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## Ilhan Omar, first African-born and female Muslim elected to US Congress

She arrived in the United States as a refugee with her parents from Somalia. But today she has just been elected to the US Congress representing a Minnesota district.

Ilhan Omar, became the first female Muslim and African-born to be elected to the US House of Representatives beating conservative activist Jennifer Zielinski.

Omar joins a myriad of "firsts" to emerge in the November 6 midterm elections in the United States; among them the first openly gay governorship candidate Jared Polis who won in Colorado, and first two Native Americans elected to congress.

Omar belongs to the Democratic Farmer

Labour Party wing of the Democratic party under which she was first elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 2016. A fervent critic of Israel, calling it an "apartheid regime", she says those who call her anti-Semitic have no clue of the difference between criticising the policies of the Israeli government and hating Jewish people, in effect saying she does not hate Jewish people but detests the policies of the Israeli state against Palestinians. "Even Jewish people criticise the policies of the Israeli government," she said, stressing that criticisms



against her "are rooted in bigotry toward a belief about what Muslims are stereotyped to believe."

By Peter Uduehi

## France's World Cup win stirs debate on anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe

*This story was first published in Now Toronto Magazine and originally written by African World's Peter Uduehi...*

**"The old right in Europe was not against immigrants because they provided cheap labour, but the alt-right is interested only in stirring fear to get into power."**

In the face of growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States and parts of Europe, France's national team triumphed in the recently concluded World Cup with a squad composed mostly of players whose families are originally from Africa.

Blaise Matuidi, Thomas Lemar, Steven Nzonzi, Kylian Mbappé, Nabil Fekir, Paul Pogba, Samuel Umtiti, Steve Mandanda and Corentin Tolisso are the children of African immigrants who found a new home in France.

There are others among the team, like Olivier Giroud and Antoine Griezmann, whose parents emigrated from other parts of Europe to France. In fact, only two in the starting lineup - Benjamin Pavard and Florian Thauvin - can lay claim to being full-blooded Frenchmen.

It's the second time France has won the World Cup with a similar composition of immigrants' sons having raised the trophy with the great Zinedine Zidane as captain in 1998. Zidane's background is Algerian.

"It is not only in sport that immigrants show their mettle and ability to excel. In almost every sphere of human endeavour, immigrants make immense contributions to their new environment," notes Paul Dillon, managing editor of the media and communications division at the Geneva, Switzerland-based International Organization for Migration, which provides services and advice on immigration to governments and migrants, including internally displaced persons, refugees and migrant workers.

"I am Canadian from Quebec, and my parents were immigrants, too," says Dillon. "I can tell you that Canada and America and many European nations will not be what they are today without the im-

mense work and flourishing of the cultures that have contributed to their successes. You don't have to look too far to find examples that immigration brings a net benefit to a country, not just in sports."

According to the Inter Press Service (IPS), a non-profit news agency specializing in globalization, development and aid, statistics from almost every country in Europe - including countries where anti-immigrant parties are on the rise - reveal the significant contributions immigrants make to the economy.

Yet, myths about immigration persist.

"The old right," notes IPS founder Roberto Savio in a recent news report, "was not against immigrants, because they provided cheap labour. It was mildly nationalist but was never xenophobic (Jews apart). The alternative right is not interested in statistics and economics. It is interested only in stirring fear, to get to power."

In its own 2016 study, the U.S.-based management consulting giant McKinsey Global Institute makes the following observations: "The movement of people to regions where they can be more productive boosts output; many of the world's leading destinations are also aging societies that can benefit from the labour-force growth and improved old-age dependency ratios that an influx of immigrants can bring."

The report goes on to say that the benefits of immigration "have ripple effects that persist well into the second and third generations. Yet policy discussions surrounding immigration in many countries tend to focus on determining the right numbers and mix of people to admit rather than finding the right formula for integration."

By 2015, migrants produced 2.5 trillion dollars in the U.S. economy, 2.3 trillion dollars in Western Europe and generally increased the GDP of coun-



France striker Kylian Mbappé

tries around the world by some 9.4 per cent. The institute's study also emphasizes that proper integration makes new immigrants less burdensome to society, and figures across the board show that immigrant populations are more employed than native-born and commit less crime.

"Statistics generally also favour migrants in the area of crime," says Dillon. "There are studies pointing to these facts contrary to what some people want others to believe. It is true in Sweden, Finland and the United States."

The cynics, however, continue to be egged on by opportunistic politicians selling fake nationalism, in particular U.S. president Donald Trump, whose abusive rhetoric against migrants is well known.

Trump criticized the European Union policy on immigration on his trip there recently, saying migration is "a very negative thing for Europe. You are changing culture," he warned.

Early this year, Trump said Africans in the United States "come from shithole countries," even while African immigrants in the U.S. account for 57 per cent of university graduates and are actually the most educated ethnic group in the American workforce.

On the opening day of his campaign for president in 2016, he lashed out at Mexicans as criminals, saying "they bring in crime."

But recent figures released by the Public Policy Institute of California show that people born outside the United States make up about 35 per cent of California's adult population but account for about 17 per cent of the adult prison population.

Critics of immigration, says Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina, are not only perverted by bigotry, but a hatred for poor people. According to Cortina, "football players, artists and rich people, even those who are Muslims, like princes, are most welcome in Europe. Those who are not welcome are the poor."

And almost all of the African-born footballers on the victorious French team will tell you that their immigrant parents, too, were once very poor.

# Are investigative journalists facing more threats in Africa?

Anonymous threats. Police harassment. Hostile officials. The constant, hovering cloud of self-censorship, social exclusion and forced exile. And to top it all off: low pay.

Welcome to the life of a typical African investigative journalist.

In recent years, intrepid African reporters have played a key role in uncovering corruption, human rights abuses, gang violence, drug and wildlife crimes, and other unsavory dealings; but, says South African journalism professor Anton Harber, that's come at a cost.

"There's a tale of repression, assassination, harassment, jailing," he told VOA. "It's pretty rough out there."

Each year since 2004, the professor has hosted a conference that brings hundreds of African investigative journalists to Johannesburg to talk about the business and make connections. Even among the hardcore crowd, Muno Gedi stands out.

