

THE DAILY FREE PRESS

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Thursday, April 24, 2003

The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University

www.dailyfreepress.com

Africa ready for trade, former leaders say

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Former African leaders who participated in this week's two-day Boston University summit on Africa's economic future concluded that "Africa is open for business," as former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda said yesterday during a brief press conference wrapping up the leaders' discussions.

Though Africa is a continent of 800 million people and 53 countries, Kaunda said it receives only 4 percent of private capital in the global economy, a percentage he called far too small.

"Africa has been excluded for too long in terms of having access to its fair place in the

global economy," he said.

Six former African heads of state, including Kaunda, gathered at the School of Management's Executive Leadership Center to share their thoughts after the historic two-day summit, organized by BU's African Presidential Archives and Research Center. In addition to Kaunda, former president of Benin Nicéphore D. Soglo, former Ghanan president Jerry Rawlings, former Botswanan president Sir Q. Ketumile J. Masire, former president of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam and former Tanzanian president Ali Hassan Mwinyi participated in the summit.

Rawlings reemphasized Kaunda's theme of fairness during the conference, pointing

to the results of Monday's Boston Marathon as an example of what Africans can do if given a level playing field.

"At the marathon, how many of the winners were Kenyans?" Rawlings said. "Look what we can do when we have a fair chance. What does that tell you?"

Kaunda also said it is the America's duty to aid Africa, despite other current world crises like the battle against terrorism and war with Iraq.

"We understand the need to rebuild Iraq," Kaunda said. "We understand the need for the United States to focus on the terrorism that rocked this country on 9/11. But, having



BRANDON BODOW / DFP STAFF

Former Ghanan president Jerry Rawlings yesterday talks about his discussions with five former leaders this week.

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said that, let us add that the need to deal with terrorism should not become another reason for Africa's neglect."

He said the idea that the United States' national security is linked to the economic stability of developing nations around the world is internationally recognized.

"This is not simply an African perspective," he said. "It is something that has been agreed upon by both [English] prime minister Tony Blair and [French] president Jacques Chirac, even though they've disagreed on the strategy to deal with Iraq."

Rawlings said the financial power United States uses while attempting to fight drugs could be stretched further, and especially into Africa's struggling agricultural regions.

"The United States spends \$400 billion trying to fight marijuana," Rawlings said. "That money should be spent on the peasant. Fighting drugs will be easier when every person in the world can be self-sufficient."

But several of the leaders also said some progress has already been made in economically strengthening Africa, and more help may be arriving soon.

Ramgoolam discussed the prospects of possible future programs involving tax refunds and the removal of trade barriers. Kaunda also mentioned the positive effects of several other current initiatives, including the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, the Corporate Council on Africa and the World Bank Commission on Financing Capital Flows to Africa.

Kaunda emphasized the importance of the leaders' two

days of dialogue about increasing business in Africa.

"We felt that it was important to participate in these discussions," Kaunda said.

APARC director and former United States ambassador to Tanzania Charles Stith said the leaders who participated in the event represent important parts of Africa's recent history and near future.

"These six statesmen are reformers that led their respective countries in becoming premier per-

formers on the continent in terms of democratic governance and economic reform," Stith said.

Kaunda promised continuing efforts like this week's summit to provide a place for Africa in the global economy.

"The optimism we feel is not cause for complacency," he said. "As elder statesmen, we will continue to work in our respective countries ... We hope that these two days of discussions and our future efforts will result in the progress we seek for Africa."