

5 MAY 1993 MEETING

Date and Time: 5 May 1993 6:30 P.M.

Place: Roxbury Community College

Attendance: Jemadari Kamara, President

Alix Cantave, Vice President

Deborah Toler, Secretary

Tesfay Aradom, Assistant Secretary

James Pritchett, Policy Committee Chair

Pearl Robinson, Education Committee Chair

Adelaide Cromwell

Monique Burnett

Priscilla Dass

Geraldine Hines

Sabrina Johnson

Willard Johnson

Winston Langley

Aggrey Mbare

Vicki Meredith

Kwame Sarpong

Magueye Seck

Emira Woods

[VISITORS]

Effieter Beckford

Andu Gebremichael

Jonah J. M. Ichoya

Katherine N. Ichoya

Georges Ntumba

Ali Fadalla

Khailsa Wasiyo

[GUEST SPEAKERS]

Mebrahtu Tewolde

Geraldine Hines

Agenda

1. Review of April Minutes
2. TransAfrica Forum
3. Committee Reports
4. National Report
5. Report on Recent Referendum in Eritrea: Mebrahtu Tewolde and Geraldine Hines
6. New Business and Announcements

1. Review of April Minutes

The minutes of the April 7, 1993 meeting were approved as read.

2. TransAfrica Forum Update Jemadari Kamara

Jemadari reported that the Forum has received 501C tax exempt status. He also requested that tonight the Chapter recommend to the Forum's three incorporators (Beverly Grier; Willard Johnson; and Liz Philips) that they elect the following people as the first five Board members for the Forum : Pearl Robinson, Willard Johnson, Winston Langley, Jacqueline Howard-Matthews, and Jemadari Kamara.

Jemadari added we would be agreeing to these five people with the understanding that four additional members will later be elected to the Board after the Forum's mission and its associated manpower requirements were better defined.

We voted unanimously in favor of Jemadari's proposal. Jemadari will draft a letter to the Forum's incorporators advising them of the Chapter's recommendation and requesting they vote for the above five people to be the Forum's initial Board members.

2. Committee Reports

A. AIDS FORUM COMMITTEE Kwame Sarpong

Kwame distributed copies of a suggested forum outline detailing objectives, proposed speakers, format, location, and costs. Kwame and his committee have identified extremely well qualified speakers and discussants to cover both the clinical/medical and the social/political aspects of the current AIDS pandemic in Africa.

The AIDS program will be held:

Saturday, June 26, 1993 8:30 A.M. - Noon
Roxbury Community College
Room 121 Academic Building

Plans now call for the first session, from 9:00 - 10:30 A.M. to cover clinical and medical issues surrounding the pandemic and following a short coffee break, for the second session to examine its related political and social issues.

Kwame reported he has spoken with the Multicultural AIDS Coalition and they have agreed to co-sponsor the program with us. They have agreed to assist in designing a flyer for the program at no cost to the Chapter and have agreed to send information on the program to people on their mailing list.

Pearl reported the WGBH's "Say Brother" program will be covering the forum. Kwame added that we may want to consider trying to get papers from the presenters published, perhaps in National's *TransAfrica Forum*. He has mentioned this possibility to the planned

speakers, most of whom said although they could not have a publishable paper ready by the June 26th program, they would consider writing such a paper if we gave them a later deadline. Kwame noted that he has heard three of the planned speakers in other fora and they were excellent; the remaining speakers come highly recommended.

We had a lengthy discussion on covering the costs for the forum. The committee estimated the Chapter's total costs for room (\$75), mailings, publicity, and refreshments would total \$250. We recommended Kwame talk to Aggrey Mbare about the possibility of getting the RCC room for free, but agreed we should provisionally authorize the \$75 expenditure so Kwame can immediately reserve the room. Adelaide felt strongly we should charge a small admission or registration fee. Most of the discussion centered on whether or not we should such a fee and /or either request a donation for refreshments or not have refreshments at all. The majority of else felt we should provide coffee but nothing else and that this should be provided for free.

Kwame said his concern about charging an admission fee is that our speakers, experts in their fields, have agreed to speak for no fee or honorarium. It would be awkward for us to be charging an admission/registration fee and yet not paying them. Moreover, he envisions this program as a form of community outreach and membership recruitment and charging a fee detracts from both objectives. We did not reach a final agreement on charging a small admission/registration fee.