She's an investigative journalist in what is possibly the world's toughest dateline: Mogadishu, Somalia's unstable capital. Gedi writes about topics like the traditional practice of female genital mutilation, the sale of international food aid in refugee camps, and the ongoing, relentless conflict between Somali clans and militant groups.

Gedi says she often receives threats, many of them anonymous.

"I think the investigative journalism in the world is always risky, especially Somalia; it is a risky area," she said. "So when you work for the investigative journalism in Somalia, it's not easy."

Reporters without Borders says Somalia is the deadliest country for reporters in sub-Saharan Africa, with two journalists killed this year in connection with their work.

In Tanzania, the Committee to Protect Journalists says the government has in the last three years implemented harsh legislation and harassed journalists and bloggers.

Newspaper journalist Kelvin Matandiko says he feels that every day.

"It's a shock to different journalists who were experienced in working in free areas like Tanzania," he told VOA. "But the current political regime has come with new changes and I don't know what is the reason behind this, but we believe that this is to kill our media industry."

It all comes down to integrity, says Premium Times publisher Dapo Olorunyomi. And in his notoriously corrupt country of Nigeria, Olorunyomi says that sometimes means shining a light on the threats that come from within journalism itself. He pointed to the recent terminations or proposed dismissals of 15 VOA Hausa service employees after an investigation found they had accepted improper payments from a top Nigerian official.

He says that's what makes investigative journalism so hard: The truth trumps all, even when the truth hurts.

"Nigerians are really very upset about that, I must let you know," he said. "Especially for those who are doing their jobs daily, trying to hold public officials accountable in Nigeria. That's a difficult job in itself, not to add this kind of embarrassing situation to it. So we are generally upset about it, but I think VOA management has also done what it must do. It was the right thing to do."

Journalism professor Harber said one of the most worrying threats to journalism lies far beyond Africa's borders. Just this week, U.S. President Donald Trump described what he called the "fake news media" as the "true enemy of the people." American and international media houses have widely refuted and condemned these statements. Harber says these words resonate globally. "There's no question that dictators or potential dictators here cite things being said in places like Washington to support the view that things need to be done about the media and the way they behave."

Gedi, Matandiko and Olorunyomi laughed when asked why they like such difficult, thankless work. But then they all paused, and gave some version of the same answer: Because, they said, people deserve the truth.

## Ghana must do more to fight floods rather than just coping with them

Ghana has a serious flood problem. Over about 50 years, 4 million people have been affected by floods, resulting in economic damage exceeding USD\$780 million. At least one major flood disaster has occurred every year over the past 10 years.

Floods are not uncommon in West Africa. Rainfall variability and land use changes have made them increasingly common throughout the region.

In Ghana's urban areas, like Accra and Kumasi, floods are mostly triggered by seasonal rainfall combined with poor drainage, the dumping of waste into waterways and the low elevation of settlements. In northern Ghana, some floods are caused by spillage from a dam in Burkina Faso.

The floods expose communities to health risks, food shortages and mental stress.

The problem is Ghana's government currently reacts to the floods using coping strategies. These don't deal with the underlying risks, are expensive and don't consider that floods will get worse. The government must take steps towards more proactive flood risk management.

**Reactive strategies**

After every flood, the country's national disaster management organisation - along with the military, police, and other emergency personnel - is deployed for rescue and emergency relief.

The government then repairs damaged infrastructure, clears waterways and demolishes properties built close to drainage channels.

The problem is this doesn't deal with the underlying causes of the floods, or prepare people for them. Money that could go towards future prevention is instead spent on perpetual cycles of recovery.

These coping strategies will get more costly because the flood risk is set to get worse. The amount of rainfall classified as "heavy" is projected to increase between 2010 and 2050, with the wet seasons projected to get wetter and the dry seasons drier.

This will be felt intensely in the urban areas as populations continue to grow. Already, about 40% of Accra is classified as "highly prone" to flooding. This will increase as, due to more building, less water will drain into the soil. The case for flood risk adaptation

The government needs to make the country more resilient and able to withstand the challenges posed by intense and frequent floods.

Ghana participates in a variety of adaptation programmes. Like the resilient cities network and the Africa Adaptation Program. But this hasn't translated into action.

The government has also taken on projects to protect against floods, but these are focused on the coastal areas. For example the Keta sea defence project.

The current greater Accra Metropolitan Area sanitation and water project is constructing drains and culverts in Accra. But this isn't a major part of the project.

Much more needs to be done. Ghana must fully transition from coping strategies, to proactive, long-term measures. These include:

Structural flood protection measures - like storm drains or levees. These need to be constructed to protect all at risk areas, and not just the coastal areas

Improve early warning systems to ensure timely flood risk alerts. This

should include; a 24 hour monitoring and warning service during peak rain seasons and an education program to help communities understand the risk, respect the warnings and know how to respond

Social protection - like affordable social housing - which will move more people out of informal settlements built in flood prone zones

Strategies aimed at improving the natural environment - for example, creating riparian buffer zones that protect and expand wetlands so that vegetation slows and absorbs flood waters

Encourage households to adapt and advise on actions they can take, like using more water resistant building materials

Restore lagoons and rivers

Proper waste management. Ghana has a huge solid waste problem. Poor disposal of solid waste often leads to the blocking of drains and drainage systems, preventing flood waters from flowing through.

Moving homes and businesses out of flood prone locations. They can choose to do this, or the government can facilitate it by buying out at-risk properties

Build new homes on elevated ground or foundations

Strict planning to avoid construction in flood-prone areas

Deal with spillage from dams by building canals that channel the water. These can be dammed and the water used for irrigation.

The initial cost of adaptation measures will be expensive, but it will pay off. Research shows that for every US\$1 spent on flood risk reduction, it saves at least US\$4 to US\$9 otherwise spent in an emergency response when disaster occurs. The Netherlands is a classic example of a country that has taken flood risk adaptation seriously. A quarter of the country is below sea level and 60% of its people in flood-risk areas but the measures it has taken have reduced the likelihood of major flooding.

