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Africans press for United Nations seats

By Thalif Deen
INTERNATIONAL PRESS SERVICE

UNITED NATIONS — The 53-nation African Union is exercising its political clout by refusing to back down on its demand for two permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council — but with hard-to-get veto powers.

With its unyielding stand, reinforced at a second summit meeting of African nations in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa recently, the AU has undermined an intense bid by the Group of Four, namely Germany, Japan, India and Brazil, for new permanent seats minus the veto.

All four countries, co-sponsors of a resolution for the expansion of the 15-member Security Council, dropped their demand for vetoes hoping it would help them overcome strong opposition from some or most of the five veto-wielding permanent members: U.S., France, Britain, China and Russia.

The P-5 have been accused of wanting to hold onto their veto powers while denying the same powers to newcomers. But with the AU sticking to its guns, the proposal to add new veto-less permanent members to the Security Council has come to a virtual dead end — once again.

A draft resolution introduced by the AU says the new permanent members should

be accorded "the same prerogatives and privileges as those of the current permanent members, including the right to veto."

The resolution followed a decision taken at the first AU summit meeting of heads of state in Libya in early July.

"The AU should continue to demand veto power," says Bill Fletcher Jr, president of the Washington-based TransAfrica Forum, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is also a center for activism focusing on conditions in the African world. He pointed out that the AU represents nearly 1 billion people "who have little if no voice at the global table."

"Either participation in the Security Council means the same for all participants, or it should be treated as a farce," Fletcher said.

Last month, one U.S. newspaper quoted unnamed U.S. administration officials as saying that the United States is opposed to giving new members veto powers "out of concern that it might paralyze the Security Council" and also dilute U.S. power at the United Nations.

"What is the point of Security Council reform if it leaves the fundamental power structures intact? The argument for expansion must not only be linked to equitable representation but also to formal power," Kwame Akonor,

director of the African Development Institute, told IPS.

"The fact is that the veto power (of the Security Council) still is a key instrument of international politics," he said. "The African Union should therefore not compromise on its demands for immediate veto rights for any new permanent council members."

Akonor also pointed out that it is quite clear that the AU has neither support nor the two-thirds majority needed to sustain its position but sacrificing this principle (in any reform discussions) is a declaration by Africa of its willingness to remain a silent non-actor in world politics.

"The point cannot be overemphasized, especially if we bear in mind the fact that over half of the Security Council's current agenda deals with Africa," he added.

At a press briefing last month, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan described as "utopian" attempts to either abolish the existing vetoes or create new permanent seats with veto powers.

"It is utopian to think we can do it. Many member states would want to do that, but it is not possible. And they are not willing to create additional vetoes (either)," he added.

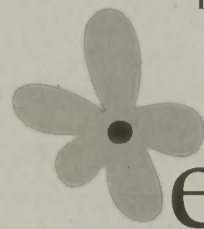
What is important, Annan argued, is to have effective

representation on the Security Council, and to make it more democratic, to ensure that voices of other regions are heard.

"And I think that sort of change would not only make the decisions of the Council much more acceptable generally, but also the Council itself will gain in greater legitimacy. And I think that is enough of an achievement for us to be able to move forward and not insist that if we cannot withdraw the (existing) veto from the other Five, we keep the status quo. That is the option," he said.

Bill Pace, general secretary of the World Federalist Movement, says that the expansion of the Security Council is an important goal "to revitalize the Council's representivity and legitimacy."

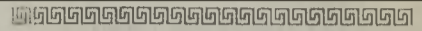
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Meeting might focus Dems

By George E. Curry
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON — George L. Brown has been the kind of Democrat the Party has always been able to rely on.

Fifty years ago, he was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives.

A year later, he won the first of five terms as a state senator. And in 1974, he became lieutenant governor, the first African-American elected to that post in the nation's history. In 1972, he co-chaired the Party's credentials committee with the late U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Texas.)

"I've been a Democrat for a long time and I don't see a lot of hope in the Republican Party," he says in an interview. "But I am getting to the point where I don't see a whole lot of hope in the Democrats."

That's why he is co-chairing the National Black Peoples Unity Convention next March 9-12 in Gary, Ind. He is co-chair of the convention with former Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher. They were part of the team that put together a similar Gary gathering in 1972.

"You can't ignore the fact that the underlining accomplishment of Gary was that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, to a lesser degree, changed after Gary in terms of access," says Hatcher. "Up to that point, Blacks did not serve on committees, very few black delegates went to national conventions. The role of Blacks within the Party was extremely restricted. After Gary, a lot of that changed."

So did the political landscape, according to Brown.

He ticks off a list of black office-holders: One U.S. senator, 43 members of Congress, 168 state senators, nearly 400 state representatives and more than 9,000 locally-elected officials.

"All of those, if you want to be truthful about it, came as a result of Gary," Hatcher says. "One of our purposes was to increase our political power." Even in political circles, problems still remain, says

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