We also discussed at length publicity for the event. Winston commended Kwame and his committee for the outstanding job they have done pulling this program together and asked who the intended audience was, suggesting the targeted audience should definitely extend beyond Chapter members. We discussed which mailing lists to use in addition to our Chapter membership list and the Multicultural AIDS Coalition's list. Deborah asked how many people the room holds (answer: 125) and suggested that since the entire initiative for this program had come from community people that at minimum the Chapter needed to advertise in community outlets such as WILD and the *Bay State Banner*.

Willard added that since their program will be covered by WGBH we can perhaps get additional publicity for the program as a public service announcement. He added that if we submit the information immediately, the event could be listed on events calendars mailed to Africa and International Affairs constituents from Harvard, MIT, Boston University and other universities' international programs. He noted we also need to send the event into the *Banner's* calendar immediately.

Kwame said these were all helpful suggestions and commented that his first priority is to make sure we cover the community outlets. He emphasized that by May 15th at the absolute latest he has to have all mailing lists Chapter members recommend we use. Pearl said the committee is putting together press packets about the program. The press packets will be given to Vickie Jones who does excellent work ensuring the press knows about programs such as this one. Sabrina recommended we also contact the local cable program, the Boston Black Network, about promoting and covering the program.

We ended the discussion by again commending Kwame and his committee (Pearl Robinson and Magueye Seck) for the work they have done, by voting to go forward with the proposed program as planned by the committee, and by voting to authorize a total budget of \$300 for the event (estimated \$250 cost plus an additional \$50 contingency).

B. T- SHIRT COMMITTEE Willard Johnson

Willard distributed a detailed report on the work he has done to sell the Mandela event T-shirts. The report stated, and Willard reiterated verbally, that he cannot continue to run this operation.

We have approximately 1600 T-shirts remaining. At our most recent price of \$6.00 each, this represents more than a \$10,000 asset for the Chapter. Willard wants us to appoint a replacement for him immediately. Willard reviewed, as does his final report, past efforts to sell the T-shirts. In addition to selling shirts the day of the Mandela event the shirts have been sold at a Tracy Chapman concert, at a Roxbury carnival, and at the 1990 Atlanta Black Arts Festival. We also attempted to sell the shirts through mail order to our membership, through mail and phone contacts to Roxbury youth groups and via getting local corporations to buy shirts for distribution to local youth organizations. The latter two efforts require more follow up than Willard has had time to do.

The Chapter has fully met all our T-shirt related financial obligations to FREESA and the ANC. We have made one payment to Paul Goodnight, the artist who designed the shirts remaining, but we will need to pay him 50 cents per each shirt sold in the future. Willard noted that the shirts are unique because (1) they are one of only two ever done by Paul Goodnight, a noted artist from our community; (2) they were official shirts for the Mandela visit but are not dated per se; and (3) they are portraits of both Nelson and Winnie Mandela. We should be able to sell the remaining 1600 shirts.

In any case, Willard concluded, his operation is moribund and has been for awhile and the time has come to turn the operation over to someone else. Without taking a decision on this matter, we slid into a general fund raising discussion when Jemadari reminded us that we related to selling the T-shirts as a fund raising activity we have to pay National \$2500 by June 4th as our Chapter assessment towards the new National headquarters.

We asked what had happened with the fund raising committee Vicki Meredith had agreed to chair and to the African dance event she had suggested. Willard said he is on that committee but it had not met. Sabrina reported for Vicki who had not yet arrived at tonight's meeting, saying that Vicki is moving forward with plans for this event and/or an African film festival.

[NOTE: Vicki did arrive later and she brought with her a written plan for several fund raising programs - a film series, and two options for African dance and theatre performances. Her plan will be discussed at the June 9th meeting as there was no time to discuss it at tonight's meeting.]

Willard said the committee needs more members [current committee consists of Vicki Meredith, Chair; Willard Johnson, Sabrina Johnson, and Emira Woods]. Regarding the \$2500 we owe National, Willard suggested we take use the Forum's account to pay this assessment. The new building will house the National Forum's think tank, archives, and other Forum activities. The building will be jointly owned by the lobbying and the forum units of TransAfrica. And the building will be open for public access to its resources. For all these reasons Willard felt our contribution would fall under our forum's legally defined expenditure activities.

Geri Hines, the attorney who got us the 501C tax exempt designation, was less certain than Willard we could use forum funds for this purpose. We agreed to check the legality of Willard's proposal and if it turns out we are not legally permitted to use the forum's money, we will just have to tell National we cannot pay our assessment by June 4th but will pay it later.

