

TIME FOR SA TO TALK

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The prospects for positioning 2010 as a continent-wide event look promising provided South Africa begins a dialogue with African heads of state without delay.

The dialogue should be initiated by the South African government in partnership with other bodies. South Africans reacted with joy at the announcement that South Africa will be the first African country to host the World Cup Soccer in 2010.

There has been much talk recently about the potential of the 2010 Fifa World Cup to leave behind a lasting African legacy.

Some analysts even suggested, without necessarily substantiating the claim, that this could be the event's biggest legacy. But it is not that simple and bears further scrutiny.

Africa is at somewhat of a crossroads at the moment. On the one hand, the continent seems mired in problems; on the other hand, there seems to be much to celebrate.

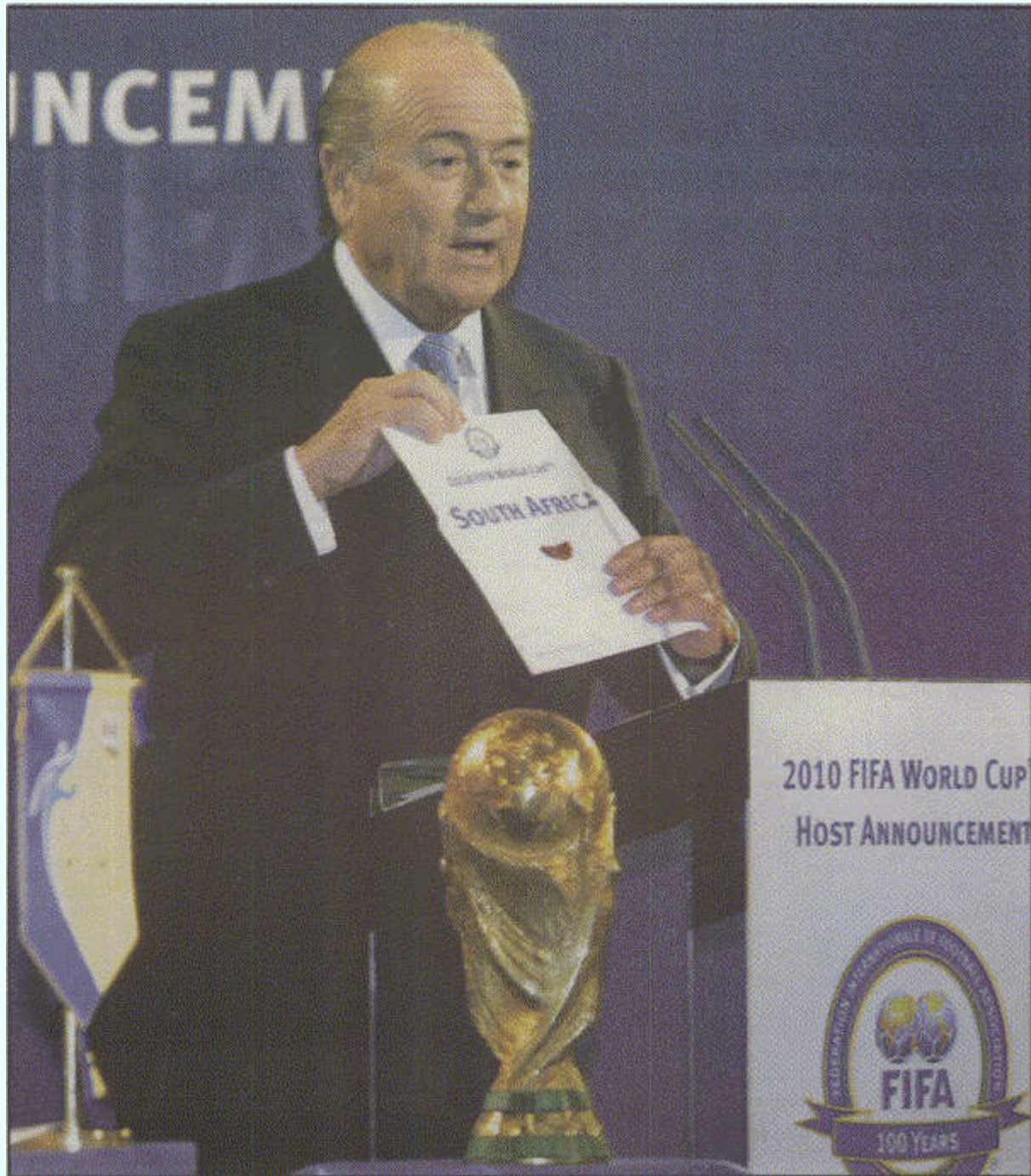
On the negative side, there is a vast amount of political conflict currently afoot, some of which seems to be escalating.

