

NEWS

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HUMAN RIGHTS

1998: NIGERIA'S YEAR OF TRAGEDY AND TRANSITION

This was a dramatic year in Nigeria, where the unexpected deaths of Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha and the illegally imprisoned President-elect, Moshood Abiola, were swiftly followed by a new general consolidating his power amid fresh promises of elections to end decades of military rule. These developments have suddenly and profoundly altered the course of the Nigerian democracy struggle and THE AFRICA FUND launched a Nigeria Transition Watch project to meet the new challenge and protect the integrity of the promised democratic elections. The Transition Watch is directed by Human Rights Coordinator Mike Fleshman.

REASONS FOR HOPE

The death of the dictator Abacha in June 1998 after five years of ruthless and corrupt misrule was greeted with celebration by the Nigerian people. Abacha's replacement, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, released some political prisoners, repealed some repressive laws and decrees, reined in the security forces and announced a rapid transition to elected civilian government, which is to culminate in Presidential elections in February 1999 and inauguration of a civilian government by May 29, 1999. Nigerian human rights organizations have established an organization to monitor the transition and ensure its legitimacy. Press restrictions have been eased and the country's powerful trade unions, under military administration for four years, have been returned to worker control.

SKEPTICISM ABOUNDS

Many doubted the army's intentions. For over 13 years Nigerians have heard successive generals promise free elections and democracy only to deliver more dictatorship. Abubakar's decision to impose yet another military controlled "transition to democracy" on the people without their consent has been harshly criticized by Nigerian human rights and pro-democracy leaders who point out that General Abubakar was a senior member of the Abacha dictatorship.

Disturbing signs of electoral manipulation soon began to emerge. During the crucial voter registration period for example, some 16 million registra-

tion cards failed to arrive at registration sites in the south and west, resulting in widespread disenfranchisement of voters outside the army's northern political base. Members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the government agency in charge of the vote, were handpicked by Abubakar and serve at his sole discretion. Local council elections held on December 5—a test run for 1999 state, federal and Presidential elections—revealed many of these flaws and underscored the importance of THE AFRICA FUND project, established in partnership with Nigeria's main human rights group, the Civil Liberties Organization, to educate Americans about the transition program and work
(continued on page 6)



Hafsat Abiola (second from left) with Michigan Coalition for Human Rights Director Sister Joannette Nitz (left) and members of the congregation at the Central United Methodist Church in Detroit. As part of an emphasis on community based education and constituency outreach, Human Rights Coordinator Michael Fleshman and Hafsat Abiola, the daughter of long-imprisoned Nigerian President-elect Moshood Abiola, conducted a speaking tour that included visits to seven local churches, an address to the Detroit City Council and briefings for the city's powerful labor movement.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Africa Fund Trustee Dr. Wyatt T. Walker introduces Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., the President's Special Representative for Democracy in Africa, at the Midwest Regional Consultation.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Illinois Congressman Danny K. Davis with Jennifer Davis.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Illinois Congressman Bobby Rush.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Illinois State Senator Jesus Garcia with Former State Senator Alice Palmer.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Indiana Representative Charlie Brown.



Credit: Basil Clunie

Kimberley August of Enron Corporation with Jennifer Davis.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS FOCUS ON AFRICA

While the President's historic trip to Africa last Spring underscored Washington's renewed interest in Africa as an economic and political partner, a quiet revolution in U.S. policy towards Africa has been underway outside the Beltway in state capitols and city halls across the country. Once the exclusive preserve of the foreign policy establishment, corporate executives and the think tank elites, states and cities are now forging their own business and cultural ties to Africa, and bringing local priorities, community values and new ideas into the national debate over U.S. interests in Africa.

Under the leadership of Project Director Susie Johnson, THE AFRICA FUND has encouraged this new dynamism over the year, convening conferences in Chicago and Greensboro, North Carolina and a forward-looking strategy meeting at The Riverside Church in New York City. These meetings brought together state and local elected officials from 18 states with African and American economists and business leaders, academics and policy makers, Ambassadors, NGO groups and human rights activists. Through focused presentations and freewheeling discussions, the conferences informed and reinforced local initiatives for Africa, and strengthened the capacity of state and local officials to engage American policy issues—helping to make the process more democratic, more inclusive and more representative of the growing “peo-

“The growth rates achieved by many African countries ... [are] founded in real economic activity. It is the reflection of Africans working harder and smarter; of our entrepreneurs becoming wiser and more innovative; of our governments becoming responsible and responsive to the needs of growing economies.”

