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The Rev. Charles Stith, a former US ambassador to Tanzania, is behind Boston University's Presidents in Residence program.

Top Africans given an out

BU plan aimed at ex-presidents

By Farah Stockman
GLOBE STAFF

US officials call it "the exit problem." Academics say it's one of Africa's biggest dilemmas: How to persuade African presidents to abide by democratic norms and give up power when retirement for many means possible prosecution, poverty, obscurity, or even assassination.

Analysts say such a shaky future is one of the reasons Zimbabwe's president of 22 years, Robert Mugabe, allegedly rigged his reelection last week.

Where do African leaders go when it's time for them to go? The answer, apparently, is Boston.

Come September, Boston University hopes to have up and running a bold new program that would expand this nation's understanding of Africa while serving as nothing less than a graceful exit strategy for former African heads of state. The offer



AP PHOTO

Robert Mugabe has led Zimbabwe for 22 years.

— a 12-month residency at BU, with an undisclosed stipend, a high-profile platform, speaking tours, and a light teaching load — is meant to be part memoir-inspiring academic retreat and part incentive to follow democratic ways.

"There is life after the presidency," said the Rev. Charles Stith, the former US ambassador to Tanzania who is spearheading BU's new Bal-

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Possible candidates for the BU program:



Nicéphore Soglo
BENIN
SERVED: 1991 - 1996
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Won the country's first democratic election. Stepped down graciously when he lost to the military leader he had beaten in 1991.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: Already spent a year at Harvard's Center for International Affairs.



General Abdulsalami Abubakar
NIGERIA
SERVED: 11 months, from June 1998 to February 1999.
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Took over upon the death of dictator Gen. Sani Abacha. Helped transfer power to a democratically-elected civilian.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: Was later accused of pilfering the national reserves.



Jerry Rawlings
GHANA
SERVED: '79, 1981 - 2000
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Presided over advent of multiparty democracy. Stepped down after losing in the first democratic election since 1957.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: Staged two military coups. Officials in Ghana's government are calling for investigations into human rights abuses in his regime.



Abdou Diouf
SENEGAL
SERVED: 1980 - 2000
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Presided over a fair election in 2000. Graciously accepted his loss and instituted a smooth transition of power.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: Perhaps difficult to entice from his comfortable home in France.



Frederick Chiluba
ZAMBIA
SERVED: 1991 - 2002
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Won two multiparty elections.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: Widely despised for instituting an authoritarian regime. Tried to change the constitution to allow himself to run for a third term. May face prosecution for corruption.



Ketumile Masire
BOTSWANA
SERVED: 1980 - 1997
DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS: Presided over Africa's oldest democracy. Voluntarily retired in 1997. Currently heads the UN effort to end fighting and bring democratic elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS: He's overlooked.

BU offers a haven to African leaders after they leave office

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four African "Presidents in Residence" program.

Stith plans to bring a different former African head of state to live at BU every year, targeting the tiny pool of eligible candidates who were elected democratically and agreed to step down from power. If it succeeds, BU will have institutionalized the kind of crucial transitions that US State Department officials say they have been struggling for years to arrange.

"Until you provide an exit strategy that gives . . . a respectable way to make a living, a way to say 'I will be able to meet people I knew in the past without holding my head down,' then there are no incentives to give up power," said Georgetown University professor Gwendolyn Mikell, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "They'll have the semblance of democracy . . . but the ballots mysteriously won't arrive."

But, by its very nature, the program could bring some highly controversial figures to BU, perhaps even some who are better known for opposing democratic change than participating in it.

Stith said Mugabe — declared a *persona non grata* by the US government — would have made a good candidate had he been voted out of office this week and abided by the election results.

"You have to consider these guys," Stith said. "All of these democracies are new. You can end up with a situation where folks have some questions about the process, but at the end of the day, what gets affirmed is the rule of law."

But an academic program featuring the likes of a Mugabe would be one certain to generate protest, and it's even unclear if he would be granted entrance into the United States. "Almost nothing exists like it as an institution, because it's so hard and so controversial," said

Mikell. "It's not a new idea, but nobody's pulled it off."

In 1990, sub-Saharan Africa was home to only five democracies. Today, the governments of about half of the 48 countries there call themselves democratic, but many are still vulnerable to rigged elections and manipulation by entrenched leaders. Most are only on their second or third multiparty election.