Ghana can take advantage of predictions and past experiences of floods to aggressively pursue flood risk adaptation. Failure to do this will increase flood disasters, and social and economic disruptions.



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# What's the real cost for a plate of food around the world?

Geneva — How much would you expect to pay for the most basic plate of food? The kind of thing you might whip up at home - nothing fancy, just enough to fill you up and meet a third of today's calorie needs. A soup, maybe, or a simple stew - some beans or lentils, a handful of rice, bread, or corn?

In the rich Global North - say, in New York State, USA -



such a meal would cost almost nothing to make: 0.6 percent of the average daily income, or US\$1.20.

In parts of the developing world, by contrast, food affordability can shrink to the point of absurdity: in South Sudan, a country born out of war and disintegrating into more war, the meal-to-income ratio is 300 times that of industrialized countries.

It is, in other words, as if a New Yorker had to pay nearly US\$348.36 for the privilege of cooking and eating that plate of food.

How do people in South Sudan afford it? It's simple. They don't.

This is not a unique issue to South Sudan. Across the board, food is becoming ever less affordable in poorer countries that are subject to political instabilities.

Lack of access to food, and the costliness of it, have many causes: climate extremes, natural disasters, post-harvest losses, or bad governance, all of which can damage- or even shatter- farming supply chains and markets.

But, one overriding cause stands out: conflict. At WFP, we've long known that hunger and war are tragically symbiotic. Which makes it that much harder to eradicate the one without ending the other.

The 2018 edition of WFP's Counting the Beans: The True Cost of a Plate of Food Around the World index, now spanning 52 countries, underscores this clear correlation between food affordability costs and political stability and security.

The index looks at whether food costs for the original 33 countries analyzed in 2017 have risen or fallen, and compares costs for the same meal in some of the world's poorest places with one of its richest, by using a New York baseline to highlight vast gaps in global food affordability.

In many countries, it was found that food affordability measured in this way has actually improved since 2017. This is situational, thanks to strong economic growth, political stability, and/or a better rainy season- or in the case of southern Africa- humanitarian assistance helping to offset the effects of severe drought.

Though despite such progress made in many countries through the past year, food costs are often still intensely disproportionate in relation to income. This is the case across much of Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and, to a lesser degree, of Latin America.

Among the countries surveyed for the study, Peru tops the list with the most affordable plate at the NY equivalent of US\$ 3.44, just 1.6 percent of per capita income, vs. what that same plate would cost in New York, amounting to 0.6 percent of per capita income.

While Laos and Jordan are close runners-up to Peru, other countries have deteriorated. Almost invariably, these are nations where peace has been (further) eroded by violence, insecurity or political tension, including South Sudan- where the cost of a plate of food has soared from the exorbitant 155 percent of daily income in 2016 (USD \$321.70) to 201.7 percent of daily income in 2018 (USD \$348.36).

It now costs twice the national daily income to buy a plate of food in South Sudan. Northeast Nigeria took second to last place, at USD \$222.05, or 128.6 percent of daily income in 2018, up from USD \$200.32, or 121 percent of daily income in 2016.

These abysmal numbers highlight the vast gaps in global food affordability, where 821 million people go hungry while elsewhere one can get a simple nutritious meal with a just a handful of change.

The fact that this still occurs defies both reason and de-

ciency, and it's why we - the World Food Programme and other humanitarian partners - are there.

However, the impact of WFP and other humanitarian actors in saving and changing lives cannot be sustained without political investment, good governance, transparent markets, and wider partnerships.

Societies cannot lift themselves out of the poverty trap if families are continuously priced out of providing their children with the nutritional meals essential for them to develop into healthy and productive adults, if climate degradation continues to threaten food security and development gains, and if protracted conflicts continue to destroy societies and force young talent elsewhere.

With a concerted global effort, the international community can achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and end hunger and malnutrition. Governments must engage with and support their developing country counterparts in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and disaster risk reduction.

The private sector must embrace that turning a profit can go hand in hand with advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through employing young people to boost incomes, sourcing from smallholder farms, and through working alongside leaders to strengthen supply chains.

The shocking and outraging numbers in this year's "Counting the Beans" index highlight that peaceful societies and affordable food go hand in hand. We have the modern technological capacities to end world hunger, but first we must end the conflict that fosters it.

Together, we can work towards reversing the figures in this year's index, and ensure that in the future, nobody will have to work a day and a half to afford a simple meal.

## New verdict on organic foods – policy works

Rome — Many countries and farmers around the world are not readily making the switch to organic farming. But the small Himalayan mountain state of Sikkim, which borders Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, is the first 100 percent organic farming state in the world.

Earlier this month, Sikkim, won the Future Policy Award 2018 (FPA) for being the first state in the world to declare itself, in 2015, 100 percent organic.

Its path towards becoming completely organic started in 2003, when Chief Minister Pawan Chamling announced the political vision to make Sikkim "the first organic state of India". The FPA, also known as the 'Oscar for Best Policies' is organised every year by the World Future Council (WFC). The aim of the FPA is to investigate solutions to the challenges in today's world. The WFC looks at which policies have a holistic and long-term outlook, and which protect the rights of future generations. And once a year the WFC awards showcases the very best of them. This year, in cooperation with IFOAM-Organics International (IFOAM) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the FPA decided to focus on the best policies to scale up agroecology. In 2004, one year after the vision was announced, Sikkim adopted its Policy on Organic Farming and in 2010, the state launched the Organic Mission, an action plan to implement the policy. In 2015, thanks to strong political coherence and strategy planning, the goal was achieved.

Among the noteworthy measures adopted by Sikkim during that decade, the fact that 80 percent of the budget between 2010 and 2014 was intended to build the capacity of farmers, rural service providers and certification bodies. The budget also supported farmers in acquiring certifications, and had various measures to provide farmers with quality organic seeds. Best practices on agroecology: Denmark's Organic Action Plan.

The WFC has also rewarded other government policies with Silver Awards, Vision Awards and Honourable Mentions. Among the Silver awardees was Denmark's Organic Action Plan, which has become a popular policy planning tool in European countries over the last decade. Almost 80 percent of Danes purchase organic food and today the country has the highest organic market share in the world (13 percent).