— South African Consul General
Sheila Sisulu

ple-to-people” connections between the U.S. and Africa. These meetings were part of a broader Africa Fund program, made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to promote the involvement of state and municipal elected officials with U.S. Africa policy.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT A MAJOR FOCUS

Despite the geographic and political diversity of the participants, trade and investment, human rights, social justice and strengthening local initiatives were recurring themes of the conferences during 1998. Establishing and expanding state and local business ties with Africa, and the sometimes bitter debate over President Clinton's proposed trade legislation, The African Growth and Opportunity Act, provided focal points for state and local legislators throughout the year.



Credit: Titus Heagins

South African Minister for Welfare and Population Development Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi speaking at the Southern Consultation.



Credit: Titus Heagins

Bennett College Provost Dr. Charlotte Alston with North Carolina Congressman Melvin Watt.



Credit: Titus Heagins

Liberian Ambassador Rachel Gbenyon-Diggs with Greensboro Mayor Carolyn S. Allen.

Many speakers, including market analyst Jeffrey E. Lewis of DST Catalyst, Inc. and Salih Booker, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and an Africa Fund Trustee, underscored Africa's growing importance as a U.S. trading partner and a potential new market of over 800 million people. Lewis pointed at African stock market investments as a way for public employee pension funds and other investors to both earn a fair return and provide African businesses with the capital to expand into such lucrative areas as the processing of African raw materials. Booker noted that U.S. trade with Africa exceeds that with the former Soviet Union, but that unfair terms of trade, a crushing debt burden and a rapid decline in U.S. development aid were major obstacles to African economic growth.

LIVELY DEBATE ON TRADE

At the southern regional conference at the historically Black Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, in June, participants engaged in what Liberian Ambassador to the U.S. Rachel Gbenyon-Diggs described as "the first real debate on the African Growth and Opportunity Act that I have participated in." The legislation, which would open U.S. markets to some African countries which lower their tariffs and adopt other free market policies, was hailed by some as a long-overdue recognition of Africa's economic importance and a boost to greater trade and investment.

The bill had strong support among most African governments and big business. But many critics in the African

and U.S. non-governmental communities dubbed the bill the "re-colonization of Africa" because it imposed tough financial conditions on African countries and did little to benefit African or African American small business. Critics also stressed that the bill ignored many of the fundamental economic problems confronting Africa, such as the debt crisis or the need to strengthen peasant agriculture.

"After the African Growth and Opportunity Act is passed, America, for the very first time, will have a definable U.S.-Africa trade policy. African countries implementing dramatic reforms will receive substantially greater access to our markets."

— Ambassador Johnnie Carson,
Principal Deputy Assistant
Secretary of State for African
Affairs

In Greensboro, the debate engaged advocates like Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Ambassador John Carson and Liberian Ambassador Gbenyon-Diggs, who argued strongly for greater appreciation of African views in the formation of U.S. policy. South African Consul General Sheila Sisulu praised the legislation as "encouraging," and pointed to the emergence of a new generation of pragmatic African leaders and efforts to increase inter-African trade and development as signs of progress.

Those critiquing the bill included Yassine Fall, who heads the Associa-

tion of African Women for Research and Development and Congressman Melvin Watt.

The challenge, said Booker, is to get the mix of aid, trade, and investment right by encouraging sound economic policies, improving the terms of trade for African exports and helping Africans overcome the centuries-old legacy of racism, colonialism, and underdevelopment. Comparing Africa's place in the world economy and in popular perception to impoverished minority communities in the U.S., Booker told legislators, "You know the neighborhood," and encouraged them to bring their experience in countering poverty and violence, improving education and economic opportunity, and challenging stereotypes to their work with Africa.

