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Better assessment needed for GTA Black empowerment, says think-tank

By Peter Uduehi

If Blacks in the Greater Toronto Area are to increase their socio-economic standing into the next millennium, an authoritative evaluation should be computed for policymakers and institutions alike.



Suelyn Knight

That's the opinion of the think tank Environics director Suelyn Knight, who tells the African World her organisation is currently conducting a survey of Black life in the GTA in a self-developed campaign called "Black Experience Project" (or BEP).

Knight says the project will interview about 2,000 Blacks of different ethnic backgrounds in the GTA asking them about their education, spirituality, religion, health, identity issues, banking experiences, police interactions, and other aspects of their living experience. "It's important to know ourselves as (African Canadians) so that corporations can better understand our tastes, desires and needs; so that government statisticians and law enforcement and other relevant institutions in society can better assess our needs," Knight explained, stressing: "For example, there are things we know of ourselves, generally speaking, as Black people in the GTA... we know there are Caribbean and African Blacks here and there are many more communities of Black people as well, but we don't know everything about ourselves. This Black Experience Project will reveal all that we don't know so our community will be strengthened," she said.

Asked if available public data on Blacks in the GTA is not enough, she said "no. Because it's still not everything on us as (African Canadians)." Policymakers and institutions need more than surface-value information in order to plan their development paths for their growth among Blacks; and also for Blacks to fully benefit in an ever-changing economy".

The BEP campaign volunteers are taking to streets, events, festivals and outdoor parlances in the GTA through September for a final report to be made before the end of the year and in time for the next celebration of Black History Month in 2016.

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Toronto mayor opts out of controversial carding

By Peter Uduehi

Toronto mayor John Tory says the controversial practice of carding must go and he intends to make his feelings known to June 18 before Toronto Police Board.

Carding, which many critics believe is discriminatory and unnecessary, gives police right to stop and search citizens at random, then collect information from suspects. The information



Toronto mayor John Tory

garnered are stored indefinitely in a database. Its detractors charge most of the practice's targets are disproportionately ethnic minorities and that the humiliating approach has no place in modern society.

Tory says the city must do away with the system and start on a "clean slate."

"I thought that we had to turn the page and we had to start with a clean slate on this issue and that we were not making the progress that I thought we absolutely needed to make as a community to resolving what is a hurtful and difficult issue", the mayor said, stressing carding has not achieved its desired result but has instead made matters worse.

Carding, which is law, was put on the cold shelf in January by former police chief Bill Blair but new head of the force Mark Saunders — the first African-Canadian on the job — supports the controversial practice saying it's a useful tool to curb crime. Tory says he spoke to Saunders about his change of heart on the matter but would not divulge their conversation; but stiffened his new stance by saying "I think what we have to put in place is something as I said that is both respectful of people's rights, and that protects those rights, and at the same time allows police to carry out their very difficult responsibility and their very important responsibility."

Ontario NDP deputy leader Jagmeet Singh said he welcomed Tory's about turn but that carding should be banned provincially. "If we had a provincewide strategy this would address not only Toronto but other urban centres including Hamilton, Ottawa and Windsor where this also occurs and it's also a troubling issue," he said.

"So while this is encouraging for the citizens of Toronto, a lot of work still needs to be done to make this a provincewide strategy to ban the practice of carding."



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Off the cuff

Our readers, as usual are vocal on many topics via email. The topics here range from the controversial Toronto police practice of carding to FIFA alleges corruption issues and to the recent problems of xenophobia in South Africa and Israel...

Here are some of your comments:

Olu Fagbaya, Mississauga:

On carding, I think it will be a good thing to stop this practice in Toronto because most of it's victims are either Black or minority people. We don't need this type of discriminatory practice in Canada. Canada is too big for this. I hope you publish my views in your newspaper.

Joyce Ona, Brampton Writes:

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to your newspaper. Regarding the issue of carding, let me just say that it is a disgrace to have this type of law in Canada. One would expect the Americans to be the ones harassing their citizens in the street, because that is what carding is. American police do that to their citizens not Canadian police. Please change or stop this practice of harassing people in the streets so we can bring some civility to the Canadian system. It is wrong.

Ofuya Moses, Etobicoke Writes:

It's a shame to think that Canada has this near-gestapo system of harassing young kids in the streets. Why is it important to have in place a system that discriminates minorities? Of what use is carding? The evidence shows it has not worked, so the effective thing is to eliminate it. I am glad the new mayor is now in support of removing this shameful approach to policing. The new police chief supports it, and that for me is even more shameful as he is Black and his own people are gonna be more affected by it if it is left in place.

