

Dateline Africa

High- (and low-) lights on the continent, May-August

Since the last *Dateline Africa* column was published in the previous issue of *New Agenda* the continent has been marked by mounting clashes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between the armed forces and the March 23 Movement (M23), a militia made up of mainly Congolese Tutsi that DRC claims is backed by neighbouring Rwanda. This comes despite ongoing peace talks and a rare promising announcement that the DRC has formally joined the East African Community.

MAY

7 May - Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Russian mercenary outfit, the Wagner Group, of torturing and murdering civilians in the Central African Republic. This follows an HRW



report in March that Wagner and Mali government forces had massacred 300 people in that country, which prompted a decision by Germany to stop training the Mali army.



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

14 May - Islamic State West Africa Province, a Nigerian terrorist group, released a video purporting to show the murder of 20 Christians in the north-eastern state of Borno. Nigerians are experiencing unprecedented massacres, abductions and kidnappings for ransom in many parts of the country by both religious extremists and bandits. State intervention has been ineffective or non-existent.

14 May - The International Monetary Fund resumed lending to Mozambique, having suspended it six years ago after it emerged that the country had \$2bn (approximately R34bn) in undisclosed debts. Credit Suisse, which arranged the loans, was fined for failing to carry out due diligence – and possibly also because it emerged that its bankers had pocketed some of the cash.

20 May - The African Development Bank will channel \$1.5bn (more than R25bn) to African farmers for seeds, fertiliser and technology in a bid to boost the continent's food output to avoid mass starvation amid surging food prices since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both countries are big

suppliers of grain and fertiliser.

JUNE

2 Jun - Foreign nationals in Alexandra township, South African, which was at the centre of xenophobic riots in 2008, told the BBC they again live in fear. The Alexandra Dudula movement closed down shops and stalls that it claims are run by illegal immigrants. Dudula is Zulu for “push back” or “drive out”. In 2021, nearly three times as many foreigners were killed as a result of xenophobic violence than in the previous year, according to the African Centre of Migration and Society.



AU Chair Macky Sall with Russian President Vladimir Putin

4-Jun - Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and Chairperson of the African Union, told Vladimir Putin at a meeting in Russia that African countries are innocent victims of the war in Ukraine and Russia. Mr Sall said the Russian leader had promised to ease the export of cereals and fertiliser, but gave no details. Over 40% of wheat consumed in Africa usually comes from Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine's ports in the Black Sea were blockaded by Moscow to prevent exports since the conflict began.

5 Jun - BBC News reported that the government of Lesotho had asked for protection for its citizens working in South Africa – many of whom are

seasonal farm workers. More than 400 Lesotho nationals were displaced during fighting with residents in the town of Hankey in the Eastern Cape.

9 Jun - Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, an academic and civil rights campaigner, was sworn in as President of fractious Somalia. It is his second attempt to guide the country while it continues its struggle against jihadists, drought, famine and internal strife.

June - The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published its latest Global Trends Forced Displacement Report. Africa stands out as having half of the world total of people displaced inside their own countries due to armed conflicts, generalised violence or human rights violations. There are about 25 million Internally Displaced People in Africa. The largest number – over 5 million – are in the DRC, with substantial numbers also in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan. Uganda hosted the greatest number of cross-border refugees – over 1.5 million – from South Sudan and the DRC.

14-16 June - South African truck drivers blockaded the crucial corridor connecting the country's economic hubs of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal for three days. The All Truck Drivers Foundation (ATDF-SA) said South African company should stop employing foreign drivers. It also demanded that the price of petrol and diesel be reduced. This was the second blockade to protest this issue since 2020.

18 June - Between 230 and 500 Amhara civilians in the Gimbi county of Oromia Region, in the west of Ethiopia, were massacred by as yet unknown forces. The Government of Oromia (based in Addis Ababa) confirmed the attacks. Both the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the Ethiopian government forces have blamed each other. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said he deeply regretted the loss of life and called for an

investigation into the attacks.

June - Tunisia was paralysed by widespread trade union protests against efforts by President Kais Saied to reform the state and grab more power for himself. Tunisia was the only country to retain any democratic gains from the “Arab Spring” uprisings in 2011 but it has been critically destabilised by ongoing political and economic problems.

20 Jun - China hosted a “peace conference” in Addis Ababa, to which it invited all the countries in the Horn of Africa. This follows the appointment of a special envoy to the region, which is racked by ethnic, territorial and resource-driven conflicts. The aims of the conference were general, but China is concerned to protect its considerable economic investments in the region. Rebel groups, such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia, were not invited.

22 June - The Zondo Commission into State Capture in South Africa released its final set of reports. Comprising over 5,000 pages, the Commission's report concluded that during the time covered, “the most dominant political faction – the ANC under President Zuma – permitted, supported and enabled corruption and state capture”. The Commission, whose main task was to identify individuals for prosecution, named more than 200 people – politicians, business people, civil servants and people “deployed” by the ANC to work in State-Owned Enterprises and public entities. Follow-up actions are likely to take years.