AT HOME IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

Establishing or expanding direct links between states and African countries was another constant among legislators. With foreign trade becoming an increasingly important part of regional economies, state and local legislators have become much more involved in assisting local businesses to take advantage of opportunities overseas, and Africa is a key priority. Speaking to his colleagues in Greensboro, Georgia, State Representative Bob Holmes noted that five states, including Georgia, had established trade offices in South Africa. The Georgia office worked hard to educate state business leaders about African opportunities and actively promoted state businesses with African business and political

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT (continued from page 3)



Credit: Truss Higgins

Legislators from nine states attended the Southern Regional Consultation on U.S. Policy Toward Africa. Participants include (front row, from l. to r.) Susie Johnson, Director of Projects, The Africa Fund; Sheila Sisulu, Consul General of South Africa; Florida State Representative Beryl Roberts-Burke; Gloria Scott, President, Bennett College; Jennifer Davis, Executive Director, The Africa Fund; Greensboro Mayor Carolyn S. Allen and Senegal's Yassine Fall, Executive Director of the Association of African Women for Research and Development.

leaders through the state Center for Trade and Technology and regular trade missions.

Speaking to a similar point in Chicago, Wisconsin State Representative Spencer Coggs described the evolution of sister community relationships between African and American states and cities into trade and investment initiatives and, like many other speakers, emphasized the importance of involving African American business and community leaders.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The impact of U.S. policy on African struggles for human rights and economic and social justice also emerged as a key focus for legislators. At the Midwest regional conference in Chicago in March, for example, civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson, the President's Special Representative for Democracy in Africa, set the tone early with an impassioned appeal for the inclusion of social justice concerns in U.S. economic policy. Reminding legislators that for centuries the basis for U.S.-Africa economic relations was the sale of human beings, Jackson declared that "trade without humane values is slavery."

Other speakers throughout the series of meetings, including Human Rights Watch/Africa Executive Director Peter Takirambudde, were harshly critical of the Clinton Administration's record on human rights in Africa and the President's failure to

emphasize human and civil liberties during his Africa trip. Addressing conferees in Greensboro, Takirambudde noted that the rush to embrace "new leaders" while ignoring African non-governmental human rights and democracy activists blinded Washington to ongoing human and civil rights abuses in countries embracing American economic prescriptions.

The ongoing crisis in military-ruled Nigeria was a central concern for the legislators, who heard accounts of economic injustice and state terror-

"Trade between the U.S. and Africa now supports about 11 million American workers, these jobs pay above the national average, and 47 states have increased trade with Africa over the last four years."

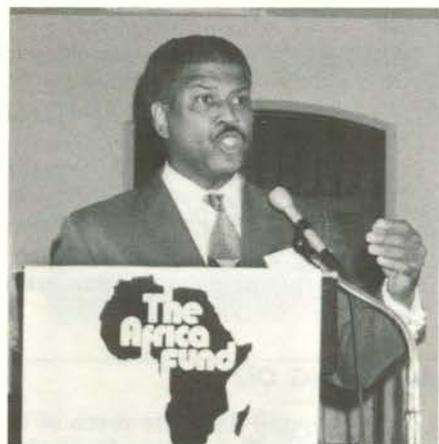
— Representative Irma Hunter Brown, Arkansas

ism from two members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) which is leading the Ogoni peoples' struggle for environmental justice and human rights in the Nigerian oil fields (see article on page 1). In Greensboro, Dr. Owens Wiwa, the brother of the executed Nigerian author and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa, recounted the environmental and human rights abuses of the Shell Oil Company in Ogoniland and cautioned against the futility of promoting economic development (continued on page 5)



Credit: Richard Knight

Arkansas State Representative Irma Hunter-Brown, Chair of the International Affairs Committee of National Black Caucus of State Legislators with Susie Johnson and New York State Assemblyman Albert Vann.



Credit: Richard Knight

Los Angeles City Treasurer J. Paul Brownridge addressed the Strategy Meeting.



Credit: Richard Knight

Jesse Jackson, Sr. with Wisconsin State Senator Mary Panzer.



Credit: Richard Knight

Boston City Councilman Charles C. Yancey, the incoming President of National Black Caucus of Locally Elected Officials.

under conditions of extreme political repression.

Georgetown University Law Center Professor Robert Stumberg warned legislators about efforts to use international trade agreements to restrict the right of states and cities to adopt the kinds of local economic sanctions that had proved so successful against apartheid South Africa. He said the Clinton Administration, the private sector and foreign governments operating through the World Trade Organization had launched a political offensive to strip states and cities of the right to include justice concerns in investment and procurement decisions. The attack on local sanctions, Stumberg argued, raises important constitutional and sovereignty issues.

EDUCATION A FOCUS

In recognition of Bennett College's role as a leading academic bridge to Africa, the Greensboro agenda included a special workshop on education addressed by Bennett College President Dr. Gloria R. Scott who outlined Bennett's longstanding partnership with Zimbabwe.