"What has made Danish consumers among the most enthusiastic organic consumers [in the world], is that we have done a lot of consumer information and we have worked strategically with the supermarkets to place organics as part of their strategy to appeal to consumers on the value of food, putting more value into food through

organics," Paul Holmbeck, Political Director of 'Organic Denmark', told IPS. The importance of being organic and agroecological. The policies of Sikkim and Denmark, as well as those of Ecuador and Brazil -- countries that also received Silver Awards -- are steps towards a world where agroecology becomes widespread and practiced globally. In fact, to conceive cultivated land as ecosystems themselves, in which every living and nonliving component affects every other component, is vital to obtain not only healthy and organic food, but also to preserve our environment.

Indeed, it would be a mistake to think that having organic products on our tables necessarily means having solved all problems related to intensive agriculture and to the damages on the environment.

"Agroecology is one approach that applies ecological concepts and principles to food and farm systems, focusing on the interaction between micro-organisms, plants, animals, humans and the environment, to foster sustainable agriculture development, in order to ensure food security and nutrition for all, now and in the future," Maria Helena Semedo, FAO Deputy Director General, told IPS. "It is based on co-creation of knowledge, sharing and innovation, combining local, traditional, indigenous practices with multi-disciplinary science." According to the report, The World of Organic Agriculture 2018 -

Statistics and Emerging Trends, released earlier this year and authored by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM, 57.8 million hectares (ha) worldwide were farmed organically in 2016. This is an increase of 7.5 million ha (or 13 percent) compared to the previous year. In 2016, the share of land dedicated to organic farmland increased across the globe: Europe (6.7 percent increase), Asia (34 percent increase), Africa (7 percent increase), Latin America (6 percent increase), North America (5 percent increase). Australia had the largest agricultural area farmed organically (27.2 million ha), followed by Argentina (3 million ha), and China (2.3 million ha). In 2016, there were 2.7 million organic farmers.

Around 40 percent of whom live in Asia, followed by Africa (27 percent) and Latin America (17 percent). According to the report, the total area devoted in Asia to organic agriculture was almost 4.9 million ha in 2016 and there were 1.1 million organic producers in the region, with India being the country with the highest number of organic producers (835,000). So the success of Sikkim is not surprising considering that the Asian continent can be considered among the regions at the forefront of organic production.

However, favouring the scale up of agroecology, which includes producing organic products, is unfortunately not that simple. "To harness the multiple sustainability benefits that arise from agroecological approaches, as enabling environment is required, including adapted policies, public investments, institutions and research priorities," said Semedo. "However, this is not yet a reality in the majority of countries." Indeed, poverty, malnutrition, unfair distribution of wealth, decreasing of biodiversity, deterioration of natural resources like soil and water, and climate change are significant challenges in most countries.

Agriculture will become one of the greatest challenges, if not addressed properly. Therefore, moving towards more sustainable agriculture and food systems is certainly a potential part of the solution, not only for our health and wellness but for the planet itself.

"It's vital for everyone to be organic [and] for every person to eat organic because otherwise people would eat poison and basically writing a recipe for chronic diseases. It could be cancer [as well as] neurological problems," warned Vandana Shiva, a food and agriculture expert and member of the WFC, told IPS during the ceremony of the Future Policy Award 2018 at FAO headquarters in Rome this October.

"Organic is the only living solution to climate change. Chemical farming is a very big contributor to greenhouse gas emissions but organic farming takes the excess carbon out of the atmosphere and puts it in the soil," she added.

However, there seems to be a large consensus with the fact that the planet needs to move towards a more sustainable way of living and this is a reason for optimism.

"I'm very optimistic about organics [because] we are creating new solutions for climate and animal welfare, sustainability and good soil every single day," said Holmbeck. "Governments are starting to see that organic food policy works: it is good for farmers, for consumers and for the planet."

## News of theAFRICAN World

# Egypt kills Coptic Christian attackers



Nineteen Islamist militants accused of carrying out a deadly attack on Christians in Egypt have been killed by police, the interior ministry says.

They died in a shoot-out after police pursued "fugitive terrorist elements" into the desert area west of Minya province, the statement said.

Seven Coptic Christians were killed in an attack on two buses near a monastery in Minya on Friday.

The Islamic State (IS) group has said it carried out the attack.

It was the latest in a series of attacks by extremists on Egypt's Coptic Christian minority. The ministry said security forces had exchanged fire with "terrorist elements" they were pursuing, although it did not say exactly when the firefight happened.

The ministry posted images of bodies and a tent in which the militants were said to have been hiding. Guns, rifles and IS propaganda can be seen next to the bodies.

Friday's attack near the Monastery of St Samuel the Confessor in Minya also left at least seven other people wounded, including children, according to reports.

Funerals were held for the victims on Friday and Saturday, with many mourners expressing their anger.

"What do these terrorists want? Do they want us to hate Muslims?" said Michel, 23, who lost a neighbour in the attack.

The Copts, who make up most of the Christian minority, have in the past accused the authorities in Muslim-majority Egypt of making only token gestures to protect them from such attacks.

One at the same spot left 28 dead in May 2017.

Bloody protests erupted after President Bongo was officially declared the winner by a razor-thin margin. Mr Bongo, whose family has governed the west African nation for some 50 years, is currently being treated at a hospital in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh.

There has been no official news about the president's condition since an initial announcement 10 days ago that he was extremely tired and needed to rest.

After the 2016 poll, Gabon's opposition claimed the vote had been rigged and demanded a recount - but this was rejected by the country's constitutional court.

In its ruling, the court partially changed the results of the bitterly-fought election, giving President Bongo 50.66% of the vote and Mr Ping 47.24%.

## Mali thanks UN for peace

Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, whose West African country has benefitted from a 15,000-strong United Nations Stabilization Force (MINUSMA) to bring peace after Tuareg rebels and militant Islamists devastated its northern and central regions, mounted the General Assembly podium on Wednesday to thank the world Organization for "its immense and multi-dimensional" support. "This is the place to pay homage to the women and men of MINUSMA for their engagement and their sacrifice in a security situation that I know is complex and difficult," he told Heads of State and Government on the second day of the Assembly's annual general debate. MINUSMA was set up in 2013.

