

NEWS

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THE BATTLE TO CANCEL AFRICA'S DEBT MOVES FORWARD

This September, while Congress was debating whether they would finance the modest commitments of debt relief made at the G-7 meetings in Cologne in 1999, THE AFRICA FUND demanded the complete cancellation of Africa's unsustainable and illegitimate debt. The Fund coordinated two statements signed by eighty prominent black religious leaders and elected officials from across the country. These statements were presented at a press conference at St. Paul Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, during their annual Maafa (Middle Passage) commemoration.

"African-American religious leaders are unimpressed with congressional efforts to reduce some of Africa's debt," Africa Fund Trustee Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker said at the press conference. "It's 2000 A.D. and we're still in chains!" Signatories on the religious statement, from California to Kentucky, include the Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., of the PUSH/Rainbow Coalition; Martin Luther King III, of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); Mrs. Sullivan Robinson, Executive Director of the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC); and the Reverend Al Sharpton of the National Action Network. "We came together to urge the U.S. Congress to help put an end to this crippling foreign debt crisis, which poses a huge threat to the continent's long-term development efforts. The Congress must cancel the debt now if Africa is ever to have a fair chance," said the Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood, Senior Pastor of St. Paul Community Baptist Church.

THE AFRICA FUND's Advisory Council of Public Officials released a separate



Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood (left), AFRICA FUND Trustee Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker (center) and AFRICA FUND Faith Communities Program Director Aleah Bacquie (right) at THE FUND's press conference on debt cancellation.

statement, which read, in part, "The U.S. has provided leadership in the past to cancel loans to European countries such as Germany and Poland, while African countries devastated by floods, droughts and AIDS are told to reschedule debt repayment under onerous terms. Africa's economic development, the expansion of mutually-beneficial U.S.-Africa trade, and most importantly the health and well-being of African people, depends on this debt being canceled." Signatories include mayors, state legislators and city council members from fifteen states.

Thanks to our sister organization, the Africa Policy Information Center, the statement was hand-delivered to every member of the Appropriations Committee, which was charged with determining how much of Africa's debt would be canceled. AFRICA FUND efforts helped convince Congress to appropriate the minor \$435 million contribution sought by President Clinton for debt relief

through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. HIPC aims to enable some African countries to achieve a small measure of debt relief for countries that comply with rigid, externally imposed economic reforms.

"What is needed, however, is nothing less than the complete cancellation of Africa's foreign debt," stressed Aleah Bacquie, Director of THE FUND's Faith Communities Program, at a meeting on debt cancellation at Seton Hall University. "Twenty-one million African children's lives could be saved this year alone if this illegitimate debt were canceled. This is a question of life and death. Most African countries pay more servicing their international debt than they do on health care. Why must African mothers and fathers starve their children to pay this debt? Why are the world's richest countries holding the world's poorest countries accountable for debts that can never be paid? In any case, who owes whom what?" ■



FROM THE DESK OF SALIH BOOKER

By the time you receive this newsletter, Americans will have elected a new President to take

office in 2001. Judging from the presidential debates, where Africa - for once - figured in the discussion but with shameful responses by both candidates, it is clear that our work is already cut out for us regardless of the outcome.

Over the next several months members of the Board of Trustees of THE AFRICA FUND will be negotiating with their counterparts on the Boards of the American Committee on Africa (ACOA) and the Washington - based Africa Policy Information Center (APIC) to merge our three organizations into a single and stronger entity. ACOA, established in 1953 to support the liberation struggles in southern Africa, is America's oldest progressive Africa-focused organization. It expanded its mandate over time to work in support of all African independence struggles and it gave birth to THE AFRICA FUND in 1966 as a vehicle for public education, organizing and direct assistance. The Africa Policy Information Center was established in 1978 to pro-

vide "information for action" and in the 1990's has pioneered the use of electronic information technology to expand its reach and impact. By joining the strengths of these three organizations in organizing and information dissemination to mobilize our networks of activists, state and local public officials, churches, students and other engaged citizens, we will be better positioned to sustain and grow the progressive movement to change U.S. relations with Africa in the years ahead.

In August, we jointly hosted a press conference on President Clinton's trip to Nigeria that was covered by C-SPAN and many other media organizations. Panelists raised questions about the failure of the Administration to offer debt cancellation to Nigeria and its focus on military cooperation while ignoring continued military repression in the Niger Delta and the role of U.S. oil companies there.