John Asu, Toronto Writes:

I want to comment on carding in Toronto. Can anyone tell me the definition of "craziness"? It is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. That's what carding is. No matter how it is fine-tuned, it will never be an efficient tool. So it's a wrong policy to have carding because we all know who is affected



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negatively by this practice: we Black people in this great city. Toronto is bigger than carding and there are better ways to catch criminals instead of this method that offends our sensibilities and make us look like Third World nations. Carding should be stopped now before it cripples the fabric of our great city. It is offensive.

Kofi Essau, Toronto Writes:

Can I say something in your newspaper about the recent Fifa troubles involving some of its officials? I believe it is high-time that the world governing body for football stopped its underhanded ways of administering soccer. A rat is a rat and it is a rat. Corruption, it must be said, is rife at Fifa and Sepp Blatter should resign for good as the boss. His continued presence is making matters worse. He has been linked to corruption scandals at every turn and must take heed to let go at the helm. I think it would help the organization.

Peter Oko, Toronto Writes:

I want to talk about Fifa in your newspaper. Those who are calling for the resignation of Fifa boss Sepp Blatter must understand that

the Swiss man has been good to Africa. He gave us our first World Cup in South Africa in 2010, gave us many stadiums and sports academies; and we should give him a second chance. Who will replace Mr Blatter when he is gone and how are we sure his successor will be as diligent and attentive to Africa as he has been? We should be mindful of what we wish for. Thank you.

Paul Ozengwu, Toronto Writes:

Will you please publish my viewpoint in your newspaper on South Africans who want to kill their brothers from other African countries because of money matters? I am sure you know what I am talking about. It's about the xenophobic attacks that took place in South Africa recently with many migrants from other countries on the continent attacked because they have been blamed for the high level of unemployment gripping the country. I think local South Africans have forgotten the hand of the milk that fed them. Many of these attackers must be re-educated about the apartheid struggles that gave them their freedoms. They need to be told that without Blacks from other parts of the continent their freedom would

have been harder still. They were the frontline states who provided weapons to South Africa's freedom fighters and the ANC, they were the West African countries who trained South African refugees running from apartheid. They were trained in their schools and went to universities and secondary schools free while apartheid and slavery haunted their families back homes. How soon they forget! Can someone re-educate South African young Black people about their history in the days of apartheid? This sadistic way of offending the culture of the African personality is a shame to South Africa's leaders and its people. The man who started this mayhem and violence, the Zulu chief Goodwill Zwelithini should have known better that a man of his calibre must watch his tongue and know his audience. Saying that "migrants should go back to their countries" is both offensive and ludicrous. No one among the African migrants purposefully came to South Africa to take anybody's job. The shopkeepers among the migrants are self-employed contributing to the economy of the country. Diversity is a good thing as we all have learned from the great Madiba Nelson Mandela.

On the Calendar



PRESENTED BY MUSIC AFRICA 27TH ANNUAL AFROFEST 2015 JULY 4 & 5, 2015 12:00 P.M. - 10 P.M. DAILY WOODBINE PARK! FREE ADMISSION: RAIN OR SHINE

Toronto's largest celebration of African music, heritage and culture is back for its 27th year! Afrofest 2015 will take place Saturday July 4th and Sunday July 5th, at Woodbine Park, Lakeshore Boulevard East, and Coxwell Avenue.

Presented by Music Africa, in partnership with Africa New Music, the vibrant two-day outdoor festival is a chance to immerse oneself in the beauty and diversity of the African continent.

Peter Toh, President of Music Africa, says that this year's theme will include many acts from the African Diaspora. "The major theme is always the celebration of African culture and we are happy to be able to highlight the contribution of African culture to the Americas," says Toh.

The festival will feature performances by top international groups and local stars of African music, along with dancing, drumming, and theatre. This year's outstanding Main Stage line up will feature Kassav (Martinique & Guadeloupe), Wenge Music – Nouvelle Generation (DRC), Zal Sissokho, Sergio Perere & Chico Antonio (Senegal/Quebec/Mozambique), San Fan Thomas (Cameroon), Cheka Katenen Dioubate (Guinea), Obeah Opera (Jamaica), Tich Maredza Band (Zimbabwe) and more.

Music Africa is a non-profit community-based organization whose main objective is to promote African music in Toronto through the Afrofest music festival and other occasional events. Established in 1990, Music Africa is among the oldest and most respected organizations promoting African music in Canada.

Music Africa also supports the activities of other non-profit cultural organizations through partnerships for various events. Through its activities, Music Africa is committed to enhancing appreciation and awareness of African music among Canadians while also striving to establish Toronto as a thriving global center for African music.

