he says, are often presented in African countries by the west, western dominated or inspired national and international organisations as some package deal of rights and freedom invented by western civilisation, offered to the emergent democracies as a gift, in a bid to include them in the so-called civilised world. He takes issue with this approach. Africans must be taught that human rights are rights they inherited from birth, rights that have been violated in the slave trade, by colonisation and by successive post-colonial authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. He insists that each individual must come to appreciate that their human rights belong inherently to them, and are not given by an international organisation or the central government of their own nation state. Democracy is about running a society or country in such a way that these rights and freedoms are respected and defended. Constitutions provide the legal framework and the basic laws that give the broad principles under which these rights and freedoms are managed and enjoyed in society. It will be very difficult to have sustainable and lasting democratic societies in Africa until and unless constitutions provide African nation states with democratic institutions drawn up specifically to fit each one of them.

The essay maintains that in Africa most constitutions fail to work because they are not fine-tuned to the realities of the society. Political realities on the ground do not always seem to find solutions in constitutions and sometimes political realities may in fact be in conflict with constitutional provisions. It recognises a need to draft constitutions that are relevant and not based on intellectual or academic provisions found in the books of constitutional law developed in and for other societies.

According to the author elections and the fight for political power have been the major source of conflict and violence in Africa. Simply having free and fair elections will not, he believes provide a lasting solution to the conflicts and violence that surround the problems of the exercise of political power. The adversarial systems of party politics that have been copied from western democracies will still produce winners and losers, the winners shall be mainly of one or more ethnic groups and the losers shall be from other ethnic groups. Africa, he proposes, may have to move away from the western style of what has been described as 'conflictual' democracy to one that is 'consensual'. Conflictual systems tend to emphasise differences in policy rather than areas of agreement. A consensual system will seek to reach agreement and compromise, as a condition of getting everybody to participate in the process of political decision making. This essay examines how such consensual democracies can be structured and established.

Post independence parliaments in Africa have been mostly weak and ineffective, generally dominated and controlled by governments. These parliaments failed to a very large extent to hold governments accountable for their acts. African constitutions must make realistic and practical provisions for the control of the acts of the executive by the legislature. The functions and powers of the legislative branch of government are examined and it is suggested that for parliament to be truly representative of the people and their aspirations, constitutions must seek to establish truly representative

democracies in which the people can truly be said to speak through their elected representatives. Such a parliament would seek to encourage participation instead of withdrawal and cooperation instead of alienation among the people. While representing the interests of individual citizens, who elect its members, parliaments in African nation states must also recognise and protect the collective legitimate interests of ethnic, tribal and cultural entities that still form the basic social structure of African societies.

The author insists that Africa needs good governance and good governance depends on the ability to hold government accountable for its actions. The issue of separation of powers has therefore received particular attention in this essay because he feels that excessive accumulation of powers by the executive branch in post-independence and one-party states has contributed greatly to the failure of democracy and constitutionality in African nation states. The decentralisation of government as a means of recognising the legitimate claims of ethnic, tribal or regional entities has also received close examination.

The judiciary is the third arm of government after the legislative and executive. A strong and independent judiciary is essential for democratic society. It carries the burden and responsibility of arbitrating between the other two branches of government when conflicts arise, and between citizens and the state. In general terms it provides the medium of settling disputes between individuals and these bodies. The reason for having an organised society, the essay proposes, is above all to provide protection for all individuals, to secure their freedom, dignity, equality and peaceful existence. In establishing a democratic society, where there is no law of the jungle, where the rich, strong and powerful and the poor, weak and not so powerful are given equal rights and dignity. An independent judiciary cannot therefore be by-passed - it is a bulwark of democracy.

Too often, Muna argues, justice is seen as a matter between parties in court – one wins and the other loses. This is the concept of justice rooted in western democracies, judicial systems and philosophy that was inherited by post-colonial nations. He sees little, in this, concerning reconciliation of the opposing parties nor of the reconciliation of the same parties with society. In pre-colonial Africa reconciliation and the restoration of harmony was part of the judicial system. Justice should also be accessible to everyone and cannot be made the personal property of the rich and powerful and the lawyers they can hire, nor the judges that render it. In a democracy justice should be provided for the people and in the name of the people. Justice therefore belongs to the people, so any judicial system must administer justice that is fair and seen to be fair by ordinary members of the society. In the multi-ethnic, multi-tribal and multi-cultural societies of Africa a more vigilant, dynamic and independent judiciary is required. It must resist pressures from the executive arm of government as well as the rich and powerful, the pressures that are ever present in society and above all the powerful influences of ethnic groups, tribes, cultural or religious entities.

Muna examines two other very strong and powerful institutions that are vital to the functioning and survival of a democratic society today. They are institutions that did not exist as permanent structures in the many forms of traditional rule in pre-colonial Africa – army and bureaucracy or civil service. These came with colonisation and remained after independence and were used, to a very large extent, by post-independence African governments as instruments of oppression. Originally designed to serve the people they have in some cases become a power unto themselves, in other cases governments use financial reward and promotions to manipulate members of the army and civil service into oppressing the people and perpetuating their own stay in power.

There is a convergence of opinion among Africans, that their nations can address some of these problems through constitutions that are tailored to the specificities of the societies, but opinion varies on what changes are needed to make existing constitutions respond to local conditions. Muna's essay is a contribution to the on-going debate.

The problem is not that African intellectuals are in any way indifferent to questions of freedom, democracy and human rights on the continent, they are not. It is rather that they are confronted by a population that is apathetic and seems to have resigned itself to a fate, to situations suffered continuously since independence. A massive education campaign is needed to raise awareness, to transform populations that are resigned to a doom often predicted by western organisations and media services, to a people filled with hope and optimism for a bright future. Once the obstacle of constitutional instability has been removed and a true democracy established then the people of Africa can settle into a long periods of stability. It is then, Muna concludes, that the real transformation of Africa will begin and people will benefit from the continents wealth.

The Challenge of Democracy in Africa © 2006, Bernard A. Muna. Yaoundé

ANNOUNCEMENT

CAMEROON WOMEN'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME
Funded by the British High Commission in Yaoundé
managed by UNAFAS Cameroon

 # Scholarships are available for ten young Cameroonian women with strong leadership potential and academic excellence, undertaking Masters level studies during the 2014/2015 academic year in any Cameroon State University or reputable Higher Education Institution.

We are looking for young women with the potential and the drive to make significant contributions to the development of women and the development of Cameroon.

Eligible candidates **will be registered** on a Masters level course in one of the following fields: Human Rights, The Rule of Law & Governance, Development Studies, Science and Technology, ICT, Media Management and Legislation.

Full details and application forms can be downloaded from the UNAFAS and British High Commission websites.

Applicants may be taking courses in English or French, but all applications, interviews and correspondence will be in English, successful applicants will have strong English language skills.

Read more about the programme on our face book pages: cameroon-women-scholarship
cameroon-women-scholarship-alumni