Our efforts to gain the cancellation of Africa's illegitimate foreign debts are detailed elsewhere in this newsletter, and this will remain one of our priorities in the year ahead. We have also recently become more engaged in work to help

end the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, publishing an Op-Ed in the *Boston Globe*, co-chairing with APIC a working group of several NGOs on AIDS that works to increase US assistance and supporting the Economic Commission for Africa's work to organize a large forum on AIDS and the African response to be held in December in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. AFRICA FUND Trustee Canon Frederick B. Williams attended the 13th International Conference on AIDS in Durban, South Africa, last summer.

Our joint publication of "Questions on Africa Policy for Candidates and Policy makers" was distributed to Jim Lehrer and other journalists covering the elections and may have contributed to his question on Africa during the second presidential debate. The issues we outlined in that brochure, including holding global economic institutions accountable, peace and security, UN dues and combating racism in foreign policy, will continue to demand our attention and your support. The political climate on African issues will not change unless public pressure continues to grow. We are confident that we can continue to lead that struggle. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD KNIGHT

PARTNERING WITH MOZAMBICANS TO REBUILD

When Mozambique was hit by the worst floods in its history this past February, THE AFRICA FUND raised over \$50,000 for the Mozambique Red Cross and the flood rehabilitation Water Development and Sanitation Program of the Christian Council of Mozambique. Funds raised to rebuild came from individuals across the U.S. and from a special benefit concert featuring the National Song and Dance Company of Mozambique in April in New York.

AFRICA FUND Trustee Prexy Nesbitt traveled to Mozambique in April to ensure the safe receipt of contributions and to identify effective ongoing projects that could be supported in partnership with the Red Cross and the Christian Council. The long-term damage was enormous, Nesbitt reported: "In spite of how 'challenged' Mozambicans must feel after all these years of death and loss due to destabilization, war, famine and floods, there



The floods in Mozambique destroyed thousands of homes, schools and businesses and washed out roads, including this Maputo neighborhood.

remains a core of resilience and persistence that drives the people. It is important that the people not be viewed merely as 'victims.' Mozambique will need extensive time, financial support and resources to rebuild and regain the momentum it

had finally recently established." Over one million people were left with unsafe drinking water, a threatening cholera epidemic and a desperate need for emergency shelter and malaria drugs. One third of Mozambique's cereal crop was destroyed and roads and bridges were washed out, and it's clear that reconstruction and rebuilding will require huge domestic efforts and significant international support.

In May, THE AFRICA FUND co-sponsored a U.S. tour for Mozambique's former Ambassador to the U.S., Valeriano Ferrão, who is now the Director General of the Union Cooperatives of Maputo (UGC). The UGC is an umbrella organization providing services to 183 "Green Zone" agricultural cooperatives, 95% of whose 5,000 members are women. In a very successful 23-day trip, Ambassador Ferrão spoke widely about urgent reconstruc- (continued on page 4)

PHOTOGRAPH BY PREXY NESBITT

YOUTH AND COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM LAUNCHED

THE AFRICA FUND has expanded its program for two years through "New Voices." This new fellowship, sponsored by the Academy for Educational Development, helps young voices participate meaningfully in peace and social justice organizations and in the larger international human rights community.

THE FUND has a long history of preparing new voices for advocacy on African affairs and for handing the baton to younger leadership, especially during the anti-apartheid and divestment campaigns when the organization was a major presence on college campuses across the country. Today's youth movements are addressing issues like globalization and the WTO, sweatshops, worker's rights and the death penalty. From Seattle to Prague, youth have demonstrated political commitment and leadership and THE AFRICA FUND wants to strengthen its ties to these emerging campaigns and build relationships with tomorrow's leaders.

This is a particularly crucial moment to introduce new voices on African issues. By making presentations across the country and drawing connections between the social, economic and human rights struggles being waged by many African communities to similar struggles confronting urban youth in the U.S., this program will expand our network to include a broader base of Amer-

icans and increase the organization's visibility and the visibility of African issues in public discourse in the US. We are developing new strategies to sustain Africa coverage in the traditional and non-traditional media, including the alternative press and youth- and web-based publications. THE FUND has already been offered a monthly column by *Metro Exchange*, a community newspaper reaching youth, churches, health-care providers and banks in the New York metropolitan area.

In addition to collaborating with youth on these issues, we will also develop greater expertise on the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and U.S. policy. Not only is Africa home to the vast majority of the world's HIV/AIDS victims, but in the U.S., HIV/AIDS is increasing primarily among young women of color. We will support advocacy efforts to fight AIDS while also seeking to engage representatives of the generation most directly threatened by this plague. THE FUND and the Africa Policy Information Center are currently co-chairing the Advocacy Network on Africa AIDS Working Group, a coalition of over twenty NGOs working on policy issues. For more information or to share ideas about how you can connect to youth through this dynamic new program, please call our office at (212) 785-1024. ■

THE AFRICA FUND PROGRAMS

Founded in 1966 by the American Committee on Africa, THE AFRICA FUND works for a positive U.S. policy toward Africa and supports U.S. and African campaigns for human rights, democracy, debt cancellation, public health, corporate social responsibility and environmental justice.

