

CHICAGO-ALEXANDRA SISTER COMMUNITY PROJECT

A local Chicago-Alexandra Support Committee is forming links with the Alexandra Civic Organization to facilitate a sister community relationship. Alexandra, one of the poorest and oldest townships in South Africa, is located next to Johannesburg's most affluent white suburb. This, along with the community's militant resistance to apartheid laws, makes it a target of government efforts to remove or radically reshape it.

Conditions in Alexandra

Overcrowded, unpaved, and polluted, Alexandra's 200,000 residents are crammed into one square kilometer. Apartheid has created these conditions.

During the 1970's the government attempted to remove Alexandra's residents to other townships and turn Alexandra into a hostel complex for migrant workers. Conditions deteriorated as authorities refused to carry out normal maintenance, and denied residents permission to repair their own homes. Even after the hostel effort was abandoned in the face of determined resistance from Alexandra residents, the government continued to harass the community and its residents. To this day it maintains the community under the most squalid conditions.

Local resistance

The people of Alexandra were deeply involved in the June 1976 Soweto uprising, a critical stage in the development of black political power. In 1980 the government attempted to thrust a "community council" on Alexandra, but the residents refused to be taken in by this facade of "self-governance". The government answered with the imposition of "town council elections" in 1983. By boycotting the local elections the people deligitimized this effort as well. Nevertheless, the council was imposed on the community, only to be forced to resign by community pressure during the uprisings of 1986. The government responded to national unrest with the state of emergency, still in effect in 1990.

Current government tactics

The government recently attempted to move the activists out of the community by detaining them without trial for extended periods of time. Simultaneously, it is trying to create a "new community" free of the conditions that have made Alexandra a major trouble spot. But creating a new community does not mean upgrading the appalling conditions for local residents, or allowing them any degree of self-governance. It is rather an effort to build expensive housing to ensure that current residents cannot afford to live in Alexandra any longer.

The government plan envisions an Alexandra of "black bourgeoisie" whose economic self-interest will make them less likely to resist government policy. Recently the government added one kilometer to Alexandra and contracted with private white developers to build homes selling at a price far out of reach of most Alexandra residents. So although the government's efforts are not a "classical" forced removal, the effect will be the same: remove the residents, neutralize a key resistance point, and reshape the community according to the government's needs.

The Alexandra Civic Organization

The Alexandra Civic Organization (ACO) was formed in 1982, and spearheads the organized resistance to the government. Its leadership has been a victim of apartheid harassment and detention.

One of ACO's major goals is to force the government to grant Alexandra more land -- not for high-cost developments, but rather to expand low-income housing. They have mounted an **Affordable Housing for All** Campaign demanding that the government, rather than private developers, build affordable housing. In addition, they are pushing for rents tied to income and upgraded community services.

Alexandra-Chicago Sister Community Relationship

The Alexandra Civic Organization requested assistance from Chicago, as part of the broader United States-South Africa Sister Community Project, which establishes linkages between U.S. cities and South African communities threatened with removal. The project is endorsed by the African National Congress, the United Democratic Front, the Black Sash and other anti-apartheid groups.

The people of Alexandra contacted Chicago because they believe their American partner can expose the on-going brutal policies of the South African government. We, as a sister community, can respond to crisis situations, such as the one which ended recently when four community leaders were detained for months without charges.

For Further Information

The Chicago-Alexandra Support Committee, sponsored by CCISSA (Chicago Committee in Solidarity with Southern Africa) welcomes support from you and your organization. Contact Joan Gerig at (312) 421-5513.