

PERSPECTIVE: When Africa Comes Into Its Own
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For years, SGI President Ikeda has been saying that the continent of Africa will come into its own in the 21st century. This is very encouraging, but until recently I was unaware of any corroborating opinion that I could trust. The media, both electronic and print, generally presents a grim picture of Africa, concentrating on civil conflict, famine and disease.

The first significant verification of President Ikeda's prediction for me was a talk given in Boston in June by new U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who had just returned from a meeting of African heads of state in Zimbabwe. Democracy is definitely going to come about, he predicted, due to the desire and determination of a new generation of leaders to see Africa realize its full potential.

Shortly after Mr. Annan's visit, President Clinton, according to *The New York Times*, "joined with bipartisan members of Congress to promote a series of trade measures with Africa intended to encourage free-market reforms of the continent's most promising economies."

Also, according to the *Times*, some 30 African countries have shown positive growth rates in the last year, some as high as 12 percent. The administration also pointed out that a majority of Africa's 48 countries have begun economic and political reform over the last 10 years.

The second encouraging event is the advance of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in Africa.

Recently, Boston Joint Territory's Sunrise District in New Hampshire began a correspondence with Groupe Espoir (Hope Group) in Korhogo, northern Ivory Coast. Together, they have created a newsletter, "Kosen-rufu Journal," in which they share hopes, dreams and recent achievements.

In one issue of the "Kosen-rufu Journal," Hope Group Chief Kpan Denis writes: "I was chanting to be able to obtain a microcomputer. After three years of practice, I was able to secure a loan from my bank, which permitted me to buy a computer. I have started a small business with a friend in which we prepare documents for people on the computer. We also offer lessons to people who want to learn about computers.

"As for the latest news from Korhogo," he continues, "Dan Kpan has passed his baccalaureate exam, and Gnakade Joachim has received the great benefit of being appointed a chief judge (president of the court) in the Town of Touba."

The chief judge himself writes: "As a young and growing group, we attach a great deal of importance to this kind of unprecedented exchange, which can serve to fortify our faith in the Gohonzon. We take your gesture of friendship as an immense benefit... I hope this bridge between our two communities united in faith can perpetuate itself for all time."

From a radio announcer: "I am still in Korhogo at the radio station 'The Voice of the North.' Soon, we will have the authorization from the Ivorian government to operate. I have been chanting for this for two years."

The "Kosen-rufu Journal" contains statements from high school students, housewives, office workers and gardeners, among others.

Of course, there have been SGI members in Africa for a long time, but the "Kosen-rufu Journal" represents the first opportunity I have had to read stories of the daily struggles and victories of African members.

Altogether, the statements of Mr. Annan, Mr. Clinton and the members of Hope Group seem to me a profusion of buds that will blossom and become a glorious flower garden in the 21st century, which President Ikeda long ago declared to be the Century of Africa.

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