Music Africa gratefully acknowledges the funding support of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Celebrate Ontario, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council. www.musicafrika.ca For media information, please contact: (416) 469 5336

Afrofest is an annual musical festival that celebrates African culture and brings together many African communities. Many of the greatest stars of African music have performed at the event including Hugh Masekela, Papa Wemba, Amampondo, Oumou Sangare, African Guitar Summit, Mzwakhe Mbuli, Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi and many other ambassadors of African culture. With over 100,000 people attending over the weekend, the festival is the largest annual gathering of African communities in Canada.



PETER TOH, PRESIDENT OF MUSIC AFRICA



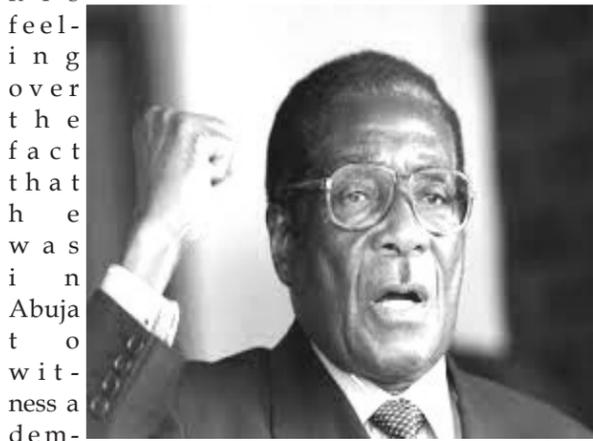
KASSAV

Zimbabwe president Mugabe bombarded by Nigerian journalists

President Robert Mugabe may perhaps have to find another phrase to describe Nigeria after he was humiliated by a group of journalists who took him to task over his prolonged stay in power and lack of democracy in Zimbabwe.

As soon as Mugabe and his entourage had arrived for president Buhari's inauguration, Nigerian journalists swarmed around his vehicle to ask a barrage of provocative questions, in apparent contempt for the 91-year old strongman.

Was Mugabe happy to be in Nigeria? What was his feeling over the fact that he was in Abuja to witness a democratic handover of power when there was no such in his own country? When was he going to step down considering he had ruled for over three decades? the journalists wanted to know.



A video footage of the incident showed Mugabe, then seated at the back of his official vehicle, smiling and willing to engage, telling the scribes that he was indeed happy to be in Nigeria.

But as soon as it dawned on him that he had been ambushed and that the questions were meant to humiliate him his mood changed, with the irascible Mugabe coming close to bursting out.

A visibly miffed Mugabe struggled to keep his cool as the Nigerians scolded him, with one lady journalist shouting loudly, 'there is no democracy in Zimbabwe'.

Confused members of the CIO close security unit could be seen struggling to protect their proud master against the determined Nigerians with one body guard speaking in Shona, saying mirai, mirai (wait, wait).

The ambush on the Zimbabwean leader came as no surprise after Mugabe, last year, kicked up brouhaha by calling Nigeria a 'corrupt nation'.

Mugabe's comments about Nigeria then forced Abuja to summon Zimbabwe's envoy to seek an explanation.

Mugabe was in Abuja in his capacity as the African Union chairperson.

In 2008, Mugabe was ambushed by a British journalist Julian Manyon in Egypt after an election which was boycotted by the opposition over violence.

An irate Mugabe dismissed a persistent Manyon as a "bloody idiot".

Zimbabwe: Mugabe Ambushed and Humiliated in Nigeria

Historic shipwreck found off South Africa coast

Researchers have announced the discovery of the wreck of a Portuguese slave ship in which an estimated 200 Mozambicans died when the ship sank just off Cape Town more than two centuries ago.

Iziko Museums of South Africa will host the official announcement of the discovery in Cape Town later Tuesday. However, one of the museum complex's American partners, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, made an early announcement in the American media beginning last week.

In details published on the Smithsonian's website, museum officials were quoted as saying that the wreck was originally discovered by treasure hunters in the 1980s but that it was mistakenly thought to have been a Dutch ship.

Subsequent research by a coalition of African and U.S. agencies has shown that the ship was the São José-Paquete de Africa, which was sailing from Mozambique Island to Maranhao, Brazil, carrying more than 400 captives into slavery when it ran onto submerged rocks about 100 metres off Camps Bay in December 1794.

The ship was so close to the shore that it was able to fire a cannon calling for help. The ship's crew and about half the enslaved people were saved, but about 200 slaves died.

A Smithsonian press release said a private memorial service was being held near the site of the wreck on Tuesday to honour "the enslaved Mozambicans who lost their lives or were sold into slavery ..." Modern-day Camps Bay is an upmarket beachside tourist hub popular with foreign tourists.