STATE AND MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS: State and municipal officials are encouraged to think globally and act locally and promote direct links to Africa and mutually beneficial trade and investment. The program's Advisory Council of Public Officials helps identify and act on critical policy issues. Major support is provided by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

FAITH COMMUNITIES AND OUTREACH: A national network of African-American religious leaders are engaged through regional consultations, forums on debt, contemporary slavery, peace-building initiatives and HIV/AIDS; issue Sundays on human rights; and a fact-finding mission to the Sudan. This program is made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

YOUTH AND COMMUNICATIONS: This program seeks to engage and educate younger voices in Africa advocacy work, increase Africa coverage in traditional and non-traditional media and expand efforts to combat the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. For more details, see the full story on this page.



NEW STAFF APPOINTMENTS

AISHA SATTERWHITE, Director for Youth Programs and Communications

Aisha will direct a new youth outreach program, expand our communications program and coordinate our efforts to highlight public health issues, particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic. She has written extensively on race, class and gender issues and has worked with non-profit organizations concerning education, labor and health and health care in minority communities. She has worked on youth issues with Youth Communication in Washington, D.C. and at *USA Today*. She is the former Associate Editor of *American Legacy*, a quarterly African-American history and culture magazine. Previously, she served as the Director of Publications and the Assistant to the Director at THE AFRICA FUND and the American Committee on Africa.

MUNTU MATSIMELA, Program Director for State and Municipal Affairs

Muntu has been appointed to lead THE AFRICA FUND's State and Municipal Affairs program, which works to promote the involvement of public officials with U.S. policy toward Africa. He has worked in a leadership capacity on community issues, including anti-apartheid and anti-colonialism, for more than thirty years with diverse constituencies including students, labor, clergy and legal and elected officials. He has been involved with a wide range of civil organizations, including the National Black Human Rights Coalition, the New York Review Commission on the FBI, and the City Wide Coalition Against Police Brutality. Until his appointment he served as the managing attorney for The Osborne Association, providing civil legal services for HIV-positive clients trapped in the criminal justice system. He has also worked as a Field Coordinator for the Legal Aid Society and as the Co-Director of David Dinkins' Northern Manhattan Campaign Office. ■

MOZAMBIQUE (continued from page 2)

tion needs to diverse audiences in ten cities across the country, reaching high school and college students, solidarity groups, relief organizations and foundation, business, labor and community leaders.

At the time of the floods, Mozambique was paying \$1.4 million a week in debt service and Mozambican leaders, including Ambassador Ferrão, have made urgent appeals for debt cancellation. "We call on the international community to cancel our debt immediately so we can concentrate on the reconstruction of lives and infrastructures," said Mozambique's Methodist Bishop Bernardino Mandlate. "It is unthinkable that our country can continue to drain

itself of much needed resources to service the debt we believe morally and financially has already been paid back."

As a result of pressure for debt cancellation from THE FUND and other national and international organizations, the U.S., the United Kingdom and South Africa have canceled some bilateral debt, but Mozambique will still be paying more than \$1 million a week to other creditor nations. Nesbitt elaborated, "Mozambique's international debt should be immediately and completely canceled, especially because of the huge debt the world owes them for their contribution to Southern Africa's struggle against white minority rule and apartheid." ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

By the time you receive this newsletter, THE AFRICA FUND Faith Communities Program will have convened its regional Religious Leaders Consultations on Africa. The first consultation, held in collaboration with Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago in November, included African speakers on debt bondage, the AIDS pandemic and contemporary slavery. The next meeting is scheduled for Spring 2001 on the West Coast. For more information please contact our office at 212-785-1024 or e-mail us at africafund@igc.org.

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DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Copies of these and other background papers and briefings are available at no cost at www.theafricafund.org. If you would like bulk copies for conferences and meetings, please contact Richard Knight at 212-785-1024 or africafund@igc.org.

- Questions on Africa Policy for Candidates and Policymakers, produced by THE AFRICA FUND and the Africa Policy Information Center
- "Use the Surplus to Fight AIDS," a *Boston Globe* editorial by Salih Booker
- Black Religious Leaders and Elected Officials Say Cancel Africa's Debt
- Why Cancel Africa's Debt?
- Religious Leaders Say No to Slavery in Mauritania
- Blood and Oil in Sudan
- Questions and Answers on Slavery in Sudan
- US Policy Towards Nigeria: An Agenda for Justice
- African Refugees: The Struggle for Equitable Resettlement

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