MEETING NEW CHALLENGES

It has been a tough year for our concerns in Washington. Congress has slashed programs for the poor in the U.S. and in Africa. Jesse Helms has found allies in his call for U.S. isolation from the world.

As the mood and tide seem to shift against us, people ask constantly, "So, what are you doing now?"

At THE AFRICA FUND we still believe that active U.S. citizen engagement with southern Africa and with U.S. policy is critical for the survival of the new democracies. U.S. relations with Africa must not be left to the exclusive control of State Department experts, corporate interests and isolationists who see no U.S. national interest in Africa.

Among the actions we have undertaken this year:

- We took up the fight to stop Congressional destruction of development aid to Africa. Our supporters phoned, faxed, and sent hundreds of letters to their Senators and Representatives. Cities as far apart as Newark, NJ and Seattle, WA passed resolutions calling for continued Africa assistance. Similar resolutions were passed by denominations such as the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, raising their voices against cuts in aid to Africa's poor.

- We sent a delegation of state legislators on a mission to southern Africa to establish strong links with their counterparts in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, and to assess the impact of U.S. it assists about 50,000 domestics each year, through literacy programs, social services, and help settling grievances.

De Villiers told the story of how she and a handful of determined women organized this most oppressed of work forces to audiences across this country during her October 1995 tour, arranged by THE AFRICA FUND.

"Seventeen years ago, people asked me, 'Florrie, why do you want to organize the impossible?'" she recalled at an AFRICA FUND reception in New York. Her courage and persistence have made it possible, and now she sits on the leadership of South..."
New eras are rarely as clearly marked as those in southern Africa this century. Zimbabwe won its independence in 1980, Namibia triumphed ten years later, and South Africa finally defeated apartheid in 1994.

Now each of these countries grapples with problems that beset all democracies, such as:

- How best to ensure representation of voters once elected officials take office?
- Where to find the money for roads, schools, water, all at the same time?
- How to balance the relationship between central and regional governments?
- How to answer immediate needs while planning for the future?

These questions present themselves in extreme forms in southern Africa today, but they also remain on the table every day for local legislators here in the United States.

American aid is not just money to us. It is ammunition for the toughest fight we are involved in — the fight against poverty and ignorance.

— Sam Nujoma, President of Namibia


Accompanied by THE AFRICA FUND Projects Director Dumisani Kumalo, the three state legislators spent May 1995 in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe — meeting with members of government, unions, churches, women’s organizations, and business leaders. The project was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which bears, however, no responsibility for the delegation’s findings.

Reporting on their experiences, delegation members stressed the need...
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA


seems to me that the U.S. is not doing enough to support the transition to democracy. Much more can be done,” he said.

The message was the same everywhere they went.

Namibia's President Sam Nujoma told the delegation, “We get concerned when some people in the United States are calling for cutting aid to Africa. American aid is not just money to us. It is ammunition for the toughest fight we are involved in — the fight against poverty and ignorance. We must do something, and we need the United States to continue to be on our side.”

The delegation also saw the overwhelming disparity between the haves and have-nots in each country, with the colonial pattern of white wealth and Black poverty still basically undisturbed.

In meetings with members of five of the nine provincial parliaments in South Africa, as well as with leaders in the far north of Namibia and in Zimbabwe, the three Americans were struck by the similarities of their jobs. Rep. Smith observed, “We all have to address basic infrastructure needs of our constituencies. We are expected to provide water, electricity, sewage, adequate housing and police services. But the difficulty of the task is multiplied in South Africa because apartheid policies purposely placed the Black majority in townships with the worst location and without any infrastructure. Housing is often no better than shacks built out of whatever was

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NIGERIA

NIGERIAN RULER THREATENS DEMOCRACY

I know The Africa Fund well from their support of our struggle for freedom. They were with us even in the early days when hope was very faint. Theirs was an important contribution to the victory over apartheid. I am confident that they will bring the same dedication to their new campaign for democracy in Nigeria.

— Desmond Tutu
Archbishop of Cape Town, September 27, 1995

Archbishop Tutu wrote these words after a visit to Nigeria. He was sent there by South African President Nelson Mandela to attempt to secure the release of Chief Moshood Abiola, imprisoned by Nigeria's military government. But Abiola remains behind bars, because he won Nigeria's last democratic presidential election.

Nigeria's military government, led by General Sani Abacha, continues to escalate its brutal repression. Promises of an eventual return to democracy notwithstanding, Gen. Abacha has closed newspapers and imprisoned journalists, executed opposition leaders, dissolved trade unions, and effectively extinguished all human and civil rights.

Nigeria's civil society stands on the brink of extinction. Meanwhile, U.S. and European oil companies, including Shell and Mobil, continue to do business with the outlaw government — and the United States is a major customer. Nigeria's economy depends almost entirely on petroleum exports, worth over $4 billion in U.S. sales alone last year. Sanctions directed at their oil industry would seriously weaken Gen. Abacha's ability to stay in power.

The Africa Fund is urging Washington to use its economic leverage to help restore democracy in Nigeria. We are also working with city legislators to pass resolutions calling for economic sanctions against Nigeria. But like the sanctions on apartheid, this movement will only succeed with the hard work of people in local communities. The Africa Fund is encouraging churches, civil rights, and community groups to get involved in the campaign for Nigerian democracy.

... LEGISLATORS FORGE NEW LINKS (continued from page 3)

available to the people."

