

AU Summit: Gambian President Defends Anti-West Leaders

Written by Mohammed Legally-Cole, EXPO TIMES, Banjul
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High-profile anti-west leaders Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran were special guests at the just-ended African Union summit in the Gambian capital of Banjul. And Gambian President Yahya Jammeh has defended the AU's decision to invite the proclaimed "enemies" of the western powers

Speaking at the presidential lounge of Banjul International Airport on 3rd July 2006 at a farewell press conference, Jammeh said the two were "brothers" of Africa and had no regrets for inviting them to address issues of bilateral relations between Africa on the one hand and Latin America and Asia or the Middle East on the other. "The Gambia is exercising her freedom of association. No one will tell us who to invite and who not to invite," he maintained.

Jammeh did not have favourable words for the West either, as he lashed at Europeans trying to stem the tide of migration from Africa to the West. "God created this world and made it diverse so that people can move from one place to the other. This is the same reason why European explorers discovered Africa and became settlers and colonial masters for 400 years... So why are they calling our youths illegal immigrants?" he questioned.

He said the causes of migration, like wars in Africa, are found in "external forces" that want to see an "unstable Africa so that they will continue to exploit African resources."

President Jammeh, who came to power through a coup in 1994, lauded the AU's Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance which frowns at any attempt to remove a government through unconstitutional means. "Africa no longer wants any leadership that assumes power in

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an undemocratic way,” he said.

Jammeh said the summit had been a success as a whole, as it was the first time that an AU meeting had been organized without any assistance from western powers. He said Gambia has benefited from the summit, particularly in terms of infrastructural development.

Yayah Jammeh has a reputation for anti-west sentiments, as he slammed an expulsion of western diplomats from his country in 2001 for allegedly interfering in Gambian politics. He has strong links with Arab countries, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.