"I reiterate the profound gratitude of the people and Government of Mali towards the United Nations, our bilateral and multilateral partners, for their constant support in our emergence from crisis."

At the same time, he called for making the UN even more relevant and efficient for all by adopting reforms, including enlarging the 15-member Security Council, the only UN body whose decisions are legally binding, by increasing representation for African and other developing countries, and strengthening the powers of the 193-Member Assembly, whose decisions are non-binding.

On the domestic front, Mr. Keita noted that Mali continued on its path to stability with last month's presidential elections, in which he won a second term and which, despite all sorts of challenges were held in conditions hailed by the international community. He pledged to restore faith between the State and its citizens and highlighted the return of civil administration to northern areas that had been riven by conflict. He also noted his efforts to combat poverty, promote youth and invest in infrastructure, including road building, agriculture, water and energy projects, and affordable housing.

On the regional front, he called on the international community to provide adequate funding for the G5 Sahel, a military task force comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to fight terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. In the international domain Mr. Keita reiterated his support for the Global Compact on Migration, pledging that Mali will do its part in managing migratory flows.

## Gabon opposition leader reignites election row

Gabon's opposition leader Jean Ping has again claimed victory in elections held in 2016, as President Ali Bongo is being treated in a hospital abroad.

Speaking in Libreville, Mr Ping urged the nation to overcome its divisions and rally around a common ideal.

He said this ideal was the one conveyed in the August 2016 poll, adding it was him who really won most of the votes.



# Can Djibouti desert be regreened?

Ali Omar remembers a time when the practically bare patch of desert in northern Djibouti he calls home was a bustling seaside resort and the waters around it were teeming with fish. "Lots of people lived here and they had shops all along the seaside," says 75-year-old Omar, recalling his hometown Khor Angar's 1970s heyday, before it was hot year-round and the village had dwindled to just a few huts in the desert.

"You used to need a jacket around here," he says, squinting in the morning sun next to a sparkling shoreline, now empty apart from crabs scuttling to and from the froth. There used to be enough fresh water for all and so much seafood that planes would come from the capital to fill up with lobster, crab, fish and langoustine.

"And then the problems began," says Omar. Rising seawater started forming sand banks that blocked a channel feeding oxygenated sea water to a mangrove forest providing a breeding ground for fish and crabs. As trees wilted and died, their fallen trunks further suffocated the forest.

"There was dead wood everywhere inside the forest that stopped the rest of the trees from getting freshly oxygenated water," says Mohammed Omar, who runs a small eco-hotel next to the mangroves. "Mangroves need mud to grow, but the sand was coming in, smothering them, and the water was stagnating because the salt water they need was blocked from entering", he says. "A lot of mangroves died and the fish went away."

The forest kept shrinking as the local community chopped down trees for firewood and timber, while natural reforestation--falling mangrove seeds creating new trees--stopped due to the degradation.

"Mangroves are very important for the ecosystem and to protect the small fish that are growing there," says mangrove expert Hassan Haissama Gozola, who works at Djibouti's Ministry of Environment. "Fish come to nest there and lay their eggs, and hatchlings need a place to grow before going out to sea," he adds.

With the fish business waning and the supply of fresh water drying up, people who had lived in the desert for generations started moving away. Those who stayed had to pay for fuel to power generators to pump fresh water from the ground--water that was becoming increasingly hard to reach due to salt water intrusion into aquifers, or pay for water trucks to come from the nearest town.

Globally, rising sea levels and temperatures, deforestation and increasingly unpredictable rains are damaging fragile coastal ecosystems and putting people in already arid and poor countries like Djibouti at the forefront of the battle against climate change.

"Khor Angar is the biggest mangrove forest in Djibouti and the most important. It used to span 120 hectares and dropped to 60 hectares," says climate change adaptation specialist Mohamed Ahmed Djibril, who works for Djibouti's Ministry of Environment. "To make sure it didn't disappear, we had to intervene."

To save this important ecosystem and the people who rely on it from ruin, the Government of Djibouti, UN Environment and partners have helped the community to restore forest areas, unblock canals and improve the drinking water supply.

With just over US\$2 million in funding from the Global Environment Facility, the project supported the restoration of mangrove forests to provide a

buffer for important ecosystems and communities from seawater intrusion. The community cleared the debris clogging up the forest, and mechanical diggers were brought in to drag out the larger pieces and clear the sand from seawater channels. When the circulation of water was restored, the forest could breathe and grow again.

New generations of mangroves now dot the shore in an area outside the village that has been fenced off to stop camels--the only animal that can now survive here due to the lack of pasture--from eating the plants.

The Khor Angar nursery now produces around 35,000 seedlings per year and the community has planted more than 100,000 seedlings in total, says Djibril, who oversaw this pilot project. "The most important thing for us was to make sure the community that depend on these mangroves can live and keep living from them," he says.

It will take between 50 and 100 years to fully restore the mangrove forest, but the community is already seeing results, most noticeably with the return of crabs to the area. It's not like it was in its heyday, explains Ali Omar, "but it is getting better, little by little". The aim is for natural reforestation to take over from the project's success at replanting mangroves with only a 0.5 per cent mortality rate.

The project has helped fishing communities to overcome falling fish stocks by providing better equipment and training on sustainable fishing practices, date palm cultivation, eco-tourism and small-scale agriculture. It has also helped people access a better quality, cheaper supply of fresh water by upgrading its desalination system with a new pump, pipes and generator.

Khor Angar is one of two sites in Djibouti where the project has helped communities to adapt to climate change, and the effects of more frequent droughts and erratic rains. In an area of southern Djibouti called Damerjog, the project constructed three small dams to improve farming and prevent salt water from intruding into wells, as well as supporting the installation of solar-powered irrigation in 18 farms.

Further inland from Khor Angar, UN Environment and partners have also supported the construction of a small tree nursery to grow date palms for shade and fruit, and to test whether areas of the desert can be successfully regreened. "There used to be so much forest here that you would not even be able to see if people were passing," says Ali Ibrahim Mohammed, 65, who has watched the weather changing.