REACHING OUT

Moving beyond the wide reach of its own meetings THE AFRICA FUND also expanded work with associations of elected officials throughout the year. Susie Johnson was the keynote speaker in Indianapolis in August when the Indiana State Black Legislative Caucus (IBLC) marked its first ever legislative weekend putting Africa—and THE AFRICA FUND—at the heart of state efforts to increase international trade and prepare young Hoosiers for the challenges of the global economy. The initiative, spearheaded by two members of THE AFRICA FUND legislative network, state Representatives Bill Crawford and Charlie Brown, complements the announced establishment of an Indiana trade office in South Africa with an ambitious plan to expand awareness of and support for Africa statewide.

The IBLC adopted a plan to:

- Ensure that state economic development and pension fund decisions benefit Africa
- Support transfer of skills between Africa and Indiana
- Ensure that Black students are prepared for careers in international public policy.

Indiana Governor Frank O'Bannon praised the two lawmakers and noted that Hoosier state sales to South Africa alone totaled \$41 million last year.

"Trade between U.S. and African countries needs to benefit both Africans on the continent and those of African descent in the U.S."

— Representative Spencer Coggs,
Wisconsin

In July, Susie Johnson attended the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and in December she addressed the NCSL's Women's Network. In November, Ms. Johnson addressed

the Africa strategy committee at the National Order of Women Legislators meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, and was asked to be an advisor to the committee, which is planning a trade delegation to Africa. In December, she addressed the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) annual meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, where the theme was children in the new millennium, and distributed an Africa Fund report, *Africa's Children: The Struggle for a Decent Life*.



U.S. MAYORS CALL FOR AFRICAN DEBT RELIEF



Credit: U.S. Conference of Mayors

Throughout the year The Africa Fund has continued to build its relationship with the U.S. Conference of Mayors. In January, Executive Director Jennifer Davis addressed the Mayor's Summit on Africa on U.S. policy and human rights. With her on the dais are Fort Wayne Mayor Paul Helmka, the Conference President, and Denver Mayor Wellington E. Webb, chair of the organization's Task Force on Sub-Saharan Africa. In June, Susie Johnson addressed the Conference's annual meeting in Reno on African debt. The Conference subsequently adopted a resolution supporting debt relief for Africa.

HUMAN RIGHTS (continued from page 1)

to protect the integrity of the process. The Nigeria Transition Watch project will allow Americans to understand and follow the progress of this critical transition and have access to Nigerian views about the transition as it unfolds.

URGING DEMOCRACY

The Transition Watch followed on our continuing focus on Washington and U.S. policy toward Nigeria. In January Executive Director Jennifer Davis presented a paper at the Council on Foreign Relations that detailed U.S. economic links to the Nigerian military and outlined the potential effectiveness of economic sanctions.

In April, responding to dictator Abacha's fraudulent scheme to run unopposed for the Nigerian presidency, THE AFRICA FUND initiated an African American leadership statement challenging the U.S. policy of "constructive engagement" and urging the Clinton administration to back the democratic movement. Signatories to the widely reported statement included NAACP leaders Kweisi Mfume and Julian Bond, Congressional Black Caucus leaders Maxine Waters, Donald Payne, Cynthia

McKinney and Carolyn Kilpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Walter Carrington.

Throughout the first half of 1998 THE AFRICA FUND and a coalition of concerned investors also dialogued with the Mobil Oil Company, the second largest producer of Nigerian oil, about corporate practices in the country and a Nigeria shareholder resolution. After moving speeches by two young women, Cordelia Kokori the daughter of then imprisoned oil workers' union head, Frank Kokori, and Hafsat Abiola, daughter of imprisoned president-elect Moshood Abiola, to the annual shareholder meeting the resolution attracted over 7 percent of total votes. THE AFRICA FUND arranged for the two to attend the meeting.



DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

The following four-page background papers on issues of current interest are available for \$1.00 each.

- Africa's Debt Crisis: An Obstacle to Growth
- Africa's Children: The Struggle for a Decent Life
- The Massachusetts-South Africa Sister State/Province Relationship
- Women and Governance - Finding Voice and Claiming Rights in the New Africa
- Mobil in Nigeria - Partner in Oppression (Updated 9/98)

Visit www.prairienet.org/acas/afund.html

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