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REGIONAL NEWS

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Editorial

DEAR READERS

It is fascinating to read how Botswana has become a peaceful and wealthy country and now intends to become a global engine for democracy.

Read the full story to find out why its increasing cooperation with Switzerland is part of this journey.

WARM REGARDS, GISELA PIERCEY



GISELA PIERCEY,
EDITOR «SWISS REVIEW
SOUTHERN AFRICA»

Botswana:

Africa's longest uninterrupted democracy goes global

The second Summit for Democracy initiated by US president Joe Biden took place simultaneously in five continents at the end of March. It offered a unique stage to small countries with strong democratic identities like Botswana, Mongolia – and Switzerland.

The second Summit for Democracy took place from March 28-30 and brought together more than 100 countries. This global event was initially proposed by US president Joe Biden and took place in Washington DC in December 2021.

At that summit participating governments including Switzerland committed to concrete democracy support measures, which will not be evaluated during this week's second edition, which takes place on five continents. The second Summit was co-hosted in Africa (by Zambia), Asia (by South Korea), Europe (by the Netherlands) and the Americas (by Costa Rica and the United States).

Democracy diplomat Kaelo Molefhe tells SWI swissinfo.ch how a small landlocked and initially not very rich country in Southern Africa has become a peaceful and wealthy country and now intends to become a global engine for democracy – and why it is increasing cooperation with Switzerland is part of this story.

Molefhe participated in late March in a pre-summit meeting hosted by the Swiss government at Giessbach/Lake Brienz in the Swiss Alps, together with government representatives from Indonesia, Mongolia, Kenya, South Africa, Colombia, Ireland, the United States and the European Union.

SWI swissinfo.ch: Since gaining full independence in 1966, Botswana has been a thriving, open and competitive multi-party state, making it the oldest uninterrupted democracy in Africa. What are the reasons for this success?

Kaelo Molefhe: I think a number of factors can explain this development.

Let me start by focusing on the British rule beginning in 1885 until independence in 1966. Unlike elsewhere in the continent, the British opted for indirect rule in the then Bechuanaland, meaning that they allowed the traditional leaders to have authority and power over their people. In that way the British allowed our local authorities to be in charge, with minimal disruption to the traditional governance structures which are underpinned by broad-based participation and consensus in the decision-making process. It is called the Kgotla system, under which everybody has the right to express themselves and the chief facilitates a consensus.



Dancers wearing Swiss flags welcome Swiss President Alain Berset on a five-day state visit to Botswana and Mozambique last month. © Keystone / Peter Klauzner

Even in the post-independence period the Kgotla remains a key component in our public administration, especially at the local level. For instance, we recently completed the comprehensive review of our constitution, traversing the breadth and width of the country and met people at various Kgotlas where they expressed their wishes in an open and transparent manner. The Kgotla therefore remains a critical forum for deliberation, decision-making and conflict-resolution and has served our country well.

Botswana: a peaceful, wealthy and democratic country.

SWI: Botswana is a landlocked country with neighbours who, when it comes to peace and democracy, haven't had the same

stable development. I'm thinking about South Africa in times of Apartheid or Zimbabwe, which is still an autocracy. How could your country do so well in the shadows of such regimes?

K.M.: Botswana is a small state. Economically and politically. We're right in the heart of a region which over a long period of time was riddled with various challenges that threatened our sovereignty. But instead of adopting a confrontational attitude, we emphasised engagement to resolve issues. In a way we used our traditional skills for keeping peace in foreign relations as well.

SWI: For a long time the world knew very little about Botswana and its foreign policies concen-

trated on Southern Africa. That seems to have changed. A few months ago the Swiss president Alain Berset visited Botswana for the first time and your president Mokgweetsi Masisi just visited the United States ahead of the second Summit for Democracy and gave a speech on the importance of democracy in environmental protection. Is this a new strategy?

K.M.: No, this is a natural step for us. As the longest uninterrupted democracy in Africa, we've always been an example and reference point to others. We know the importance of peace and stability for socioeconomic and political development. To that end, as part of the Southern African Development Community standby force we are engaged in Mozambique mindful of the fact that peace is a necessity for democratic development. We are also active in the African Union and beyond in the support and promotion of democracy. Last year we hosted the first African-wide summit on Constitutionalism and Democratic Consolidation and now we are actively contributing to the second Summit for Democracy.

