African Union

Topic A

Corruption in West Africa

Statement of the Problem

Africa is a land plagued by conflict, corruption, and political instability, and has been constantly affected by bloody regime changes and rebellions. Today, many African governments suffer from incredible corruption and are unable to take care of their own economies, let alone their own people. These governments impose repressive policies that escalate these conflicts and hinder any possible improvements. West Africa is a region that has been particularly affected by corruption and constant civil war. An example of an extreme case of corruption is that of the situation in Nigeria. It has been reported that dishonest politicians were known to have hired assassins to eliminate their competition and to ensure their victory at the polls and extension of time in power.

Organizations in the United Nations have labeled Sierra Leone as the worst place to live and also reports that based on the quality of life in 173 countries the bottom 24 are all in Africa. Because of corruption, the African economy is incapable of development and the society is prevented from advancing. Stability in West Africa is the key to being able to achieve Africa’s full potential as a continent. Even though the corruption seem to only effect the respective regions, it truly affect all of Africa as well as the world.

West Africa has the potential to become a crucial trade area due to some goods such as cotton. Instead of achieving its potential in production and having a vital position in the world, corrupt governments have led their countries into tremendous economic ruin and have create tremendous obstacles to development.

Measuring Corruption

One of Africa’s worst troubles is corruption, a worldwide epidemic that directly affects all aspects of a nation’s economy and political well-being. It hinders the development of a nation’s economy and prevents many goods and services from reaching the people who need them. Examples of corruption include the allocation of resources into private investments instead
of national infrastructure, imposing penalties, fines, and making life dangerous and difficult for citizens who are tied to opposition parties, eliminating the opposition through death threats and sometimes political assassinations, and using already scant resources to fund bloody civil wars, amongst many others. As a result of this behavior the standard of living along with income are lowered and possibilities for free trade are reduced. Corruption is prevalent in the less developed countries, and unfortunately, African countries are considered to be some of the most corrupt in the world. To demonstrate this reality using concise research and statistics, one could refer to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The CPI is basically an assessment of corruption levels as perceived by corporate businessmen, investigative journalists, risk analysts and the general populace.

Several sources are used to measure the CPI (which is based on a scale of ten to zero, ten being almost free of any kind of corruption, and zero being very corrupt) including: the opinions of the aforementioned individuals collected by surveys, official documents stating general information on a country’s economy, and other polling methods. Based on this measure, several African countries fall in the lowest part of the scale, demonstrating some of the highest rates of corruption in the world; countries such as Nigeria, Angola, Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire and several other nations are considered to be the most corrupt, with many countries not listed, but infamous for their government’s corruption.

**Past Actions**

Anti-corruption laws have been imposed and institutions have been created in parts of West Africa with the objective of ameliorating instability and eradicating corruption. Despite having such benevolent ambitions, however, the institutions have faced much criticism due to their ineffectiveness. The reasons for this ineffectiveness may be that anti-corruption institutions appease international figures, while governments simultaneously try not to alienate their political allies through anti-corruption crackdowns. Many West African nations have a high dependence on foreign aid, and aid is contingent on successful completion of the requirements of anti-corruption. Although aid restrictions place some pressure on governmental actions, the flow of revenues from oil and diamonds continue to be the object of increasing corruption.

**Possible Solutions and Questions to be Answered**

The first step to a more stable and less corrupt West Africa is to increase transparency amongst all the nations. Transparency refers to openness, communication and accountability in
fighting corruption. In a state, transparency is characterized by open government meetings, publicly viewable budgets and financial statements, and by laws, rules and regulations that are open for debate and discussion. Increasing transparency will limit the opportunities for the authorities to abuse the system for their own private interests. One way to achieve this goal is through the consolidation of democratic reform, which has proven to be successful in nations such as Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana and Sierra Leone. These nations all witnessed exceptional advancement and further strengthening of their national integrity systems; at the same time, governance in nations such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Togo has weakened. A probable reason for this predicament is that the leaders of this group began as military dictators who transformed themselves into political leaders, despite their poor experience in transparency and accountability.

To create a more stable political and economic structure, the AU must devote time to the restoration of infrastructure and the raising of incomes in the ravaged economies of nations such as Liberia. These improvements depend on the implementation of reliable macro- and micro-economic policies which include the encouragement of foreign investment and generous support from donor countries. Perhaps the AU can invest money and engage in nation-building programs which could at least serve as a starting point for economic and political development.