Rep. Brown said she could relate to the problems of many of the public officials she met on the trip. "The legislators we met all knew what their needs were. They all had goals. The difficulty lay in achieving those goals," she said.

In July the group reunited when the legislators formally presented their report to the National Conference of State Legislatures annual meeting in Milwaukee, WI. Africa Fund Executive Director Jennifer Davis and the speakers of all nine of South Africa's provincial legislatures also joined that meeting.

The report has been distributed to more than 1,500 political, religious and community leaders, Congressional and State Department officials and opinion makers in the U.S. Key recommendations include:

- The U.S. should help southern African countries preserve and extend their hard-won democracies.
- U.S. development aid to southern Africa should be increased.
- U.S. legislators should work with the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and The Africa Fund to build direct links and share expertise.
- Trade and investment should increase.

Copies of the "Report of The Africa Fund Delegation of U.S. State Legislators to South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe" are available for $6 from The Africa Fund.

... DOMESTIC WORKERS (continued from page 1)

Africa's national trade union federation COSATU, among 14 other union General Secretaries — all men. But bucking the system is a way of life for De Villiers. "I have always been a trouble maker," she said.

These days she joins the leadership of a democratic South Africa, with the priorities of housing and a minimum wage for her constituents foremost in her mind. "The goal is to work eight hours a day, like the normal people do," she explained. "Then go home at night and be with your family."

The Africa Fund's Labor Desk coordinator, Mike Fleshman, organized her tour which started in New York City on October 10, proclaimed Florence De Villiers Day in Manhattan by Borough President Ruth Messinger. De Villiers went on to Detroit, Chicago, and Washington DC, meeting with Senator Nancy Kassebaum, union leaders, and women's groups, and participating in the national convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

On her U.S. tour, De Villiers said she hoped to learn, especially from African Americans, "what worked for you and what did not work. So we don't make the same mistake and think it's all roses and fold our arms." Evaluating South Africa today, she said, "We're not absolutely free. Until the unemployed, farm workers, and domestic workers have equality — then we're absolutely free."
TEACHERS VISIT SOUTH AFRICA’S SCHOOLS

This summer, THE AFRICA FUND sponsored 12 teachers from across the United States on a visit to South Africa to develop Africa curriculum for American schools.

Over five weeks in July and August, they traveled to Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, meeting with teachers, principals, artists, workers, and members of government. They saw well-equipped white schools with laboratories for science, music, and art, and impoverished Black schools that didn’t even have buildings for the students’ shelter.

“What I saw was very different from what I read or what I expected,” said group leader Dr. Evelyn Jones Rich. “I was blown away. The rural areas and the poverty were much worse than I expected, but the cosmopolitan cities were also way beyond my expectations.”

The trip, co-sponsored by THE AFRICA FUND and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, received major funding from the U.S. Department of Education. Teachers from Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, New York, and North Dakota participated. Its purpose was to examine the new South Africa in order to develop course ideas for American classrooms and to offer assistance to South African educators. The group is launching a World Wide Web page on the Internet, where educators from around the world can access lesson plans about South Africa.

The group kept to a busy schedule wherever they went. In Cape Town alone they met with Mayor Reverend William Bantom, the Domestic Workers Union, the Human Rights Commission, the Cape Times newspaper, and educators at Cape Town and Western Cape universities.

Of course they also visited schools in the impoverished Black townships where they learned to say, “Good morning, how are you?” in Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and Arabic.

Monumental problems face South Africa’s schools. Education for Black children has been free and compulsory only since President Mandela took office last year. Inevitably, the quality of education—from buildings, to text books, to teachers—for Blacks still remains far below what whites receive.

Basic access to school was one of the key problems the group identified. Many Black children must walk miles to school, if they go at all. There is no system of school bus transportation. And once they get there, the conditions are rough.

“We went to African schools where the buildings were made of sheet metal, and they were so hot you couldn’t breath inside,” Rich said.

The group returned with a new appreciation of the challenges facing South African educators, a commitment to remaining engaged, and some preliminary recommendations, including:

- U.S. corporations should contribute money, computer equipment and training to South African schools.
- U.S. foundations should sponsor teacher exchange programs between this country and South Africa.

Looking back on the trip, Rich said, “I’m optimistic, but I am mindful that the problems they have to overcome are so enormous.”

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Jennifer Davis
Executive Director
When Paul Harris was a child in Jamaica, they called him “deacon.”

Years later, when he served in U.S. Army peacekeeping forces in Egypt, he heard the calling to become a minister.

Today he combines his theological training, Pan African outlook, and commitment to African liberation and development as the new Religious Action Network coordinator. (RAN is a project of the American Committee on Africa, The Africa Fund’s associate organization.)

“I’m still fighting a battle, but it’s not with guns,” he said. Rev. Harris’ battleground is the fight against injustice and oppression. He plans to engage churches across the country in this effort.

“The churches that we have today are the traditional villages of yesterday,” he said. “The church is the bedrock of our community.”

As a student at Hofstra University in Long Island, NY, he actively raised money and awareness to support the ANC and SWAPO in their fight for freedom. He remembers working with the staff of ACOA and The Africa Fund on ideas for student organizing.

Reflecting on his plans for RAN, he said, “We are building a movement to support African development and African reconstruction. It has to be a grassroots movement in the churches.”

Pastors who would like a visit from Rev. Harris should contact him at ACOA, 17 John Street, New York, NY 10038 or call (212) 962-1210.

INSIDE:

- Women and Labor Organizing

- New Local Political Links in Southern Africa

- U.S. Teachers Learn in South Africa