And as was the case in the first years of the American democracy, most African countries have not yet made provisions — pension plans, bodyguards, or housing — for their leaders' retirement. The prospect of persuading this generation of African politicians — many of whom had ruled for decades — to retire without a certain future has prompted US officials in recent years to seek positions for them on college campuses.

"A lot of guys won't take that final step unless they know where they are going to," said one State Department official who asked not to be named. "It's graceful exit."

And if those leaders can't move on, neither can their fragile democracies. "A restless defeated incumbent can be an impediment to progress, and the question is raised of what can be done," said Susan Rice, former assistant secretary of state for African affairs. "Boston is certainly a good place to go, especially if the infrastructure is there for a smooth transition to go with dignity and grace."

Professors at Harvard University, Georgetown, and UCLA said government officials had approached them about finding a

place for former African heads of state.

Some universities refuse candidates with unsavory pasts, fearing damage to their reputations. "It might be perceived as a soft slap on the wrist after years of misrule," said Peter Takirambudde, executive director for Africa at Human Rights Watch.

Stith, a Boston minister who joined BU as the director of the African Presidential Archives Research Center, said he got the idea for the program toward the end of his tenure as ambassador to Tanzania, as he chatted with the president there.

Stith said he pitched the plan to then-BU chancellor John Silber, who quickly embraced it. BU is home of one of the nation's oldest and most respected African studies departments.

"I think it is consistent with BU's inclination toward being willing to play a cutting-edge role," said Stith, who just returned from a five-nation tour of Africa aimed at publicizing the BU opportunity.

Putting the plan into place will be an enormous challenge, say scholars and analysts, noting that hosting former heads of state — even for just one day — is often a delicate affair. BU will have to arrange a year's worth of security, travel, world-class accommodations, and speaking engagements.

"The biggest problem," said Debbie West, a program associate at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who has helped arrange presidential visits, "is what do you do with their entourage?"

BU's selection criteria — that the ex-presidents have operated in

a "democratic context" — narrows the pool of eligible candidates to about a dozen people.

"I would say there are not more than a handful of living African former heads of state who have voluntarily stepped down from power," said Edmond Keller, director of the Globalization Research Center-Africa at UCLA.

Revered former South African leader Nelson Mandela is considered to be in too high a demand to be a candidate. Of the nine or 10 names that BU is considering, just one comes close in terms of name recognition and universal respect. But Ketumile Masire of Botswana is busy leading peace negotiations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is not a serious choice.

So potential residents range from lesser-known heroes to better-known scoundrels.

"From our perspective, the whole range of folks are attractive," said Stith. "Our objective is to get folks to appreciate that there is progressive leadership on the continent beyond Nelson Mandela."

But the term "progressive" may be too generous.

One candidate, Fredrick Chiluba of Zambia, is widely despised as a democratic disgrace. After winning the country's first democratic election with a reform platform, he introduced an autocratic regime, harassed opponents, tried to change the constitution to stay in power longer, and is accused of widespread corruption. "There is very serious talk of prosecuting him," said Takirambudde, of Human Rights Watch.

Another candidate, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, was hailed for instituting democratic change, but is also being investigated for political crimes he allegedly committed more than two decades ago when he took power in a military coup. "The new government has agreed to exhume for positive identifica-

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GWENDOLYN MIKELL
Georgetown University

tion people who were executed," Takirambudde said.

Stith said he met with Rawlings last month, during his African tour publicizing the program.

Despite the difficulties, many applaud BU's effort to attract such leaders and point out that such controversial US leaders as Henry Kissinger have been welcomed on campuses for years.

"I think personally the more controversial they are, the better they will serve the purpose of the program," said Augustine Toure, deputy executive director of Liberia Democracy Watch and a fellow at the International Peace Academy.

Besides offering leaders incen-

tives to leave power, Toure said, the program would also give leaders time to write their memoirs and grant historians invaluable access to the personalities that almost single-handedly shaped institutions in their African nations.

But others say that while BU's offer might entice presidents who have already retired, it is unlikely to move those still in office.

"The odds of getting Mugabe are next to nil," Rice said. "But if Charles Stith could convince him to give up the ghost and live in Boston, then it would be brave and noble. BU might get some stink for it, but Zimbabwe and Africa would be better off."