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African countries condemn Trump for racist slurs

Each week another controversy unfolds in the United States over the character of the administration of President Donald Trump. At a White House meeting with members of Congress on Jan. 11, Trump reportedly described the nations of Africa, El Salvador and Haiti as “shithole countries.” He also said that more people from Norway should be immigrating to the U.S. and not from places with dark-skinned people.

The meeting was centered on working out a legislative response to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Its potential termination means that millions of undocumented residents are facing deportations to the countries where they were born.

Later Trump claimed that he did not use those particular words. However, he tweeted on Jan. 14 that he wanted only people entering the U.S. who would make America great again, and presumably these individuals would be of European origin. Trump has built up his political base by appealing to reactionary and racist elements within U.S. society.

African people’s role in building capitalism, imperialism

The African Union, a continental organization with representatives from 55 member states, issued a statement condemning Trump’s utterances. The AU called them an insult to Africans on the continent as well as those of African descent in the U.S. Officials in Haiti, a majority-African state in the Caribbean, harshly criticized Trump as well.

AU spokeswoman Ebba Kalondo said of Trump’s remarks: ”Given the historical reality of how many Africans arrived in the United States as slaves, this statement flies in the face of all accepted behavior and practice. This is particularly surprising as the United States of America remains a global example of how migration gave birth to a nation built on strong

values of diversity and opportunity. We believe that a statement like this hurts our shared global values on diversity, human rights and reciprocal understanding.”

The Washington, D.C., offices of the AU said it was “shocked and dismayed” at the U.S. head-of-state’s remarks. Despite Trump’s denial, Illinois Democratic Senator Richard Durbin, who was present at the meeting, said publicly that these were the words used and that the president had repeatedly referred to Africans and Haitians, among others, in such derogatory terms.

The AU’s response noted that the ”remarks dishonor the celebrated American creed and respect for diversity and human dignity. While expressing our shock, dismay and outrage, the African Union strongly believes that there is a huge misunderstanding of the African continent and its people by the current Administration. There is a serious need for dialogue between the U.S. Administration and the African countries.”

A media advisory issued by the Republic of Botswana in southern Africa asked for clarification as to whether its citizens fall into the category Trump described. Botswana, a diamond-rich nation with a history of postcolonial stability and a multiparty democratic political system, has cooperated with the U.S. for several decades. The country is a member of the regional Southern African Development Community, which includes 16 member states.

The Botswana press release, circulated on Jan. 12, said: “The Government of Botswana is wondering why President Trump must use this descriptor and derogatory word, when talking about countries with whom the U.S. has had cordial and mutually beneficial bilateral relations for so many years. Botswana has accepted U.S. citizens within her borders over the years and

continues to host U.S. guests and senior government officials, including a Congressional delegation that will come to Botswana at the end of this month. That is why we view the utterances by the current American President as highly irresponsible, reprehensible and racist.”

The African National Congress, the ruling party of the Republic of South Africa, which celebrated its 106th anniversary on Jan. 8, came to power, as did all African states, through a struggle against racism, colonialism and imperialist domination. The ANC condemned Trump’s racist remarks, calling them an insult to Africans throughout the world.

Jessie Duarte, the deputy secretary-general of the ANC, in response to Trump’s language stressed: “Ours is not a s—hole country, neither is Haiti or any other country in distress.

It's not as if the United States doesn't have problems. There is unemployment in the U.S. and there are people who don't have healthcare services. We would not deign to make comments as derogatory as that about any country that has any kind of socioeconomic or other difficulties.”

South African President Jacob Zuma has summoned the U.S. ambassador to provide clarification of Trump's racist statements. The former apartheid system in South Africa was based on the same ideology of white supremacy which still permeates the U.S.

Racist underdevelopment, immigration policies

Trump's characterization of states in Africa, the Caribbean and Central America in such negative terms misleadingly ignores the centuries-long exploitation and oppression of these territories. Historians have documented that the enslavement, colonization and modern-day dominance of the world system by imperialism, which Washington and Wall Street control, served to propel the West in economic development, resulting in turn in the underdevelopment of oppressed nations.

Guyanese historian Walter Rodney wrote in his pioneering work “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa” (1972): “Mistaken interpretations of the causes of underdevelopment usually stem either from prejudiced thinking or from the error of believing that one can learn the answers by looking inside the underdeveloped economy. The true explanation lies in seeking out the relationship between Africa and certain developed countries and in recognizing that it is a relationship of exploitation.” (p. 22)

Haiti is a nation born in revolutionary struggle against slavery and colonialism. It was the first country in history to transform itself immediately from a slave state to a republic. Nonetheless, its declaration of independence in 1804 after a 12-year war against France was met by decades of sanctions from Paris and the lack of recognition by the U.S. until 1862 during the Civil War. Even today, Haitian workers are exploited through low-wage labor and subjected to national discrimination as immigrants in the U.S.

Haiti has been occupied on numerous occasions by the U.S. From 1915-34 it was a de facto colony of Washington subjected to segregation and lynching. Another two invasions were carried out by the U.S. in 1994 as well as 2004, coinciding with the bicentennial of Haiti's independence.

The much-anticipated aid from the U.S. in the wake of the earthquake of 2010 never materialized. Even Democratic Party stalwart and former U.S. President Bill Clinton failed to account for hundreds of millions of dollars that the Clinton Foundation collected for relief and development assistance that never took place.

U.S. immigration policy has always been slanted in favor of people from Europe to ensure the dominance of the majority white population. Nevertheless, rapidly shifting demographic changes will create a majority people-of-color nation by the middle of the 21st century. These social variables are fueling the racist state's efforts to curb immigration from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America, along with the reversal of bourgeois democratic rights for the oppressed nations and national minorities inside the U.S.

These actions by Trump, although atrocious, provide opportunities for solidarity among the impacted peoples. The combined efforts of the peoples of the U.S. and the world can defeat racism and capitalist exploitation, paving the way for mutual cooperation and genuine equality in relations among nations throughout the planet.