

# The Washington Times

## Bad cop Biden opens Africa summit with corruption warning

By Ben Wolfgang

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Vice President Joseph R. Biden on Monday lectured dozens of visiting African leaders on the need to clean up the “cancer” of corruption in their governments, but some analysts say the U.S. can do very little to solve the problem and in some cases has contributed to corruption by funneling monetary aid to unstable governments or dictators.

Africa is home to some of the most corrupt governments on the planet, according to Transparency International rankings, and Mr. Biden’s comments Monday underscore the Obama administration’s desire to fight corruption while at the same time encouraging economic growth, equal rights for women, food security, a commitment from African nations to battle climate change and other steps to improve life on the continent.

Those issues and others are at the forefront this week as more than 40 African leaders gather in Washington for the U.S.-African leaders summit. President Obama will address the convention on Tuesday and the same night will host a dinner at the White House for African heads of state.

Ahead of that gathering, Mr. Biden played something of the “bad cop” role, offering harsh words about how official crime is hampering economic progress in Africa and, in some cases, accelerating violence and human suffering. He also offered specific recommendations on how countries can tackle the problem, including the establishment of American-style inspectors general within governments to detect bribery and weed out other illegal activity in militaries, court systems, police departments, political bodies and elsewhere.

“Corruption, as I said, is not unique to Africa, but it’s a cancer. It’s a cancer in Africa as well as around the world. Widespread corruption is an affront to the dignity of its people and a direct threat to each of your nations’ stability, all nations’ stability,” Mr. Biden said. “It not only undermines but prevents the establishment of genuine democratic systems. It stifles economic growth and scares away investment. It siphons off resources that should be used to lift people out of poverty. And it weakens — to the core — it weakens your military readiness. It creates vulnerabilities to foreign manipulation and interference.”

Mr. Biden’s words certainly are borne out by numerous private studies and surveys. Corruption rankings released each year by Transparency International consistently place African countries near the bottom of the list.

Last year, for example, all but five sub-Saharan African countries scored in the lower half of the 175-country survey, the organization said.

Somalia is the most corrupt government on earth, the study says. Of the 20 most corrupt countries, 10 are in sub-Saharan Africa, with nations such as Sudan, Chad, Eritrea and others especially low on the survey.

But specialists say Mr. Biden's exhortation will do little to address an issue so deeply rooted in African governments. They also say the U.S. sometimes makes matters worse with billions of dollars in foreign aid, some of which is then used not to better the lives of average Africans but to bribe public officers or line the pockets of corrupt officials.

In fiscal year 2013, the U.S. doled out \$31.5 billion in foreign aid, including billions of dollars given to especially corrupt African governments.

Somalia, despite its lowly ranking, received \$319 million in American aid last year, according to government data. The Democratic Republic of the Congo ranked 21st on the list of corrupt nations and received \$302 million.

"Essentially, a lot of people have argued it is precisely our aid that has enabled corruption to grow," said Marian Tupy, a senior policy analyst at the Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity at the libertarian Cato Institute.

"I think there is no point in moralizing to African leaders. Those who are serious about governing their countries in a proper manner realize this is a problem," said Mr. Tupy, who specializes in globalization and the political economy of Europe and Africa. "Those who don't care, there's nothing that you can do. People who don't give a damn won't give a damn no matter what we say."