Before taking a vote on this, we had more discussion. Winston said he was very leery of spending money from the treasury rather than raising the money first because we could soon find ourselves replicating the "deficit spending" pattern of the U.S. Government. He said we should at minimum have fund raising events planned if not implemented so we can immediately replace these funds.

Pearl wanted to go on record as noting that we have known for several months we would have to pay National this \$2500 and that if we end up having to pay this out of our forum's existing treasury we will have in fact been quite irresponsible in not having raised this money by now. Jemadari said Pearl's point was well taken it and would be so noted.

We voted to agree to pay National the \$2500 from the forum account, assuming we are legally able to do so. Noting that it was because we had agreed to take this vote without attaching a proviso stating we would replace those funds, Geri Hines voted "nay" and Deborah Toler abstained.

C. POLICY COMMITTEE James Pritchett

Jim reported on the April 21st Policy Committee forum on Sudan. He noted that our guest speaker had been Professor Ali Fadlalla from the University of Khartoum's Law School and currently a Visiting Research Associate at Tuft University's Fletcher School. Based upon Prof. Fadlalla's presentation and his own knowledge of and research on Sudan, Jim wrote an educational and analytical draft memo to National regarding the missed nuances and media stereotyped Sudan press release National recently issued and about which many of us expressed concern at our April meeting.

Jim asked us to read the draft memo and to get our comments back to him no later than this month's Policy Committee Forum which will be on May 19th. He will make changes in the memo based upon our comments and turn the final memo over to Pearl who will see it gets to National. The May 19th discussion will be on Eritrea and the Horn of Africa in general.

4. National Report Jemadari Kamara

Jemadari reminded us National's annual Foreign Policy Conference and dinner will be June 4th - 5th. He said National wants to emphasize members' involvement in the organization and towards that end has planned an open membership meeting for Saturday, June 5th from 10:00 A.M. until 2:00 P.M. in the Jefferson Room of the Washington Hilton Hotel. In addition to staff presentations from the National Office there will be an open mike session to allow members to voice their opinions and concerns about the organization and the weekend.

We took a quick survey at tonight's meeting and discovered that enough of us were planning to attend that we could request a reserved Boston Chapter table for the Benefit Dinner on Saturday night. Those of us planning to attend are supposed to make sure Willard has our names by the end of tonight's meeting. Willard will notify National to reserve a table for our Chapter.

5. New Business and Announcements

Jemadari announced that the Scholarship Committee received six applications for the Chapter scholarship. Two of the applications were incomplete and for that reason were not being considered. Jim said he is one of the readers and has read three of the essays. The Scholarship committee will decide on a winner in time for National's competition and the local winner will be announced at the June meeting.

Jemadari announced that an executive committee of Chapter officers will formulate a Nominating Committee consisting of one third of the Chapter's current Board members. The Nominating Committee will in turn nominate people to run for election to the Chapter's Board. The ballot for Board elections will go out in the June mailout.

After a brief discussion about when to hold the June meeting, given how close that meeting is to National's annual weekend, we decided to change the regular monthly business meeting from the first Wednesday to the second Wednesday of June. Hence for the month of June **only**:

Chapter Regular Business meeting will be on Wednesday June 9th (and not on June 2nd as it would normally be).

6. Report on Eritrean Referendum Mebrahtu Tewelde and Geri Hines

Jemadari noted he was proud of the role our Chapter played in the recent Eritrean independence referendum. More than half a dozen of us served as observers at the RCC polling location.

Before introducing tonight's speakers, Tesfay Aradom reiterated that our Chapter had played a significant role in the recent election and he thanked us for our participation. Tesfay introduced Mr. Mebrahtu Tewelde, a member of the Eritrean Referendum

Commission - Boston area, and Geri Hines who was one of the international observers in Eritrea itself during the referendum.

After also thanking our Chapter for our support and participation as observers, Mr. Tewolde summarized the history of the Eritrean struggle. Eritrea's state identity was formed during Italian colonialism, from 1890 - 1941. The British drove the Italians out during World War II and occupied the country for another ten years. Although the Eritreans demanded the same independence being prepared for other African states at the time, in the face of continued Ethiopian claims on the territory, the British turned the matter over to the United Nations. In 1952, without consulting the Eritreans, the UN made Eritrea a federated region of Ethiopia.