Conflict in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe and Uganda suggests there is much regional instability, at different times requiring intervention by the international community, including the EU and the UN.

Along with high levels of poverty and underdevelopment, large trade and balance of payment deficits, a lack of progress on trade liberalisation negotiations, high levels of HIV-Aids rates, and the consequences associated with global climate change, prospects for the consolidation of democracy, economic growth and sustainability throughout the continent – especially in some countries – look bleak.

On the positive side, Africa's economy is growing at an average of 7 percent (albeit driven by high performance among a few nations) and there has been considerable foreign direct investment over the past five years.

Debt cancellation and trade concessions – despite the failure of the recent post-Doha talks – have also resulted in positive gains. Then there's the African Renaissance and Nepad which, while seemingly dormant over the past two years, has the poten-



HISTORY: Fifa president Sepp Blatter announces that the 2010 World Cup will be organised by South Africa at the Fifa headquarters in Zurich. PHOTO: AP

tial to revive the ailing fortunes of the continent.

In this regard, the African Union has done commendable work over the past year, especially in Sudan, and the peer-review mechanism is working effectively.

Additionally, there are all the positive spinoffs for the continent should South Africa's non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council bear fruit.

Encouragingly, regional bodies in Africa have been transformed to meet the objectives of Nepad and regional trading blocs have been established, most notably in the SADC region, following a summit in Maseru a month ago.

So, against this background, can Africa celebrate and hope to benefit from 2010 as a truly continental event?

The concerns and challenges for Africa posed above, plus time constraints and a host of technical specifications from Fifa, seem to be hindering widespread collaboration and a true sense of partnership between South Africa and the rest of Africa.

However, drawing on the current strengths of the continent, prospects for positioning 2010 as a continent-wide event look promising, provided South Africa begins an immediate dialogue with African heads of state.

This should be initiated by the

South African government in partnership with the AU, and followed up by the 2010 Local Organising Committee (LOC) and the National Communication Partnership, with Fifa's support being critical.

A programme of action grounded in what is achievable for the continent requires formulation as well as commitment.

The agenda for the first of such meetings – a summit of sorts – must coalesce around the following issues, inter alia:

- What are the likely tourism (and other positive economic) spin-offs from 2010, especially for neighbouring SADC states?;

- What are the benefits that are likely to accrue to Africa from successfully staging a mega-sporting event like 2010? (for example, will this enhance the prospects for countries with similar aspirations?);

- Does the event have the potential to drive elements of the African Renaissance pro-

gramme, including the opportunity to celebrate the continent's unique culture, diversity and identity?;

- Do prospects exist through 2010 to enhance integration of the continent into the global economy as an equal global trading partner?;

- And how do event-based economic growth and development relate to arrangements for good governance?

This first meeting must conclude with the establishment of a pan-African coordinating committee entrusted with making sure that, through constant debate, dialogue and intervention, the prospects for 2010 to deliver across Africa will be realised.

The South African government, in partnership with the LOC and Africa's newly restructured regional bodies (mandated by nation states) must drive such a process and assume ownership. The global community must also play a supportive role.

Time constraints suggest that this formative summit occur in the first quarter of next year, and that the coordinating committee tasked with driving this initiative immediately develop a programme of action, with a specific set of time-bound deliverables.

The coordinating committee and its many subcommittees – these modalities must be decided on once the programme of action is finalised – must meet regularly and liaise closely with the South African government, the LOC, the regional bodies referred to above and Fifa.

If this happens, we could be well on our way to seeing a World Cup in 2010 that truly benefits the continent. It is time that Africa made its mark in consolidating and celebrating its position internationally, and 2010 represents a real opportunity to do so.

It must be embraced and nurtured by the continent with spirited determinism and enthusiasm, as well as unfailing belief.

Talk alone will not suffice. A programme of action grounded in what is achievable for the continent requires formulation as well as commitment.

While we may be tempted to base such a plan on the recent experience of Germany – and there is much to be learnt from the 2006 event – the Africa initiative must be grounded locally, yet be simultaneously marketable and relevant globally.

I believe the international community must play a supporting role to all the African stakeholders that come together to drive this process.

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