The discovery of the wreck is significant, according to Lonnie G. Bunch of the Smithsonian, "because there has never been archaeological documentation of a vessel that foundered and was lost while carrying a cargo of enslaved persons."

He added: "The São José is all the more significant because it represents one of the earliest attempts to bring East Africans into the trans-Atlantic slave trade - a shift that played a major role in prolonging that tragic trade for decades."

Artifacts from the wreck will be on display when the Smithsonian opens its new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington next year. Among objects found are a wooden pulley and iron ballast which was used to stabilise ships, counteracting the shifting weight of people being transported.

Archeologists led by Iziko's Jaco Boshoff have so far explored only a small part of the wreck area, which is buffeted by turbulent water.

Rooksana Omar, CEO of Iziko Museums says: "The story of the São José's more than an African story. It is a story that transcends time, space, place and identity. It is a global story of our inter-connectedness as a human race. It is a story of migration and of untold human wrongs.

"The São José slave shipwreck site reverberates with historical significance and represents an addition to our underwater heritage that has the potential to advance knowledge and understanding of slavery, not only at the Cape but on a global level. The São José narrative, while linking with sites such as the Iziko Slave Lodge, where many enslaved Mozambicans were incarcerated, simultaneously opens up opportunities for links with sites of enslavement in Mozambique and Brazil."

Tough new laws go into effect in South Africa aimed at child trafficking

South Africa's tough new entry rules to prevent child trafficking came into effect on Monday 1 June, with airlines and travel agents saying the regulations could hurt the important tourism industry.

The government estimates 30 000 children are trafficked into South Africa annually, often for prostitution or labour. Opposition parties, human rights groups and tourism firms say the true figure is much lower.

The new rules from the department of home affairs require minors travelling with both parents to have an unabridged birth certificate with full details of both parents, as well as a passport and visa.



NEW LAWS COMES INTO EFFECT IN SOUTH AFRICA TO STEM CHILD TRAFFICKING

If the child is travelling with only one parent, immigration authorities require the written consent of the other parent, even when the parents are divorced.

Those travelling with a minor who is not their biological child need a legal letter from both the parents or guardians authorising the journey.

"The main aim is that we prevent child trafficking," said Minister in Presidency Jeff Radebe.

Tourism has become South Africa's fastest-growing sector. Arrivals have been boosted in part by a weaker rand currency that has made South Africa a relatively cheap destination.

The outbound travel, inbound tourism and airline industry associations - ASATA, SATSA and BARSAs - held a media briefing on Friday to discuss the key issues around the new requirements, including how biometric visas will affect the industry.

David Frost, the chief executive of Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA), said the new rules would hurt the industry.

Airlines would bear the cost of repatriating travellers without the correct documents, he said.

"What we are seeing here is akin to taking a sledgehammer to kill a mosquito," he told the briefing.

Otto de Vries, the head of the Association of Southern African Travel Agents, disputed the government's figures on trafficking.

"If you are going to implement policy that is this unique in the world, you would have taken the time to find out exactly how serious the situation is," he said.

Following are three of the many issues raised by ASATA, SATSA and BARSAs, surrounding the new visa requirements:

Issue 1: Must unabridged birth certificates be translated into English?

According to the organisations this requirement is unclear because "the Standard Operating Procedures V5 issued by Home Affairs makes no mention thereof and the brochure issued by DHA one month prior to the implementation of these regulations is ambiguous and unclear, raising more questions than answers".

Issue 2: How many children are being trafficked in South Africa?

Frost said the figure of 30 000 children being trafficked annually was produced by Roxanne Williams from Operation Mobilisation and has been confirmed as a misquoting.

"Stats produced by SAPS on the actual number of children going missing in SA every year are not even 2% of this estimate. If the number of SA children being trafficked is so high, why has there not been an increase in the number of missing children reported to SAPS?"

"Surely, their parents would have reported it? Most trafficking occurs within South Africa, i.e. it is internal and not across borders. Porous borders into and out of SA have been noted as a means for trafficking children across borders."

Issue 3: How prepared is the DHA to roll out new regulations?

According to the tourism bodies there are "large gaps in the Standard Operating Procedures, which are further confused by the inconsistent statements being made by DHA officials on what is required, is not required".

They have also called into question how DHA will clear the backlog of outstanding birth certificates.

"As of 18 May 2015, the backlog of applications still within the 6 to 8 week turnaround time amounted to 5 674".

Amnesty International says Libya a very cruel place now

By Pete Uduchi

Rights group Amnesty International says torture and humiliation of Africans and Christians are so rampant in today's Libya the entire situation beggars belief.

