American Committee on Africa & The Africa Fund
Expresses Sorrow at the Death of Julius Nyerere

October 14, 1999, New York, NY....The American Committee on Africa (ACOA) and The Africa Fund expressed sorrow today at the death of former Tanzanian President Julius K. Nyerere. “Africa has lost a true son and teacher” said Jennifer Davis, Executive Director of the ACOA and The Africa Fund, which has worked with Nyerere since the 1950s.

“He led the fight for independence from the Britain which was achieved in 1961,” said Davis. “He was president over twenty years during which time he strongly back the struggles for independence in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. After leaving office he continued to play an important role in Africa including serving as a mediator in peace talks in a number of countries including Burundi.”

When Nyerere came to New York in the 1950s to petition the United Nations for independence of his country, then known as Tanganyika, he met with George M. Houser, then director of ACOA. “What an unforgettable personality he was—slight of build, a high forehead, small black toothbrush moustache, quite-spoken but with an easy laugh and a delightful sense of humor,” noted Houser in No One Can Stop the Rain-Glimpses of Africa’s Liberation Struggle. “The U.S. government, following the advice of the British, restricted his movements to a few blocks of the UN. Nyerere, characteristically, made light of it. He looked young, more like a graduate student that a teacher and certainly not like a man soon to be cast in the role of father of his country.” Some years later Nyerere wrote “It was George Houser who introduced me to people who supported the African anti-colonial struggle. Through him I learned that not all American people acquiesced in decisions of the American government, which seemed to us to be backing up Tanganyika’s government at that time—that is, the British colonial power.”

On a subsequent visit to New York ACOA sponsored a large public meeting for him in Harlem. In 1957 Nyerere joined 123 world leaders Declaration of Conscience calling on the South African government to “honor its moral and legal obligations as a signatory to the United Nations by honoring the Declaration of Human Rights.”

When George M. Houser retired as executive director of ACOA in 1981 Nyerere wrote “Many who are now, or have been, political leaders in Africa have been helped to become effective on the international scene by the assistance and friendship of George Houser. I am one of those who he helped in this way, especially when TANU was making appeals to the Trusteeship Council and other Committees of the United Nations.”

The American Committee on Africa was founded in 1953 to support African independence and majority rule. Founded in 1966 by the American Committee on Africa, The Africa Fund works for a positive U.S. policy toward Africa and supports African human rights, democracy and development. In 1991, at the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Africa Fund President Nyerere wrote: “Traditional colonialism in Africa is now a thing of the past, and apartheid is on retreat.... Congratulations are deserved by all those who helped make the new realities. But I ask you to accept that the task of The Africa Fund is not ended.”

“President Nyerere was known as ‘Mwalimu’ which means teacher,” said Jennifer Davis. “Today we accept his challenge to continue his struggle for freedom and development.”