

RWANDA

PRESIDENT INTERVIEWED ON DOMESTIC, AFRICAN SCENE

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[Etienne Ugeux Brussels 13 May interview with Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana:
"We Are Building Our Boat To Cross the River of Poverty"]

[Excerpt] [Question] Africa in general, and landlocked countries in particular, have been affected by the harmful consequences of world recession. Has the attitude adopted by some of your neighbors not further affected unfavorably your possibilities in the sphere of supplies, especially with regard to fuel?

[Answer] We have no reason to feel suspicious toward our neighbors. Uganda, which is also a landlocked country, faces problems similar to ours. General Amin has taken certain steps in his country on which I can pass no judgment and which can probably be justified by the fact that he himself is confronted with difficulties. For instance, he stopped all night road traffic for domestic security reasons. The previously existing supply system has been thrown into confusion as a result. We now have to go as far as Mombasa (a Kenyan port about 1,500 km away) to get our supplies, which are brought by road

Faced with these problems, therefore, I stated in a speech that desperate diseases require desperate remedies. That is why I created the stabilization committee. I have given full powers to this committee, of which I am chairman. Naturally, we have other organizations (the Politburo, the Executive Council and so forth) but the stabilization committee has full powers to act at any time, seek solutions to the present crisis and abolish most nonessential imports. I have also set up a production committee to try to increase production, to make an effort in other fields and to export as much as possible. We have also taken certain measures concerning wages, including wage cuts. In sum, we have taken many measures through the stabilization committee and you will be hearing about some of them shortly, particularly the results of the talks which we have had with the International Monetary Fund.

LE COURRIER: You have already spoken a lot about the problem, so important for Zaire, of the mining and raw materials sector. Zaire is, in fact, the world's major producer of cobalt and industrial diamonds, and occupies fifth place for the production of copper and seventh for the production of tin. Copper represents, on average, two-thirds of Zaire's exports. However, the price has fallen considerably since May 1974 as a result of the international economic crisis. Do you think that, with the upturn which seems to be beginning at the moment, there is hope of a return to more normal prices?

Mobutu: Certainly. First, I must say that I receive the current price of copper every morning and evening. We are very optimistic about the upturn. But it will be slow. 1976 will not be an easy year for us, and 1977 will also be very difficult. We are counting on an increase of, perhaps, 20 percent over last year in value. Perhaps it will be more. But we are now fairly optimistic because it is evident that, on all sides, in the West and throughout the world, a certain upturn is beginning. In addition, the current discussions within the framework of the North-South conference, even if no immediate results are expected, nevertheless create a certain favorable climate.

LE COURRIER: Are these projects [the Inga dam and Inga-Shaba electricity line] both proceeding very well?

Mobutu: Very well on the whole. Not only will Zaire be transformed, but also Africa and, perhaps, part of the world. You know that Inga is unequalled as a single source of energy. Cabora Bassa is 2,000 megawatts while Inga alone is over 40,000 megawatts. Now, Cabora Bassa was built to supply South Africa and it is technically possible to connect this dam with Inga. What was difficult was to connect Inga with Shaba, which is already linked up with Zambia and Rhodesia. Rhodesia and Mozambique can be linked very quickly. With everything that is happening now in southern Africa, where things are moving so fast politically, I believe that the psychological problems which prevented the connections will disappear. Finally, it may be that we will change the actual structure of South Africa because the leaders will have to obtain energy from us and, before giving them energy, we will obviously demand that they change their policy.

LE COURRIER: What role would you like to see Zaire play in the future on a regional African scale, on the one hand, and on an international scale, on the other, particularly regarding the definition of the new international economic order which is currently the object of the North-South dialog, which began in Paris in December 1975?

Mobutu: First there is the fact that Zaire is in the center of Africa. That tells you how much we are at the center of Africa's problems. In fact, our Constitution provides that, even if we had to lose part of our sovereignty, we could do it in the interests of African unity. Within the African regional framework we are ready to do the maximum. That is why we are having meetings on a central African level, tripartite meetings between Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi. Certainly, there will now be more tripartite meetings between Zambia, Rwanda and Zaire, which also have other affinities. There is the West African Community; President Senghor would like it to include Zaire. In any case, we are open to any advance of the idea of cooperation in Africa.

Furthermore, we in Zaire strongly believe in European-African cooperation and I believe that a large part of Africa also believes in it because, looking at the negotiations for the Lome convention, it is evident that the 46 countries which negotiated this convention did so in a true spirit of close cooperation with Europe. Africa's friendship for Europe is real. Africa is certainly being approached from all sides, but it remains attached to Europe. Therefore, European-African cooperation must be a true motive force for development between our two continents.

Within the more general framework of international relations, what do we ask for? Justice, that is all. The theory of liberalism based on free competition can only be fully implemented if the two sides are evenly matched. What we are asking, therefore, is that raw material prices be fixed on fair terms. We are not asking for exorbitant prices; we are asking for the stabilization of prices and a reasonable floor price which does not change too often. We do not even want an index system. That is why we believe that all this must proceed from true consultation, not from confrontation.

Europe's role in all this is fundamental. Of course, the United States is the power that we know, Japan is there, the United States and Canada are, Europe. It is the Europe of the Nine, it is the Europe which is now expanding and with which we want to work hand in hand. We are reasonable countries. Of course, we know that there are some demagogues among our group; it takes all sorts to make a family. But we want a lasting solution to be found, a solution which can be revised regularly and, in any case, a solution taking account of justice above all. We have seen that, during this economic crisis which should really have penalized everyone, the industrialized countries actually improved their balance of payments in many cases because the prices of their exports had increased, since the industrialized countries fix the prices. Therefore, all this is not just and, instead of waiting until there are confrontations at the United Nations, a solution must be found which is equitable to all concerned.