

# IT'S TIME FOR AFRICA'S VOICE IN THE G-20

EZRA SURUMA

As the next meeting of the G-20 draws near, it is once again appropriate to draw attention to the continued marginalization of Africa in this forum. Africa should not be excluded on the grounds that it is poor and therefore unfit to sit in the rich man's club. Africa should be included because there are many issues that will be discussed which affect Africa substantially and therefore require Africa's participation if they are to have legitimacy in their application to African countries.

It is certainly good that Ethiopia has once again been invited to attend the forthcoming G-20 Summit in Toronto in June, bringing the total number of countries from Africa to two. Indeed, it could be argued that Africa is now on par with South America, which also has only two countries in the G-20: Argentina and Brazil. But this comparison of African representation in the G-20 with other continents is misleading, inaccurate and unsatisfactory.

It is misleading and inaccurate because Ethiopia has only been invited to attend as a guest and not as a member of the G-20. As such, Ethiopia will come as an observer and will not participate fully in all the meetings. So the fact remains that Africa, with a population of nearly one billion people, has only one nation that is participating as a member in the discussions that will ultimately shape the economic future of the world.

The fact that G-20 membership is largely based on economic size and less on population has resulted in the virtual exclusion of the African continent. Yet, the G-20 has become the most significant forum for the discussion of the world economy including the resolution of poverty and the future of the multilateral

institutions. The exclusion of Africa means that it will not have an opportunity to contribute to the discussions on world poverty, aid and trade, which are core economic issues affecting the continent's future.

Africa's absence from the G-20 stands in great contrast to the generous representation of North America, Asia and Europe. All the North American countries—Mexico, the United States and Canada—are members, while Asia and Europe have six members each and the European Union has an additional membership, which raises Europe's total representation to seven. Surely there can be little doubt about the bias against Africa's representation in this global forum.

It is particularly noteworthy that currently the 53 African states that are members of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have only two executive directors who sit on each of the boards of directors of those institutions. After a protracted struggle, the World Bank has agreed to accord a third chair to the African countries. However, the IMF has not agreed to go along with the World Bank but is instead offering a different accommodation with increased representation at a lower level. All this has created considerable incon-

gruence in the participation of Africans in these two multilateral institutions, which are critical players in the economic development of the African economies.

The G-20 is probably the main forum where this issue of African voice in these institutions and in the world economy as a whole can be substantively resolved. It is therefore not appropriate to discuss Africa's future participation in these institutions when the Africans are absent from the forum. As the long-standing struggle to increase Africa's voice in the IMF and the World Bank continues, it is important that the world is seen to respond to Africa's quest for inclusion in the discussion of the world's economic affairs rather than exacerbating its marginalization on the grounds that it is poor.

While the determination of the best route to follow to give Africa a voice will require consultation, one option is to include another African country such as Ethiopia or Nigeria as well as the African Union in the G-20. That would surely be a step toward a more balanced treatment of the one billion people of Africa who are a part of the global community but who are currently being treated as though they are aliens on this planet.