"When I was little it would rain every season, and for the past ten years, it hasn't rained at all," he says. "Without trees there is no rain and without rain there is nothing."

Mohammed hopes that the now knee-high cluster of date palms planted in 2014 will survive and that the reforestation initiative will be expanded to ensure the survival of people living in the surrounding areas.

Abdul Mohammed Omar still walks two kilometres a day to guard and water the trees, even though he is no longer being paid. "I am working for my country and community," he says, adding that he dreams of the day when the trees will bear fruit and provide much needed patches of green and shade in the Djiboutian desert.

# In Mali they're using irrigation to ward off extremism

Kouna, Mali – A short journey in a wooden canoe separates villagers from militants sowing fear with their weapons just across the calm waters of the Niger River in the Malian town of Kouna.

"We worry that these people infiltrate and indoctrinate our children," said Kouna resident Madou Touléma, 51, clearing weeds with his teenage son, shin-deep in their flooded rice field.

Violence involving armed groups has proliferated in Mali since Islamist militants hijacked a Tuareg rebellion in 2012.

Groups linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State have used the centre and north of the West African nation as a launch pad for attacks across the region.

The United Nations recorded nearly 290 civilians killed in Mopti and other central Mali areas from June to mid-September, noting in a recent report security continues to deteriorate.

As Islamist and other armed groups push into once-peaceful Mopti, to loot and spread their influence, locals hope their young people will spurn the appeal of joining the militants if farmland is better protected from the effects of climate change.

"The more land we can harvest, the less children leave," said Touléma.

Central Mali, home to the Inner Niger Delta, is the breadbasket of this largely desert country.

Nearly all - 98 percent - of Mopti residents survive from farming, according to the International Institute for Environment and Development, a London-based think tank.

But their livelihood is at risk as rains become more erratic from year to year.

Some areas of Mopti now receive about half the amount of rainfall - up to 80 cm (28 inches) per year - that fed the land in the 1960s, according to local climate official Lassana Kamia.

Researchers say climate change will shift West Africa's rainfall patterns, although they disagree over whether a warming climate will bring more or less rain to the region overall.

Abdraman Touré, a leader in Kouna, said yields here have plummeted in a drier climate, causing rice farming, which dates back to the 19th-century Massina Empire, to lose its appeal.

In recent years, up to 200 young people have left the town of nearly 8,000 inhabitants in search of better prospects, he added. The same is happening in many villages in the area.

Many of the migrants end up in cities working in low-skilled jobs, such as security guards and handymen. But stories of young men abandoning farming for jihadist or criminal groups are not uncommon - even if shared reluctantly.

Koh Coulibaly, who liaises with communities for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali, said people fear revenge.

"If you say, 'Yes, X person has joined an armed group,' they will come and kill you," he said.

Youth become members of such groups to loot and plunder, gain power over others or settle scores, said Bréma Ely Dicko, a Mopti expert at the University of Arts and Humanities of Bamako. "Mercenaries can make money," he added.

In Saré Mala village, also in Mopti, Allayheri Dicko lowered his voice when speaking of a young rice farmer who left to hook up with a band of criminals in 2013 after a poor harvest. "It was a bad year during which crops were destroyed," said the 48-year-old.

# Moi airport to be solar-powered

From the East African Newspaper

Moi International Airport in Mombasa will get the region's first ground-mounted 500kW solar system, which will be interconnected to the its terminal grid.

The system, to be installed by Solarcentury East Africa, is expected to generate 820,000 kWh per year and offset 1,300 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually.

The firm is expected to install airport gate electrification equipment consisting of a mobile electric-powered preconditioned air unit, an electric converter and a backup battery that will provide uninterrupted power

Director of Solarcentury East Africa Guy Lawrence said the project also entails the addition of ground power units (GPUs) to enable arriving aircraft to offset all their carbon emissions on the ground.

The electricity generated from the solar photovoltaic panels will power the gate equipment, which will supply pre-conditioned air and compatible electric power to aircraft docked at an existing passenger boarding bridge or parked at a remote stand.

They will eliminate existing carbon emissions from the aircraft on-board auxiliary power unit powered by jet fuel and from the GPUs fuelled by diesel, by providing pre-conditioned air and compatible electricity that runs on solar energy to the aircraft during ground operations.

Mombasa will be the first airport in East Africa to have such a solar power system.

It is a critical step in reducing the carbon footprint of aviation in Africa, in support of the environmental objectives of ICAO's member states.

Once completed, the solar system will enable the international airport to save thousands of dollars per year on grid consumption for at least 25 years.

"We are excited to be the pioneer airports authority in the region to have the Solar PV system installed. The expected savings on electricity as well as reduction in carbon emissions will contribute towards the efficient operations of Moi International Airport," KAA chief executive officer Jonny Andersen said.

Work on the site will take 10 months, and the systems are expected to be generating solar electricity by next year.

Solarcentury will provide two years of operations and maintenance on the system, and will set up two educational kiosks inside the terminal building to provide the public with real-time information on power output and carbon emission reductions over the life of the system.

The project is part of a \$7.36 million initiative implemented by ICAO and funded by the European Union targeting 14 countries -- 12 of them from Africa -- to reduce carbon emissions in the aviation sector.

India's Cochin International Airport is the first airport in the world to be powered entirely by solar energy. Huge power bills prompted the airport to build a 12 Megawatt solar plant that has more than 46,000 solar panels.

In August, Unep awarded Cochin International Airport its 2018 Champion of the Earth Prize. "This is the United Nations' highest environmental accolade," said Unep director Erik Solheim.

"As the world's first fully solar-powered airport, you set an ambitious example that we hope many others will follow."

# Nigeria: Previous govt abandoned power projects – Buhari

From the Nigeria Vanguard Newspaper

The Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed had disclosed that the past governments abandoned 800 containers of power equipment meant to help boost power generation in the country.

The minister made this known when he featured on a national television on Saturday to discuss on the state of the nation.

He said the containers were abandoned because contractors were not paid.

He, however, noted that the present government in its determination to boost power supply was able to retrieve 690 of those containers.

