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–NEWS–

### **AU LEADERS GEAR UP FOR A UNITED STATES OF AFRICA AT JULY ACCRA SUMMIT**

By Basil Okafor

As the July Accra African Union, AU, Summit draws near many Pan-African commentators are variously concerned about the outcome of the future summit.

The sole agenda item for discussion at the summit is the proposed merger of all African states into one nation-state, to be known as the United States of Africa, USA.

Although a majority of commentators from all around Africa and the Black diaspora advise caution in approaching the proposed merger of all countries on the continent into one nation-state, there are equally, enthusiasts.

Already, campaigners for the utopian state, notably the Wood brothers, of Greenwood, California, United States, co-founders of the USA4USAfrica lobby, among others, are busy painting numerous advantages that await such merger.

On their website, for instance, the USAfrica campaigners already display such items as a flag of the proposed new nation-state and even the photograph of the immediate past Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, whom they want “installed” president of the new USAfrica.

“Our Mandate is for the African Union, in 2007, to form an official United States of Africa with Kofi Annan, (whose term ended December 31st 2006) departing UN Secretary General, being installed as the United States of Africa’s First President in much the same fashion George Washington was ‘installed’ as the first U.S. American President. God willing.”

In his own reaction, USA4Africa’s Mark Wood, comments: “In a United States of Africa, a citizen could freely travel anywhere on the continent to seek education, opportunity, commerce, or the simple pleasure of tourist travel within their vast country.

“A common African currency much like the EU model affords the ability to buy and sell throughout the continent with a reliable backed currency.”

Furthermore, he stated, “Much of Africa's debt could be relieved if freedom and capitalism were able to thrive in any African state from taxes paid by companies involved in business in any African location.”

However, in a February 2007 forum on the subject of a USAfrica, organised by the BBC World Service, many Pan-African commentators have expressed their reservations about the merger.

In response to the Forum's topic, "Is African unity a dream worth pursuing?" a majority of the respondents broach the question with caution.

Of the 32 contributors, writing in from 14 countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas, two-thirds of them either express caution in embracing the concept of the new Africa, or are downright sceptical about the whole idea. On the other hand, a minority one-third show enthusiasm for the project, with no concern for its pitfalls.

Writing in from Khartoum, Sudan, John Moi, while drawing attention to the situation in his own country and the rest of North Africa, raises the fundamental question of the identity crisis that has continually plagued the continent, of who an African really is. He explains:

"A majority of people will accept that the question of who is an African is still problematic. Culturally, the guys in North Africa including our own Sudan consider themselves as Arabs."

He further explains, "In secondary school days we learned about the map of the Arab world to really emphasise that my country belongs to that part of the world.

"Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism oppose each other to the effect that North Africans have very little to do with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. We cannot subscribe to the idea of United States of Africa without answering this genuine identity question in clear terms."

But Dennis Turner of Middlesex, England, thinks otherwise. He prescribes unity as the only panacea for the survival of Africans:

"It's time Africa united. With Africans putting aside selfishness and greed, religious, tribal and cultural differences, then a united Africa would be one of the most powerful states on earth. Otherwise, I foresee an extinction of the African race purely because of selfishness and greed."

But how could the ideal of African unity be attained without addressing the very fundamental human problems pointed out by the sceptics, by purely dreaming, without confronting the pitfalls?

On a cautious note, Clement Kuol Biong of Mahe, in the Seychelles Island refers to the anecdote of a Sudanese politician, to buttress his point:

"A veteran Sudanese politician, once compared the Sudan Socialist Union of Jafaar Numeiri's rule to a shadow tree where we come just to share the shade but what each person under the tree is thinking about is not necessarily the same.

"So how can Africa be united when we are still tribally fragmented and no African leader is interested in uniting his own people? How can African unity become a

dream come true when different groupings of the AU have their own hidden agendas?"

He concludes: "The Arabs have never stopped their dream of imposing Islamic culture on African masses by the sword, a practice which is still widespread in Sudan up to today."

However, despite the caution advised, and the arguments and concerns raised by equally well-meaning Pan-Africanists about the feasibility of a United States of Africa, the continent's leaders, it would seem, are determined to ignore the dangerous pitfalls.

It would be recalled that on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007, African leaders, at the Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, summit adopted as the sole agenda item for discussion at the forthcoming July Accra summit, the theme, "An AU Government: Towards the United States of Africa".

The proposal was referred to the heads of state and governments of the African Union, by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal who, himself, was absent at the summit.

President Wade's proposal was carried to the summit and presented on his behalf by that country's foreign minister, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, with the support of Nigeria.

According to Gadio, "President Wade suggested that the heads of state seize the opportunity offered by their next summit in Accra to devote a special session to the issue of the United States of Africa", while adding that it is necessary to prepare a new roadmap to better determine the next steps to be taken towards African unity.

While Nigeria and French-speaking countries as a whole were in favour of it, South Africa and the Southern African countries were not convinced of the necessity to root for the United States of Africa, an AU official who took part in the working session revealed.

According to one delegate, South African President Thabo Mbeki told his peers at a closed-door meeting that, "Before you put a roof on a house, you need to build the foundations".

President Wade's proposal was finally accepted after two days of discussions and will be the sole item on the agenda of the Accra summit, a fact described by Cheikh Tidiane Gadio as a real "historic victory", considering that the summit will convene in Ghana, the country from where Kwame Nkrumah championed Continental Union Government.

Ghana's President John Kuffuor, who was elected the new AU chairman after member states rebuffed Sudan and will host the Accra meeting, said in closing remarks at the Addis Ababa meeting that African states had much to gain by forging closer ties.

"Divided, we are weak," he said, "united, Africa can become one of the world powers, for good."

In the mean time, President Wade has suggested, according to his Minister of External Affairs, that non-governmental organisations, women's associations, the media, among others, reflect on the subject so that each country will come to Accra with clear suggestions.