Migrants and refugees in Libya, says Amnesty, face indefinite detention at immigration detention centres in dire conditions where they face rampant torture and other ill-treatment. Most are detained for irregular entry and similar offences. Those captured on boats that are intercepted by the Libyan coastguard while making the journey to Europe are also detained at such centres. Women held in these centres have also reported sexual harassment and sexual violence.

In a scathing 30-page reported titled "Libya is full of cruelty: Stories of abduction, sexual violence and abuse from migrants and refugees", reveals a macabre picture for migrants and refugees mainly from sub-Saharan Africa. It tells of beatings and assault and humiliation of victims ranging from pregnant women and their children to the handicapped and those who don't share their religion, especially Christians.

One pregnant woman who spoke to Amnesty, said she witnessed the beating death of another pregnant woman while in detention.. Many women are raped and sexually harassed.

Charles, from Nigeria, is a former resident of Libya. He told the London-based human rights organisation that he was forced to flee to Europe by boat last month after being kidnapped and beaten and humiliated a number of times by members of a criminal gang in the coastal city of Zuwara. He had gone there to escape indiscriminate shelling and fighting in Tripoli after the fall of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi. He went on: "In Zuwara, sometimes young men would come to our house to steal our money. They would come with guns. As a black man, I cannot go to complain to the police. I went to complain at the police station twice but they did not believe me. They refused to listen to me. They call us slaves. I am a Christian and that's why the men would always come to our house and attack us. We were three Christian Nigerians living in the same house ... In October 2014 four men kidnapped me ... because they saw I



Gadafi in good times

was carrying a bible." The men devoid Charles of his phone and money and detained him for two days torturing and assaulting him until he managed to flee through a window.

Horror stories like this coming out of Libya are legion, notes Phil Luther, Middle East and Africa Director for Amnesty International. "The ghastly conditions for migrants, coupled with spiralling lawlessness and armed conflicts raging within the country, make clear just how dangerous life in Libya is today. Such horror stories about the dangers driving migrants and refugees to flee Libya highlight the continuing desperate need to save lives in the Mediterranean. European leaders must ensure that refugees and migrants fleeing conflict and human rights abuses are never pushed back to Libya," added Phil Luther.

Amnesty says migrants and refugees face abuses at every level in Libya; from the smuggling trade which takes people from the country's coast to Europe to those Africans considered either illegal or legal in the country before the fall of Gaddafi. Many, including women and unaccompanied children, have been abducted on their journeys and tortured to coerce them and their families to pay ransoms. Those unable to pay are often held effectively as slaves - forced to work without pay, physically assaulted and robbed. Smugglers also sometimes pass the migrants and refugees on to criminal groups once they cross the border in desert areas or in major

transit cities along the migration route such as Sabha in the south-west or the coastal city of Ajdabya in eastern Libya.

Migrants and refugees interviewed by Amnesty said smugglers saw them "as slaves" and treated them "like animals". One said the smugglers kept them in a dirty overcrowded room with no toilet, blankets or mattresses and fed them only dried morsels of bread. "It is effectively a business that they are running. They detain you so that you have to pay ... If you don't answer their questions, they beat you ... with rubber pipes," one man said.

Some migrants and refugees said they were ill-treated by smugglers while held in partly-constructed houses in Libya for periods of up to three months waiting for more passengers to be gathered. They said smugglers withheld food and water and beat them with sticks or stole their possessions. Among the Africans were Syrians fleeing their country due to the ongoing war there. They too complained to Amnesty that they were transported in poorly ventilated refrigerator trucks. The children among them were later resuscitated.

The African Union has lodged its feelings with the United Nations and has asked the international community to do something about these atrocities, especially the plight of women and their children; not to mention the harassment of people just because of their religion. Complicating the Libyan terrain is the presence of ISIL, who recently, beheaded Ethiopian and Egyptian Christians just for being who they are. At a recent Brussels summit the European Council announced plans to increase resources for Mediterranean search and rescue operations, also saying it would intensify efforts to identify, capture and destroy vessels before their use by smugglers. If implemented, this could lead to thousands of migrants and refugees being trapped in Libya itself. Luther says "the commitment made by EU leaders to deploy more resources for search and rescue is a welcome step, but more people will continue to drown in the Mediterranean Sea unless rescue vessels are delivered promptly, deployed in areas where they are needed most - where most calls for help come from - and remain available for as long as high numbers of refugees and migrants continue to depart from Libya. Introducing measures to tackle smugglers without providing safe alternative routes out for the people desperate to flee conflict in Libya, will not resolve the plight of migrants and refugees".