He said the contractors had also been paid and mobilised to site, adding that the effort had yielded positive result.

"How many hours of power did we have. When we came in all the GENCOs were generating were under 5000 megawatt, which we have been able to raise to 7000.

"Today people who live in part of Ondo that have not seen power for 10 years will tell you they now have power.

"As a matter of fact, not only do we generate 7000 megawatt of power, by the end of this year we will generate additional 2000 megawatt," he said.

On challenges of power distribution, the minister said the government had put measures in place to solve the problem.

"If once in a while there is problem in distribution, it is not about generation.

"Yes there is this disconnect between the generation and distribution and this is where the government has come in to help the distribution companies through a programme called the Distribution Expansion Project," he said.

He further reiterated the effort of the present government in working to revive the Mambilla Power Project,

According to him, going by the effort of the present government the Mambilla Plateau will generate additional 3050 megawatt of power in a few years time.

He pointed out that President Muhammadu Buhari was the only one that had summoned the courage and political will to see that the project was revived.

"We have improved on what we inherited because we put together a payment assurance scheme of N701 billion to ease the difficulties of gas suppliers and generating companies who complained that they have the capacity to generate but the discos do not have the capacity to pay them.

"In the area of distribution, we were distributing 2,690 megawatts of power in 2015.

"January 2018, we distributed 5,125 megawatts. So, in every area of power we have stories to tell," he added.

Mohammed explained that beyond power, the Federal Government had touched the lives of Nigerians positively in other areas including education, agriculture, infrastructure and technological development.

"The N100 billion Sukuk bond that was divided into N16.6 billion for each of the geopolitical zones is powering infrastructure of 25 critical roads.

"The present government has invested in bridges, roads and rails and had put aside a 1.3billion dollar under the Presidential Infrastructure Development Fund to ensure that five critical projects did not suffer from funding.

"Some of these projects have been there for about 40 years, such as the Mambilla Power Project, Second Niger Bridge, the East West road, the Lagos-

Ibadan Express Way and the Abuja-Kano road. "There is no area that this government has not touched," he said.

# No record of Buhari's certificate at WAEC headquarters

From the Nigeria Vanguard newspaper

Following the presentation of attestation certificate to President Muhammadu Buhari by the Registrar of West African Examination Council (WAEC) in Abuja yesterday, the Number one best-selling author and former aide to ex-President Goodluck

Jonathan, Pastor Reno Omokri has described the development as pure garbage, maintaining that President Buhari has no WAEC certificate.



Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria president

Pastor Omokri who said this on his viral Facebook page said even the Headquarters of WAEC had confirmed in 2015 that it had no record of Buhari as one who had written its exams.

President Buhari has come under serious criticisms, especially from members of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, who have continued to maintain that Buhari does not have WAEC certificate and so, is not eligible to vie for elective position much less that of the presidency in Nigeria.

Minimum Wage: Kogi Workers stage protest, tasks Buhari

The allegation which first arose in the run-up to the 2015 election which Buhari later won has, however, resurfaced just as the 2019 election is at the corner.

Although the military claimed it was not in possession of Buhari's WAEC certificate and other academic credentials, the President, however, continued to maintain that all his academic credentials, including his WAEC certificate are with the Secretary of the military board.

The drama took a new turn when, yesterday, the Registrar of WAEC, Iyi Uwadiae, came from the WAEC headquarters in Ghana to present the attestation certificate to the President in his mini conference hall in Abuja.

The Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Mr. Femi Adesina, in a tweet, wrote, "WAEC presents attestation certificate and confirmation of school certificate result to President Buhari. What will the naysayers say next?"

However, Pastor Omokri countered the development, saying that the Headquarters of WAEC which is in Ghana had confirmed in 2015 that it did not have records of Buhari's certificate.

He also said that the University of Cambridge had also confirmed that, as at 1961, that they did not use the alphanumeric grading system which is now found in the recent attestation certificate given to Buhari

According to him, "The Headquarters of The West African Examination Council (WAEC) is in Ghana. They are immune to political control by President Muhammadu Buhari. In 2015, Move On Nigeria wrote WAEC Headquarters and they said they have no record of Buhari's certificate. Also, University of Cambridge confirmed that they did not use the alphanumeric grading system in 1961 which appears in Buhari's 'certificate'. #RenosDarts"

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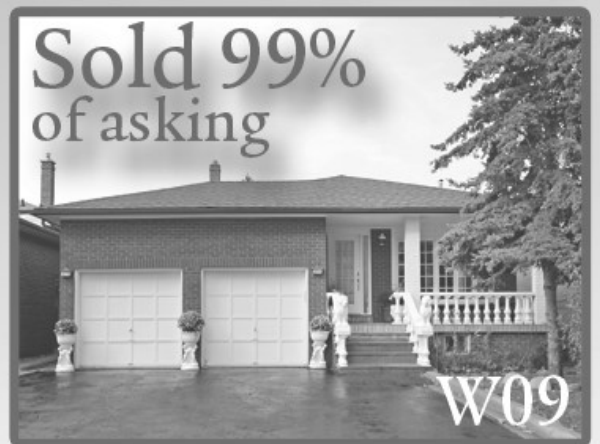
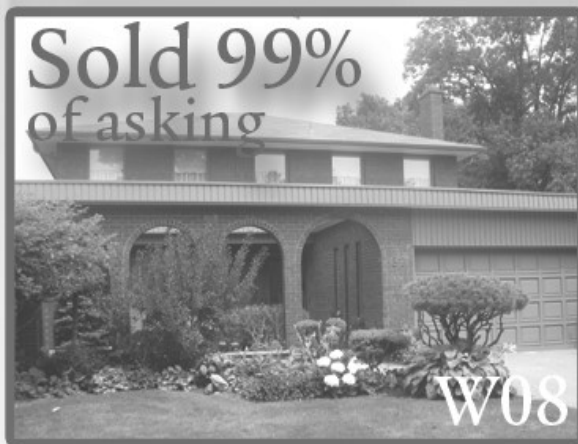
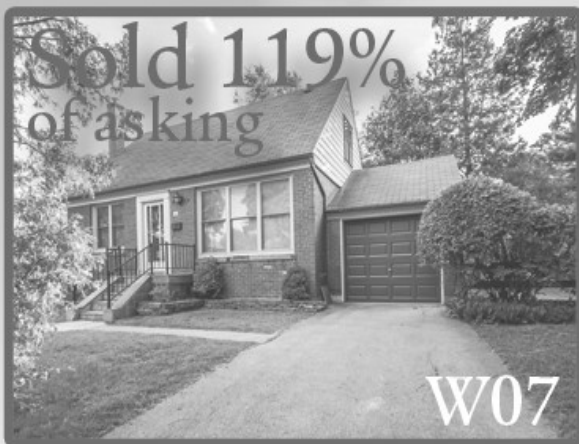