Eritrea was supposed to have internal autonomy and to be guaranteed certain democratic rights. But the Ethiopian government continually and systematically undermined Eritrea's autonomy and violated its guaranteed rights. The Eritreans repeatedly appealed to the UN to revisit the agreement in light of Ethiopia's continued violations, but the UN ignored Eritrean appeals. The Eritreans also tried peaceful protests against Ethiopia's violations. After the Ethiopians continually met these peaceful protests with violent responses, the Eritrean war for liberation began in 1961. In 1962 the Ethiopians officially and formally incorporated Eritrea as a province of Ethiopia.

In 1973 then ruling Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military coup and Eritreans were hopeful his overthrow would result in the end of the war. Instead, his successor, Haile Mariam Mengistu, refused to negotiate an end to the war. In addition, the Mengistu regime received huge amounts of military aid from the then Soviet Union. Mr. Tewolde said the years from 1978 - 1987 were the most difficult in the war for independence. But 1988 saw the beginning of the end of the war. In 1988, the Eritreans defeated the best unit in the Ethiopian army (which at the time was the largest and best equipped army in Africa) - its Second Division. After that Eritrean victory, the Ethiopian military began to unravel and by May 1991 Mengistu had been overthrown.

[The final defeat of the Ethiopian army was accomplished by both the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Because they were allies in defeating the Mengistu regime, when the TPLF replaced the Mengistu government, it did not stand in the way of Eritrean independence. This is significant not only because it is the first time in the post OAU era that an African government has **willingly** ceded territory (albeit with the sure knowledge that if they had not stuck to their war alliance agreement to do so, the Eritreans would have continued a war that was devastating Ethiopia), but also because doing so meant Ethiopia became a landlocked state when it lost Eritrea's seacoasts. It should be noted however, that not all Ethiopians are reconciled to this agreement, - particularly not among the Amhara ethnic group who had dominated Ethiopia's government until Mengistu was overthrown.]

In addition to a vicious and devastating war, the Eritreans had to battle many years of severe drought and famine. They have had to rely upon their own resources to do this, including upon the help provided by the more than one million Eritrean refugees scattered

throughout the world in the Eritrean diaspora. Mr. Tewolde emphasized the extent to which the Ethiopians destroyed or dismantled and shipped to Ethiopia the infrastructure and light manufacturing factories the Italians had built in hopes of launching a conquest of the rest of Africa from Eritrea.

Mr. Tewolde said that even though the EPLF had won the war and was de facto in power, it insisted on holding a referendum because of the EPLF's long standing principle of respect for the right of the Eritrean people to decide their fate. He pointedly noted that had someone forced the UN / the international community to hold such a referendum and to respect its outcome in 1952, all the resulting bloodshed could have been avoided. More than 50,000 Eritreans fighters alone - women and men- lost their lives and an entire generation lost access to health, to education, to living their lives in peacetime.

The referendum process actually began in April 1992 when the Referendum Commission was formed. One very positive aspect is that the current Ethiopian Government has helped and cooperated with the process. The current regime understands that Ethiopia's future is very much tied to Eritrea's.

Mr. Tewolde began his conclusion by commenting that the Eritrean war for liberation had been "the loneliest in the world." The rest of the world knew about the war but ignored it. The Eritreans suffered in isolation. They were especially hurt that the rest of Africa ignored their suffering. Mr. Tewolde said that African heads of state annually attended meetings at the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa, only miles away from where the battlefield, and yet never once mentioned the Eritrean struggle. Despite the lack of recognition and support during their war, the Eritreans are today putting the past behind them and are prepared to work with all those willing to work with them.

To conclude, Mr. Tewolde read the official statement from on the Referendum's outcome from General Secretary of the Provisional Government of Eritrea, Mr. Issaias Afwerki. Of those eligible to vote in the referendum, 99% voted and the result was 99.8% favored independence from Ethiopia. Mr. Tewolde said the challenge now is to maintain that level of popular involvement and enthusiasm for the more difficult and complex nation building tasks facing Eritrea.

Attorney Geraldine Hines began her report noting that her participation as an international observer had special personal significance. As a law student at the University of Wisconsin in 1969 she became good friends with an Eritrean she had assumed was an Ethiopian until she observed he and an Ethiopian in a heated discussion and inquired what they were arguing about. That inquiry was her introduction to the Eritrean struggle. Her Eritrean friend has been the President of the Eritrean Supreme Court for the past twenty-three years.