ARTICLE: SWISSINFO.CH

Africa:

Swiss NGO unmask African industrial gold trade

Switzerland's refineries are top recipients of gold mined at industrial sites in Africa, but most remain deliberately opaque about their sourcing, according to Swissaid. The Swiss non-governmental organisation published a report mapping over 100 business relationships between African industrial gold mines and refineries around the world.

"Without transparency, it is impossible to improve the situation of workers and local populations living in the vicinity of mines," said Swissaid in a statement. The research is part of long-running efforts in Switzerland and abroad to hold corporations accountable for environmental damage and human rights violations linked to mining.

Gold from over a dozen African nations ends up in Switzerland. The continent's largest three gold producers are Ghana, South Africa and Sudan. In 2020, Switzerland's five refineries accredited with the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) imported over 177 tonnes of gold with a

commercial value of CHF9 billion (\$9.8 billion) from African industrial mines, according to the NGO.

Swiss refineries have traditionally declined to disclose the identity of their suppliers, or "clients". They typically cite trade secrecy and present confidentiality and competition arguments. The NGO calls that opacity "puzzling" and "unjustified". It points out that the data in many cases has been provided by partnering mining companies or can be found in the public domain, as well as specialised databases.



Gold digger at work in the Delgo gold market of the Sahara, Sudan. Keystone / Novarc Images / Nicolás Marino

Aversion to responsibility

“We understand that the real reason for not disclosing these relationships for these refineries is they don’t want to be associated with the problems in the mines,” says Marc Ummel, co-author of the report that took two years of research. “When you confirm where you source your gold... it’s a kind of responsibility. Without it, you cannot have a frank discussion about where the problems are and what needs to be done to address them.”

Switzerland imports more than half of the world’s gold each year. In all, two-thirds of the 142 business ties identified by Swissaid concerned the Switzerland-based refineries Metalor and MKS PAMP Group or the Rand Refinery in South Africa, which supplies gold to Swiss banks. The LBMA only publishes the list of countries of gold processed by its refineries in an aggregated fashion.

Metalor has the largest, confirmed footprint in Africa and PX Precinox the smallest. Swissaid identified 26 industrial mines whose gold is being or has been recently refined by Metalor, an international group with headquarters in Neuchâtel, 17 subsidiaries, including five refineries. The NGO says the refinery engaged with its requests and shared data. PX Precinox, also based in Neuchâtel, was reportedly only willing to share that it sources gold from a single mine in Senegal but not its annual refining capacity.

Swissaid identified 21 African mine sites whose gold is being refined or has been recently refined by MKS Pamp; and another 10 by Argor Heraeus. MKS Pamp neither confirmed

nor denied the data, citing contractual confidentiality, competition and security reasons, according to the NGO report. Argor Heraeus cited commercial secrecy but told the NGO African gold supplies account for only one percent of the gold it processes.

Swissaid reported no luck getting its information confirmed by Valcambi. This LBMA refinery based in canton Ticino has an annual refining capacity of 1,200 tonnes of gold. It has filed criminal and civil proceedings against the NGO and one of its researchers following a 2020 report on the gold trade between the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland. Valcambi told SWI swissinfo.ch it does not comment on client relationships unless it has explicit permission from the client to do so due to data privacy legal considerations.

Varying degrees of transparency

“With the Swiss refineries, if you have a Metalor that confirms 26 relationships, why cannot MKS and Argor-Heraeus do the same?” asks Ummel. “If one of them can do this, the others have to do this. At the Swiss level, this shows again that we need a strong due diligence in law, which is not in place.” Switzerland’s customs legislation – including its Precious Metals Control Ordinance – is due to be revised this year.

Swissaid said it had identified human rights violations and environmental problems at the majority of the 125 mine sites analysed. On the environmental front, the list includes air, soil and water pollution – all of which have health impacts for local populations. The report also points to injuries and fatalities at mine sites, land expropriation and forced displacement, wage issues, corruption and tax fraud, sexual violence and murder.

ARTICLE: SWISSINFO

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for Lunch, Swiss Ladies meet every

4th Thursday of the month for lunch.

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■ We shoot every 4th Sat of the month,

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■ **JASS EVENTS:** This is held on the second Friday of each month and will commence at 2 p.m. and is held at Rolf Klein Jass Stube, 3 Bona Terra Road, Assagay (directions on our website).

■ **SPORT TARGET SHOOTING:** Held on the 4th Saturday of each month (weather permitting) commencing at 08:30 a.m.- Nottingham Road (calendar available on our website).
*For more up-to-date information regarding times/venues/directions, please visit our most informative website – www.swissclubnatal.org.za

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