June - Mauritius was rated as the most peaceful country in Africa in the 2022 Global Peace Index calculated by the Institute for Economics & Peace, an Australian think-tank. The world ranking of Mauritius was 28, followed by Ghana, The Gambia and Botswana – all ranking in the 40s. Even Zimbabwe, with a “low” peace ranking of 127, did better than the USA and Brazil – which were listed at 129 and 130 respectively out of 163 countries.

24 June - At least 23 people were killed when a group of about 2,000 African migrants tried to climb over a fence marking the border between Morocco and Melilla, a Spanish enclave on the Moroccan coast.

26 June - A total of 21 young people died in an East London, South Africa tavern after being poisoned – the reasons remain unknown.

29 June - Sudan shelled Ethiopian military positions in al-Fashaga, a long-disputed border territory, after seven Sudanese soldiers were murdered.

JULY

3 Jul - The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) lifted economic and financial sanctions imposed on Mali, after its new military rulers proposed a 24-month transition to democracy and published a new electoral law. Borders were re-opened and diplomats returned to Bamako, the capital city. However, the suspension of Mali from ECOWAS, will stay in force until the return to constitutional rule. Meanwhile, Jihadist insurgents still control 40% of the country and more than two million citizens remain internally displaced. France withdrew its last troops in August – after the junta favoured Russian mercenaries.

8 July - Angola's former president, José Eduardo dos Santos, died at the age of 79. A ruthless dictator for 38 years, he diverted much of Angola's huge wealth to benefit his family and friends.

9 Jul - The African Union (AU) marked 20 years since its founding in Durban in 2002. The African Continental Free Trade Area agreement, which took effect from 1 January 2021, is a genuine (if incomplete) achievement. But the Pan African Parliament has been a complete dud, the “African Renaissance” came to nought, and the campaign to “silence the guns” by 2021 has had to be extended by 10 years. Unlike the European Union – where membership is based on minimum standards – any country on the continent can join the AU. >>



Refugees from Mali arrive in Burkina Faso

21 July - For a second time, King Mswati III of Eswatini delayed a scheduled Southern Africa Development Community discussion on his promise to hold a “national dialogue” in Eswatini to address the violent protests against his autocratic rule in 2021. He previously agreed that the SADC would be involved in setting the terms of the political dialogue. Mswati had also called off a previous meeting set for 1 April.

25 July - Tunisia, the first Arab country to move towards democracy after starting the 2011 “Arab spring” uprisings against oppressive rule, will move back to an autocratic presidential system of government, following a referendum.

31 July - Senegal held its National Assembly elections. President Macky Sall’s coalition did not win a clear majority, despite opposition parties’ leaders being excluded from the poll. After losing 43 seats, Sall will govern with a majority of 1, after an opposition politician joined the coalition.

AUGUST

4 August - The gang rape of eight women in Kagiso, South Africa sparked widespread anger against migrant illegal miners who were accused of the

assaults. The women were part of a film crew making a video near a disused mine shaft. Police fired stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse angry mobs of residents who were chasing the miners. More than 130 men were detained by police.

9 August - Kenya held peaceful General Elections, but with a low voter turnout and a very close result was challenged in court. Kenya is one of Africa’s best-functioning democracies. Out-going president Uhuru Kenyatta is the third president in a row to respect constitutional term limits.



11 August - Human Rights Watch reported that Cameroonian soldiers had summarily killed at least 10 people

and carried out other abuses between April 24 and June 12, during counter-insurgency operations against armed separatist groups who are seeking independence for the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon. These are in the north-west and south-west of the country. The “Anglophone crisis” emerged in 2016 when the government responded with force to peaceful protests. The majority of the population (80%) are Francophone.

16 August - Lesotho’s prime minister, Dr Moeketsi Majoro, controversially declared a 13-day state of emergency from August 16 to August 29, saying the country’s current political climate posed “substantial threat, risk and danger [to] the country’s stability and prosperity.” This came after legislators failed to pass two critical bills aimed at ending volatility in Parliament. It was left to King Letsie III to “urgently” recall Parliament briefly to pass this legislation before the October general elections. (See article on pg 47.)

18 August - Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organisation, said the ongoing war in Ethiopia was worse than any other humanitarian crisis in the world and questioned why it is not getting as much attention as the war in Ukraine. He wondered whether the lack of global engagement could be linked to “the colour of the skin of the people”. Ghebreyesus is an ethnic Tigrayan and served as a health minister in Ethiopia when the government was led by the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, which is now in conflict with the current regime of Abiy Ahmed.

20 August - An Al Shabaab terrorist attack in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, killed more than 20 people. **NA**