Emmy awards to be hosted by Egyptian doctor

Egyptian heart surgeon turned award-winning television show host Bassem Youssef will be hosting the 43rd International Emmy Awards in New York, the event organisers said on Monday. "I am extremely honored to be chosen following the footsteps of incredibly funny and distinguished comedians like John Oliver and Matt Lucas who hosted the ceremony in the last two years," Youssef said, in a press release by the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, which organises the annual awards gala.

Youssef gained popularity shortly after the January 2011 uprising which toppled former President Hosni Mubarak, starting off with Youtube episodes and later hosting a widely popular live audience show.

Bruce L. Paisner, President and CEO of the International Academy of Television Arts &

Sciences described Youssef as "a comedic force and important political commentator around the world," adding that while the satirist has "been dubbed the Jon Stewart of the Arab world but in fact his talent has no borders."

The stairist has been critical of consequent regimes that have taken charge in Egypt and his show has faced several hurdles, before eventually being suspended since June 2014.

Despite this, Youssef and his off-air show *Albernameg* reaped the silver medal at the 2015 New York Festivals, World's Best TVs and Films, last month.

As the first person from the Middle East to host the Emmy's, Youssef said this places "more



Bassem Youssef

responsibility" on him to serve the position in the best way he can, adding "and I hope that this will shed more light on the vibrant entertainment industry in my region."

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Obama daughter offer challenged

A woman has asked a lawyer to withdraw his offer to marry US President Barack Obama's daughter saying she has always been "fascinated" by him.

Ann Kioko, 27, said she has followed lawyer Felix Matagei on Twitter and sent him a friend request on Facebook which he is yet to accept.

In a letter to the lawyer on Sunday, Kioko said she was impressed by his good looks that she said other men lack.

"I took time to go through your pictures. I got smitten by one in which you have some good-looking, seemingly designer lipstick on," she said.

"I have been looking for that shade to no avail. The more the reason I am very unhappy that all that expertise is going to Malia (Obama)."

Kioko asked Matagei to consider her application saying they can give Obama an explanation when he comes to Kenya in July.

Matagei who is "interested" in Malia said the 50 cows, 70 sheep and 30 goats he proposed were a "booking offer", according to the Kalenjin customary law.

Kioko who hails from Weru, Nyandarua District said they can instead start a business of exporting milk.

"I am a very hardworking woman and within no time we will build our own white house," she said.

Matagei's admirer said they have a big shamba where all the livestock can be grazed sufficiently.

"We are located near Lake Ol poloisat so they will never lack water and just a few meters down is a cattle dip. They will be very well taken care of," she said.

Matagei, a student at Oxford University, offered the livestock to the First Family in order to fulfill his "dream of marrying Malia".

"I have never fallen in love with any minor, I only like the first family... period! My Kalenjin customary law is consistent to justice and morality," he said on his Facebook page last Thursday evening.

He however said his interest in Obama's daughter began during the US presidential campaign in 2008 when she was just 10 years old.

The lawyer asked Kenyan authorities to grant Obama dual American-Kenyan nationality and present him with his citizenship when he arrives.

Darfurs conflict deepens, reports say

Violence in Sudan's Darfur has surged to levels not seen in a decade, with more than 150,000 people driven from their homes this year alone. The region's long-suffering residents are also bearing the brunt of a measles epidemic.

It is a conflict to which the international community appears to have no answer and which risks being overshadowed by other crises in East Africa and beyond. The humanitarian and security challenges are vast. Darfur's war began in 2003 with a rebellion by tribes complaining of political and economic marginalisation

against the Arab-dominated government of President Omar al-Bashir. Khartoum's counter-insurgency campaign has relied heavily on locally-recruited Arab militias who have been accused of mass killings of civilians in non-Arab areas suspected of supporting the rebels. According to the UN, the conflict has left as many as 300,000 people dead and displaced another 2.5 million. Over the years, the conflict has grown increasingly complex, with rebel movements splintering into numerous rival factions - some of which made peace, at least temporarily - and Arab groups turning against each other and the central government in ethnic disputes often linked to land rights and political power.

After years of failed international peace initiatives, and the indictment of Bashir by the International Criminal Court for crimes including genocide, the conflict has intensified since 2013 with the government launching dry-season offensives against the rebels in Darfur as well as the neighbouring Kordofan region.

Surging violence

This year, government troops, including former militias now called Rapid Support Forces, have attacked numerous settlements in purported rebel strongholds including the Jebel Marra mountains.

Recent media reports show scores of civilians sheltering in caves in the mountains, and telling of an aerial bombardment near the village of Golo in January that left an unknown number of people dead and others wounded.

In May, the government paraded trucks piled high with weapons they said were seized from the rebel Justice and Equality Movement after a major battle in the Tulus area of South Darfur on 26 April.

