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Second EU, Africa wrap up Summit in Lisbon

By Rafaela Bielecki in Frankfurt for CAAGLOP (11/12/2007)

On Sunday a gathering of 67 African and European leaders ended in Lisbon. During the meeting such difficult topics as the crisis in Deafer, the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, problems of good governance, as well as the issues of trade and resources were discussed.

While the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was urged by a European delegation including the Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy to pave the way for the deployment of a UN-AU peace keeping force in Darfur, the Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was heavily criticised by German Chancellor Angela Merkel who accused him of "harming the image of the new Africa." South African President Thabo Mbeki, the mediator between the ruling party and the opposition in Zimbabwe, commented on her statement by pointing out that she was in his opinion out of touch with the situation in Zimbabwe and that - as also other countries in the world - Africa was still facing challenges of good governance. Of course it should not be overlooked that also in Europe there have been cases of corruption, social unrest, and riots, and that these problems and good governance are by far not Africa's problems alone. Mugabe's presence however had prompted Britain not to send its ministers to the summit.

Though most important topics were approached during the summit, it was overshadowed by the aftermath of colonialism. Fifty years of colonialism had created a big gap between the continents that was difficult to overcome, but the meeting was a first step to encourage dialogue and to redefine relations. Portugal's secretary of state for cooperation and development Joao Gomes Cravinho also pointed out that the main goal had not been problem solving, but to work towards

improving relations between the two continents. This certainly won't be an easy task, and there still is a long way to go, but without this very important first step solving problems together in the future would not be feasible.

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