As women, citizens of South Africa, we are here to claim our rights. We want recognition and respect for the work we do in the home, in the workplace and in the community. We claim full and equal participation in the creation of a non-sexist, non-racist democratic society.

We cannot march on one leg or clap with one hand. South Africa is the poorer politically, economically, and socially for having prevented more than half of its people from fully contributing to its development.

Recognising our shared oppression, women are committed to seizing this historic moment to ensure effective equality in a new South Africa.

— The Women's Charter for Effective Equality, South Africa, February 1994
As I write this my suitcase lies open at my feet, waiting for last-minute additions before I board the plane to Johannesburg to serve as one of THE AFRICA FUND's three official observers to South Africa's first-ever democratic elections.

By the time you read this, those fateful elections will probably have occurred, so there is no point in playing guessing games here.

You will know whether the ANC swept home and how much damage was done by the rejectionist violence that flowed from the desperate efforts of Gatsha Buthelezi and some top Generals in the South African security and military forces to forestall democracy and preserve their own versions of the future.

But now I want to celebrate with you the wonder of this moment. As AFRICA FUND supporters, you have been close to the pain of the long, bitter years of struggle against apartheid oppression. You helped young societies in Angola and Mozambique set out to fulfill the dreams of their people after centuries of colonial rule, and you shared the tragedy as those dreams were smashed by apartheid's armies and agents.

Now the phoenix of hope has risen again. It was given life by the courage and determination of the South African people in their freedom struggle; it was nurtured by the international solidarity expressed through peoples' sanctions; it has been strengthened by the willingness of many South Africans to abandon past forms, beliefs and prejudices and engage with one another on totally new ground.

The problems ahead will be enormous, even if the violence-mongers can be contained. Poverty, landlessness, the lack of education cripple the lives of millions. But there are also millions of Black South Africans who have managed to acquire technical skills, as well as the political skills they have so often demonstrated. South Africa is resource rich in its people, its minerals, its diversity.

Its people have established a dense network of organizations, from human rights groups and the churches to a strong labor movement and many community structures. These will be able to play a vital and dynamic role in building a democracy that responds to the needs of the people, that is rooted in a commitment to economic justice for all.

And progress in South Africa can create the space for progress throughout the region — so I plan to visit Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe also on this trip.

I have lived most of my rather long adult life declaring a belief that one day South Africans would be free. It often seemed unlikely. Now it seems I may really see that moment.

And then of course there will be much more work ahead — to overcome the devastation of the past and build a new society.

I look forward to working with you on those issues too, and I thank you for your long years of support for the struggle for justice.

A luta continua.
On March 15, 1994, the Africa Fund and the House Subcommittee on Africa co-hosted a working briefing on the Progress Towards the Election in South Africa. With standing room only, Bill Lynch, former Deputy Mayor of New York City and campaign manager for David Dinkins, Bethuel Maserumule, Witwatersrand East Regional Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, and our own Dumisani Kumalo presented a spectrum of insights into the upcoming elections. Several Members of Congress including Representatives Charles Rangel, Harry Johnston, Donald Payne and Major Owens, Congressional staffers and local activists listened attentively to the presentations.

Bill Lynch had just returned from South Africa at the invitation of the ANC to consult on their voter education program. He emphasized the complex machine the ANC has set up to run the election and the efficiency with which Nelson Mandela is able to reach the people. Lynch commented that voters demonstrated not nearsighted hate for whites but farsighted interest in better infrastructure, such as improved water and sewage systems and better health care and education for their children. Mandela asked the people to realize change will be gradual but will come. Lynch asked Congress to be aware that there will be no public transportation available for Black people outside of the major cities on election days and they will have to walk 5 to 10 km to the polling stations. He also alerted the listeners that ID cards for voters are being tampered with and obstacles put up to hinder the distribution of ID cards.

Bethuel spoke about the efforts by the unions to organize and conduct voter education. He highlighted how miseducation about voting was spreading rapidly and the unions' huge task has been to correct these errors. An example of the miseducation is that while some groups tell voters to make a check for their favorite party, others say make an "X" for the party you do not want. The correct way to vote is to make an "X" for your favorite party. The unions have to constantly dispel these ballot myths and continue to educate the people who in turn go home and educate their neighbors. Violence daily affects their voter education efforts. The unions not only have to do voter education but also deal with violence intended to intimidate voters.

Projects Director Dumisani Kumalo, having just returned from observing Nelson Mandela's campaign with Lynch, related how enthusiastic the people were about the elections. Before he went to South Africa, he had expressed reservations about the elections happening on April 27th, but now he believes people are too geared up for the election to be postponed. He went to ANC rallies where people had to walk over 10 miles and still not a seat in the stadium was empty.

Women are taking a proactive role in voter education and Mandela has urged that the majority of voters be women, reflecting the society.

The briefing disseminated first-hand information about how the South African people are preparing for the election and dealing with tremendous obstacles.

The session ended with remarks from Representative Harry Johnston, Chair of the House Subcommittee on Africa and Representative Donald Payne. Both expressed their appreciation for the participants' ability to inform them of what is happening on the ground in South Africa, and how the U.S. Congress can most help the people of South Africa.
fundamental issues such as legal equality, position in the family, environment, health and education, customary law, the media, violence, employment and participation in political life.

The U.S. event, which showed solidarity with the efforts of South African women, reflected a wide range of support from women in this country, coming close to mirroring the diversity of participants who drew up the Charter. Just as the South African Charter is the product of women, white and Black, professional and unemployed, urban and rural, conservative and progressive, the U.S. women who came together to congratulate them brought many different backgrounds and perspectives. Attendees commented on the achievement of getting such a mix of people together to address the issue of South African women's liberation.

Dr. Dorothy Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women and Jennifer Davis, Executive Director of THE AFRICA FUND, presided over the press conference which counted women representing 26 organizations such as the YWCA, the National Council of Jewish Women, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the American Association of University Women, the Women's Missionary Society of the AME Church, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Women's Environment and Development Organization, the Institute for International Education, grass roots anti-apartheid groups like the Southern African Support Project, and many others. Press attendance included USA Today, U.S. News and World Report, Voice of America, National Public Radio, Black Entertainment Television, and others.