

Dateline Africa

Reviewing the first quarter of 2022

In our last issue of *New Agenda*, *Dateline Africa* looked back on the news from Africa that emerged over the course of 2021, including some lesser known events as well as some good news, which rarely gets much global media exposure. *Dateline Africa* will now be published as a regular feature. This column covers the year up until the end of the journal's production cycle. We hope to provide a comprehensive report on our continent, one that departs from the usually one-sided (mostly negative) view of Africa generally projected in the media. And we invite you, our readers, to submit news and information to provide a positive, or at least more balanced, account. Send your news about Africa to production@ifaza.org.

January

3rd – The Sudanese military took back total control of the government after the civilian prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, resigned following protests over him previously signing a deal with the military.



Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdock

4th – South Africa's Zondo Commission into State Capture published its first report: 1,438 people or companies were implicated in wrongdoing. [The last report was scheduled for release on 15 June].

14th – Three days of violence in a northern Burkino Faso town by fighters linked to Al-Qaida and Islamic State killed 30 people. The militants have engaged in cross-border attacks from Mali since 2015 over a swath of land where Burkino Faso, Niger and Mali meet.

15th – The Economic Community of West African states (Ecowas) imposed financial sanctions and closed their borders with Mali after the junta there postponed February elections to 2025.

22nd – Nigeria lifted a seven-month ban on Twitter (imposed after Twitter removed a tweet from President Muhammadu Buhari that incited violence).

28th – Tropical Storm Ana killed at least 88 people when it made landfall in

Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi.

29th – Burkina Faso was suspended from Ecowas following its coup on 23 January.

29th – The food crisis in Tigray resulting from the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia hit international headlines.

February

2nd – A coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau linked to drug trafficking in the country failed to kill the president and members of cabinet.

5th – Sudan was suspended from the African Union.

18th – The World Health Organisation announced a project that will give the technology to produce mRNA vaccines to six African countries – South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia and Egypt.

20th – Ethiopia started generating power from its controversial dam on the Blue Nile, launching Africa's largest hydroelectric-power project.



Tigray rebel fighters in their re-captured capital city Mekele, Ethiopia

March

2nd – A total of 24 African UN members, including South Africa, abstained from voting on a General Assembly resolution deploring the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Another 22 African governments supported the resolution, which was passed. Some African representatives missed the vote. Eritrea was the only African country to vote against the resolution while BRICS was divided: Brazil voted to support the resolution, China, India and South Africa abstained and Russia voted against.

4th – What would have been the 90th birthday of the late Miriam Makeba, ‘Mama Africa’, was marked by the release of a new album by Rwandan/Ugandan vocalist and songwriter Somi, who said: “This album is my attempt to honour the unapologetic voice of an African woman who inevitably made room for my own journey and countless

other African artists. In short, I owe her. We all do.”

10th – Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan released a leading opposition member, Freeman Mbowe, from jail. Mbowe was incarcerated by the previous leader, the late John Magufuli, remembered as an authoritarian.

15th – Sixty people were killed in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo by Jihadists who claim allegiance to Islamic State. The rebels were said to be members of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which originated in Uganda.

16th – Uganda’s government continued its campaign against freedom of expression by arresting and torturing Ugandan author and activist Norman Tumuhimbise and a journalist colleague Farida Bikobere. They were accused of relaying “offensive communication ... directed against the person of the President of Uganda”.

25th – A mortar attack was launched on a UN and African Union peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. This follows an attack on 19 March on the same compound, which houses several Western diplomatic missions.

25th – King Mswati III delayed a Southern African Development Community (SADC) discussion of his promise to hold a “national dialogue” in Eswatini this year to address the 2021 violent protests against his autocratic rule. This follows an agreement he reached with Cyril Ramaphosa as the SADC special envoy. The proposed dialogue is being held up by the king’s determination that this take the form of a *Sibaya*, which is a traditional Swazi policy and advisory council established in that country’s constitution. However, many regard it as a traditional monologue by the king. ➤



Eswatini protests

25th – The Ethiopian government announced a “unilateral humanitarian ceasefire” in its ongoing campaign against Tigray rebels.

28th – Bandits in northern Nigeria attacked the Chinese-financed and built Kaduna to Abuja railway. The assailants derailed the train with explosives and then opened fire on the passengers, killing at least seven. Other passengers were abducted. This \$874 million railway was the first of a number of standard gauge railways that Chinese contractors built in Nigeria. The General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria, Musa-Lawal Ozigi, was killed in the attack.

30th – Egypt was knocked out of the World Cup after being beaten on penalties by Senegal in Dakar. The Egyptian striker who lost the crucial shot was plagued by laser lights flashed at him by the crowd. Don't feel too sorry for him – this laser assault is apparently a common tactic used by Egyptian crowds against their visitors! Reigning African champions Senegal, with Ghana, Morocco, Cameroon and Tunisia, will represent the continent at the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar later this year.

April

4th – The South African government lifted the State of Disaster that was introduced two years ago in terms of

Covid restrictions. The official count of deaths from Covid-19 just topped 100,000 at the end of the first quarter of 2022. “Excess deaths” estimated by academics, however, were much higher, at about 300,000 between May 2020 and March 2022.

5th – The Zambian Ministry of Finance disclosed that President Hakainde Hichilema had served for the previous eight months without pay. Hichilema said a salary was not his motivation for seeking public office. Hichilema, 59, an economist and wealthy businessman, became president after 15 years in the opposition during which he was harassed and imprisoned. He unexpectedly defeated his corruption-tinged predecessor Edgar Lungu by more than a million votes.

6th – Burkina Faso's former president, Blaise Compaore, was sentenced *in absentia* to life imprisonment by a military tribunal. He was one of several accused found guilty of complicity in the 1987 murder of his predecessor, Thomas Sankara, (Africa's “Che Guevara”) in a coup. Compaore fled to Cote d'Ivoire after being ousted in 2014 and became a citizen of that country.

7th – The former president of South Africa, and former general-secretary of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe, said Russia's invasion of Ukraine must be condemned – a line at odds with that

of the government, which insisted on remaining “neutral” and not condemning Russia.

11th – A weather system triggered devastating floods and landslides in KwaZulu-Natal, that destroyed roads, bridges and warehouses. Houses were washed away or damaged across a wide area and more than 430 people died.



KZN flood damage

23rd – More than 100 people, including children, died in a huge explosion at an illegal oil refinery in southern Nigeria. Ten percent of Nigeria's huge oil reserves is stolen by criminals who tap holes into pipelines of raw petroleum. Illegal refining is widespread in the country.

24th – Sudan's Darfur region was wracked by clashes between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Approximately 168 people were killed in the renewed clashes. Another military coup in 2021 put paid to planned democratic elections in 2022.

23rd – The Equiano sub-sea cable landed in Nigeria. The cable will allow a five-fold increase in average Internet speeds in Nigeria and create many jobs. It is funded by Google as part of a planned \$1bn investment in Africa up to 2026. Equiano starts in Portugal and will end in Cape Town, with branching units along the way to extend connectivity to more African countries. Its first landing in Africa was in Togo in March. The privately owned Portugal to Cape Town sub-sea cable was mooted in 2019. **NA**