

What guarantees Sudan's suitability for the AU presidency next year?

Friday 27 January 2006

By Affail Monney, Ghana's GBC Radio

Jan 26, 2006 - African Union leaders last Tuesday 24 January went against their own tradition by electing President Dennis Sassou Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville as their new chairman against host President Al Bashir of Sudan. President Al Bashir had hoped to receive the baton from President Obasanjo after 18 months at the helm until realities forced Sudan to withdraw her chairmanship bid.

However, President Al Bashir was not entirely shot changed as he eagerly awaits the position in 2007 in line with the compromise reached at the summit.

Interestingly, Sudan is blaming the US for robbing her of the AU's topmost position. Allegations have it that Washington put pressure on countries dependent on her for aid to reject Sudan's bid. Without rallying to the defence of the US, we need to emphasize that a man's character is the arbiter of his own fortunes.

Indeed, President Bashir's leadership has been characterized by insensitivity to the plight of his own countrymen, especially in the Darfur region where over 20,000 people have been exterminated like pernicious vermin. The horrendous human slaughter in Sudan and other flashpoints feeds into the perception in the larger world that Africa perpetually remains a continent where human rights are respected more in breach than in observance.

By rejecting the Sudanese AU chairmanship bid the African leaders for once refused to behave like some bias African soccer referees who would always favour home teams irrespective of how badly they fare in matches. Africa today with its crop of democracy inclined, progressive minded and purpose-driver leaders must however go the extra mile to distance themselves from the negative role models in their midst if the continent is to win more international credibility. In a sort of repentant mood, Sudan pledged to fix the Darfur crisis and mend fences with Chad as she prepares to assume the AU chair next year.

The huge problem is if Sudan is unsuitable for the chairmanship this year; what guarantees its suitability for the same position next year? This question begs for a comprehensive and satisfactory answer especially by the AU task team, which is to ensure that the geographical principle of election the union's chairperson in conformity with the Constitutive act is followed.

Indeed, this principle meets the fundamental requirement of fairness. But in meeting it Africa must guard against requirement questionable leaders with prestigious positions like that of the AU chairmanship. Otherwise, we risk the danger of blurring the boundary between good and bad governance or in plain words promoting misrule. The dangers of misrule are too numerous to mention and its price too heavy to pay.

The denial of the AU chairmanship to President Al Bashir should send enough signals to others like him that African now refuses to remain at the periphery of the periphery and it is on the move to development in all its dimensions. We know we cannot jumpstart the process and leapfrog to the level of the developed world but with singleness of purpose and dint of determination we shall surely be there.

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