There have also been several major tribal clashes.

Most recently, fighting broke out on 11 May between Ma'aliya and Reizegat tribesmen near the town of Abu Karinka in East Darfur state over a long-running land dispute. The battles reportedly left hundreds of dead and wounded and displaced thousands. The two Arab tribes have clashed repeatedly in recent years, despite mediation efforts. Hundreds were killed and thousands displaced by fighting between the two groups in the same area last year.

In North Darfur state, a series of deadly attacks this year has fomented tensions between the Berti and Zayadia tribes and displaced thousands more people. Berti student leaders reportedly suspect Musa Hilal, a prominent Arab militia chief, of stirring trouble in the province. Hilal is a political rival to North Darfur's Berti governor, Osman Mohamed Yousif Kibir, who stands accused of recruiting an ethnic militia of his own.

Displacement

In all, about 430,000 people have been displaced in Darfur since the start of 2014, bringing the total in the region to 2.5 million, according to the UN. Some 1.5 million of those are children. About 3.1 million people are displaced in Sudan as a whole.

Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur have little prospect of returning to their homes.

Aristide Nononsi, the UN independent expert on human rights in Sudan, said after visiting Darfur in May that the displaced lived in fear of armed groups and criminality.

While most IDPs want to go back to their homelands, "many interlocutors whom I met, in particular in North and South Darfur states, remain anxious about the security situation in their areas of origin... as well as the restoration of sustainable peace in the region," Nononsi said in a statement.

The fighting around Abu Karinka reportedly saw more than 650 homes burned, and an estimated 24,000 families displaced. Hundreds more families fled with their livestock to neighbouring North Kordofan state before violence broke out, according to the UN's humanitarian coordination body, OCHA.

"The victims are in need of water, food, shelter and medicines," East Darfuri humanitarian aid commissioner Abdu Abdelmahmound said on May 15.

According to UNICEF, the UN children's agency, more than 9,000 new IDPs had arrived in the Mellit locality alone as a result of the fighting between the Berti and Zayadia tribes. It said it was also assisting new IDPs in seven other locations in North Darfur. According to OCHA, about 1.5 million of those displaced in Darfur live in camps or "camp-like settings."

"The provision of basic services in these locations, relative to the rest of Darfur, is mostly adequate," Damien Rance, a spokesman for OCHA in Khartoum, told IRIN. "The quality of basic service delivery however has deteriorated over the years as the number of displaced peo-

ple continues to grow, fewer NGOs remain to deliver these services, reduced funding is being channelled to these services, and the political interest of the international community wanes."

Access

A long-standing problem facing humanitarian agencies in Darfur has been access to vulnerable populations, particularly in active conflict zones. After the violence in Abu Karinka, for example, OCHA said humanitarian partners were standing by to move food, emergency shelters and household items. However, authorities have denied UNAMID - the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur - access to the town to carry out an assessment.

"The government has said that, at this stage, it is providing all of the aid that is required," OCHA's Rance said. "The international humanitarian community stands ready, willing and able to assist."

More broadly, OCHA said that access restrictions and insecurity had prevented it and its partners from verifying the situation of 92,000 of those reportedly displaced by recent fighting, including in the Jebel Marra mountains.

Food Security

Militias allied with the government have long been accused of adopting "scorched-earth" tactics, destroying homes and livelihoods in rebel strongholds and thus contributing to high levels of malnutrition.

According to UNICEF, some two million Sudanese children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition, of which 550,000 are severely malnourished and at risk of death.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which resumed work in Sudan in September after an eight-month suspension, recently appealed to donors for more funds so that it could expand its operations in Darfur.

"The ongoing conflict is still taking a heavy toll on civilians," said Eric Marclay, ICRC's head of operations for East Africa. "We want to assist both the displaced and host communities directly... seed and tools are needed now to prepare for the next planting season. The additional funding will also finance medical care and the building of water and sanitation facilities." According to UNICEF, frequent population displacement and high rates of malnutrition as well as very low vaccination rates contributed to an outbreak of measles in April. The disease has since reached epidemic levels in 14 states, prompting UNICEF to launch a nationwide vaccination campaign. Of the 35 reported deaths so far, 25 have occurred in Darfur.

UNICEF country representative Geert Cappelaere said about 50,000 children are being deprived of humanitarian aid, including essential vaccines, in the Jebel Marra area.

"Because of conflict, we have not been able to access the population in some areas for the last four years," Cappelaere told Voice of America. "So, we have there a massive group of children that are unvaccinated and may be one of the causes of the outbreak of measles we are having today."