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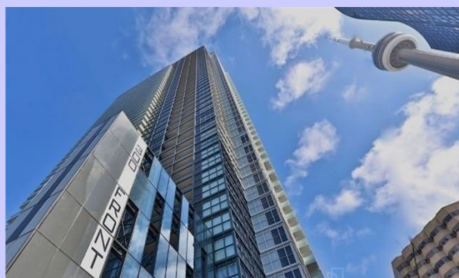
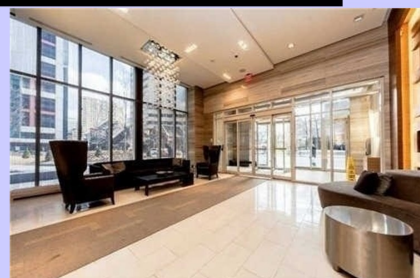
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# Super Eagles eyeing Nigerian-born German player



**Former Germany youth international Kevin Akpoguma says he would consider playing for Nigeria at senior international level - if the Europeans failed to give him a chance.**

Akpoguma, 23, who plays for Bundesliga side Hoffenheim, has a German mother and a Nigerian father - making him eligible to play for the three-time African champions.

Under Fifa rules he is free to switch because he has not yet played for Germany's senior national team.

And, despite 62 Germany caps from under-16 to under-21 level, Akpoguma says he will not close the door on Nigeria.

"I was born in Germany and I have played for all the youth teams of Germany and I am still a young player," Akpoguma told Nigeria's Guardian Newspaper.

"I want to leave it open because Germany can still call me. But if I have no other option to play for Germany, then I can consider playing for Nigeria because my dad is from Nigeria.

"My father has told me to listen to my heart... he doesn't want to put pressure on me to make any decision. It is very important I make the right decision."

Akpoguma has been in impressive form for Hoffenheim this season, missing only three games in the league campaign.

But his performances have yet to convince German manager Joachim Löw, who has a plethora of world-class defenders at his disposal.

Akpoguma's admission could give Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr an extra option as he looks for a long-term addition to the regular centre back duo of Leon Balogun and William Troost-Ekong.

"I believe that if you want to play for a country I think you should play for that country with love and passion," he added.

"That is why if I play for Nigeria I should be in a position to play my whole career for them. No half measures.

"Gernot Rohr visited us here in Hoffenheim and talked a lot about the young team he is building. I saw it at the World Cup; there are very good players like Iwobi, Ndidi and Leon Balogun.

"He explained all the things because I had a good conversation with him. But as I said, I want to leave every door open. When the time comes, I will let the world know my decision."

Akpoguma started his professional career at Karlsruhe SC and also played for Fortuna Düsseldorf.

He captained Germany at the 2015 Fifa U-20 World Cup in New Zealand, helping Germany edge Nigeria 1-0 in the second round.

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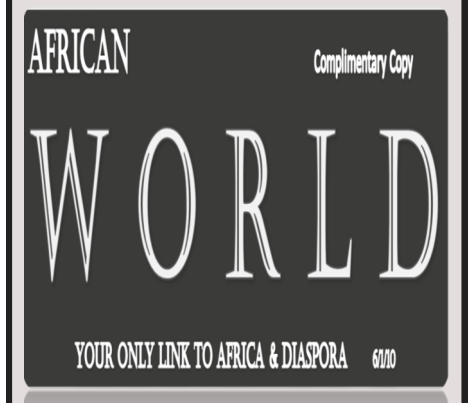
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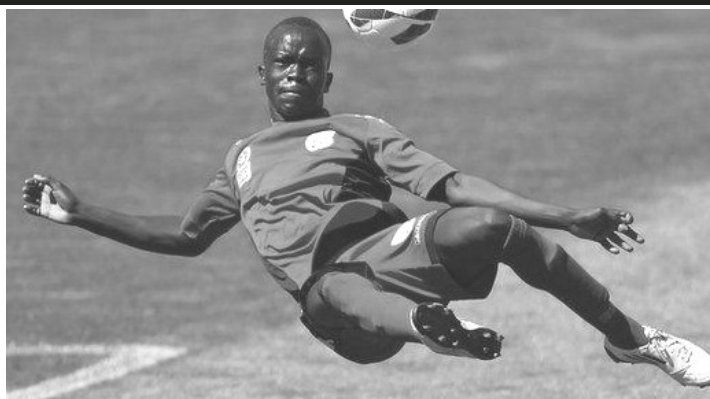


## Australia's Mabil shows mettle from refugee to football sensation

Awer Mabil's journey from life as a refugee in a hut built out of mud to scoring on his international debut is the stuff dreams are made of.

The 23-year-old grew up in a refugee camp in Kenya, where hunger and cramped conditions were everyday problems for his family.

After moving to Australia as part of a humanitarian programme, he was subjected to racism as he tried to make it



as a footballer. But he has come through it all, and scored on his debut for his adopted nation in a 4-0 win in Kuwait in October. Mabil was born in a refugee camp in Kakuma, Kakuma after his parents fled the civil war in Sudan.

Hunger and cramped conditions were just two of the daily challenges faced by his family.

"We built a hut out of mud," he tells the BBC's World Football programme.

"Probably the size of one bedroom in a normal house in the Western world, as you would call it.

"But you know it's not your home. There were four of us living in it - me, my mum, my brother and sister. We got food from the UN once a month.



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