Many of Geri's University of Wisconsin friends were in Eritrea during the referendum. The international observers were from all over the world. Most of the African observers were connected with the OAU. Outside of the UN, most of the international organizations

represented were nongovernmental development and relief agencies. She was with the Unitarian Universalists - a Boston Based aid development agency. Oxfam America, another Boston based agency was also represented. The African American Institute had a very large delegation present.

Geri said impressive logistics were necessary to get more than 300 international observers to polling locations throughout the country. Vehicles had been donated and it seemed as though at least a hundred Toyota landcruisers were involved. She was assigned to Nacfa, along with a German and an Australian observer. Nacfa is in Sahel Province, more than eight hours over rough to non-existent roads from the capital of Asmara. No accommodations were arranged in Nacfa and Geri noted she was glad she had been told to bring a sleeping bag.

Geri said they were awakened around 5:30 A.M. of the first (of total three days) polling day by the joyful singing of people and women ululating as they lined up to vote. People waited in long lines all day to vote, despite the extremely hot weather. Their work as observers was practically finished by the end of the first day because everyone registered to vote in their area had voted by the end of the first day. Geri said a good illustration of the seriousness with which people viewed the opportunity to vote for independence was the widely circulated story of a woman who went into hysterics when, after mistakenly dropping her ballots in the wrong boxes, was told she could not retrieve them and vote as she had intended for independence.

Geri said only after travelling outside of Asmara and seeing the devastation of the war could she get a sense of the suffering people had endured and appreciate the joy they were expressing during the referendum. Geri described scenes of destroyed tanks littering the roads and wrecked trucks hanging off mountainsides. The town of Nacfa had been bombed and completely destroyed during the war. Although there was tremendous euphoria throughout the country, including people literally dancing in the streets, Geri was impressed by how remarkably decorous the celebrations were. Even in Asmara there were full-hearted but also dignified celebrations - no public drunkenness, etc.

Geri added the caveat that in contrast to the euphoria in Eritrea and its capital of Asmara, the atmosphere surrounding the referendum had been extremely tense in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. Geri gave as an example the fact that Ethiopia Air had refused to honor its guarantee for a free hotel room for passengers who missed international flights saying that Geri's missed flight to Asmara was a domestic flight.

Most of the people in Eritrea who knew about TransAfrica wanted to know why the Black American lobbying organization was not interested in Eritrea. In this light, Geri said she was happy to hear our Chapter was taking up Eritrea at our next Policy Committee forum. Geri concluded by saying Eritrea is a beautiful country, rich in human and natural resources. It was clear to her that the Eritreans have already given a great deal of thought to the looming question, "What next?"

Because we were running late, there was little time for questions and answers. Alix wanted to know what is next and Pearl wanted to know how the current government is organized and whether it has received any commitments for development assistance. Mr. Tewelde said the current government is a provisional government. It consists of the same EPLF "state" structures which were in place during the war. The next step is for a Constituent Assembly to be elected which will draft a constitution. Mr. Tewelde said he did not have specific information on foreign aid commitments.

One of the visitors at tonight's meeting noted that it is extremely important for the current government to harness the current euphoria and to channel it towards development, lest someone else - an internal faction perhaps given that the Ethiopians are gone - turn that euphoria against the current unity of the country.

Jemadari thanked Mr. Tewelde and Attorney Hines for their informative reports. The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 P.M.

Submitted by :

Deborah Toler
Deborah Toler
Secretary

June 9, 1993

NOTE: These will be the last minutes I submit to the Boston Chapter of TransAfrica. I have regretfully resigned because I will soon be moving to New York City where I will be attending graduate school.

I have thoroughly enjoyed serving as your secretary. Words cannot express what a joy it has been to work with such a group of intelligent, knowledgeable, and committed African, African American and Caribbean sisters and brothers. I urge all of you who are not already doing so, to become active in both the Chapter's monthly business meetings (first Wednesday of the month except in June) and Policy Committee education forums (third Wednesday of every month). The work the National organization does is critically important for all we African peoples, and the Boston Chapter is - in my admittedly biased opinion- the most effective of all the chapters.

I will miss those of you I have had the privilege of getting to know personally. Best wishes to each of you and to the Chapter. Thank you for electing me your secretary three years ago.

A Luta Continua

(Mozambique's national motto, "The Struggle Continues")