The UN's 2015 response plan for Sudan seeking about US\$1 billion is just 28 percent funded, leaving huge gaps in areas including security and livelihoods assistance. UNICEF said its Sudan 2015 appeal was only 14 percent funded.

Humanitarian agencies also face a vastly diminished operational capacity since the government expelled more than a dozen international aid groups in 2009. According to OCHA's Rance, the number of aid workers in Darfur has fallen from 17,700 before the expulsions to just 5,540 in November last year.

"This decline in skilled workers obviously leads to a significant capacity deficit, particularly when seen against that fact that we have seen more new displacement in 2014 than in any single year since 2004. Accordingly, the ability to deliver adequate levels of basic humanitarian services has been adversely affected," Rance said. The prospects for an end to the conflict appear bleak. While President Bashir, who was elected to another five-year term in April, has said he will launch a national dialogue after his inauguration, it remains unclear which members of the opposition and rebel movements will take part.

Analysts and opponents say Bashir's apparent divide-and-rule policies in Darfur, which have seen the region divided into five provinces, are unlikely to change.

"These policies have destroyed the social fabric in the western region, which has led to the numerous violent conflicts between tribes, in particular the Arab tribes," said Yousef Hussein of the Sudanese Communist Party. "The government now holds Darfur hostage."

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Nigerian Oshoala wins BBC Women's Footballer of the Year Award

Nigerian striker, Asisat Oshoala, has made history by winning the BBC's maiden Women's Footballer of the Year award.



**Asisat Oshoala
First BBC female award winner**

The reigning African Women's Footballer of the Year saw off the challenge from other contenders which included Spain's Veronica Boquete, Germany's Nadine Kessler and Scotland's Kim Little and Brazilian forward, Marta, to win the top prize.

The 20-year-old is already in Canada where she will be representing Nigeria at the FIFA Women's World Cup.

Oshoala was also with Nigeria at the under-20 World Cup in Canada last summer, winning the golden boot for the tournament's top scorer before going on to win the MVP at the Africa Women's Championships in Namibia.

Interestingly, another Nigerian, Super Eagles' captain, Vincent Enyeama, was in the run to win the male version of the BBC award but he lost out to Algerian Yahcin Barhimi.

Women's World Cup: Canada wins opener against China

Canada took a 1-0 lead in the opener of their group A match against China at the FIFA Women's World Cup played in Edmonton. It was a nail-biter from start to finish in a first-time record capacity crowd for any gender-football in Canada. A late goal from Christine Sinclair put Canada ahead, and also shows why she is Canada's best female soccer player. It seemed Sinclair had an entire nation's pressure on her shoulders, judging from the battle at the Commonwealth Stadium.

The match was tied 0-0 going into injury time, when Canada's Adriana Leon was fouled by Rong Zhao in the box, giving the home team the opportunity to win the game with a penalty kick.

"When the call came, I celebrated it like we just scored because I knew there was one woman who would step up in the 90th minute and write the script like she always does," said head coach John Herdman. "And she did."

As soon as she saw referee Kateryna Monzul make the call, Sinclair said the first thought that went through her head was that she had to be the one to take the kick.

"I've been practising my whole life for that moment," she said. "The next thing that went through my head

was, 'man, the fans are really loud right now'." Just like she did during a penalty kick against China in a January tournament six months earlier,



A loud stadium cheered Canada women on to victory

Sinclair tucked the ball into the bottom left corner, giving the Canadians a crucial three points in their first group match of the tournament. The anxious crowd roared as soon as the ball crossed the goal-line, while Sinclair began sprinting toward the bench, where Herdman was celebrating.

"I'd be lying to you if I said I wasn't nervous," Sinclair said. "Opening game of the World Cup in front of 50-some-odd thousand fans with a game on the line? Yeah, it's nerve-racking, but I live for those moments."

Up until that point, Canada had been frustrated by a China team that was content in letting the home squad keep sole possession of the ball and come to them. Their boxed defence stymied the Canadians for much of the game. When the Canadians did manage some scoring chances over 90 minutes, they couldn't get the ball past 'keeper Wei Fang.

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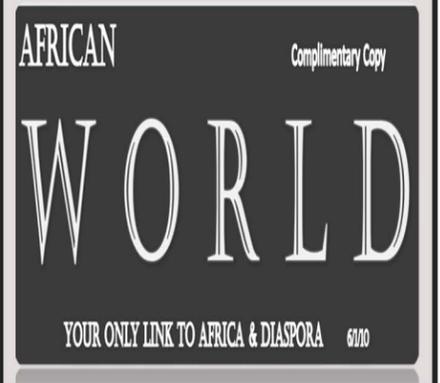
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