

## NEWS

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## BUILDING THE LINKS

## AFRICAN LEGISLATORS TOUR THE U.S.

This April, the U.S. visit of three dynamic southern African women legislators provided a new thrust to THE AFRICA FUND project aimed at keeping a critical mass of Americans informed and engaged with the region.

Delegation members Lucia Basson, Mayor of Mariental, Namibia, Koti Nyama, Deputy Speaker of South Africa's Northern Province Legislature and Edna Madzongwe, Deputy Speaker of Zimbabwe's Parliament, personified the profound changes now shaping their countries. As women legislators they could speak both about the problems of democratization and the difficulties of achieving equality for women.

As policy makers involved in defining and reforming governmental structures in their own countries, they were eager to share experiences with their U.S. counterparts, gain insights into American legislative approaches, and take home strategies to strengthen their democracies and improve the quality of life in their constituencies. They visited New York, Illinois, Georgia, Alabama and the District of Columbia, providing elected officials, community, religious and women's organizations with vivid pictures of their ups and downs as legislators in young democracies. Establishing links with their U.S. counterparts, the delegation met with New York State Senator James Lack, current president of the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the incoming President, Alabama Representative Michael Box.

The timing of their visit, during a presidential election year, enabled delegation members to recognize both the difficulty and importance of keeping Africa policy issues on the U.S. national agenda. "Stay with us," they urged wherever they went, asking not only for continued U.S. economic aid but also for



In Montgomery, Alabama: Koti Nyama, Deputy Speaker, Northern Province; State Rep. Joseph Mitchell; Edna Madzongwe, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Zimbabwe; Lucia Basson, Mayor of Mariental, Namibia.

the ongoing concern that could shape U.S.-Africa policy in support of development and democracy on the continent.

Dumisani Kumalo, THE AFRICA FUND Projects Director, organized the visit and accompanied the delegation. Arkansas State Representative Irma Hunter Brown, who was a member of the 1995 AFRICA FUND delegation of U.S. state legislators to South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, joined the group for much of its visit, providing the African legislators with valuable insights drawn from her years of legislative experience.

## NEW YORK

New York's state legislature was engaged in a protracted budget debate during the delegation's visit to Albany, where they were hosted in the state capitol by Assemblyman Al Vann and

Assemblywoman Gloria Davis, in coordination with the New York State Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.

The debate provided a lively backdrop for a briefing on the budgetary process by the Assembly's Deputy Speaker, Arthur Eve, and Assemblyman Herman (Denny) Farrell, Jr., Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Assemblyman Vann struck a chord with the delegation when he described the grim struggle to "hold on to gains against the budget cutters."

This set the stage for useful exchanges on legislative strategies. "Since you and your members are a minority in the Assembly, how do you make sure that your needs are taken care of in the budget?" Deputy Speaker Nyama asked. Responding, Farrell stressed the importance to the Caucus of using its power

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## ... AFRICAN LEGISLATORS TOUR THE U.S.



Meeting in Albany, New York, with state legislators: Back row: Assemblymembers Al Vann, N. Nick Perry, Jeffrion L. Aubry (Chair of the Black & Puerto Rican Caucus), Gloria Davis, AFRICA FUND consultant Pamela Simms-Difo and Arkansas State Representative Irma Hunter Brown. Front row: Koti Nyama, Lucia Basson and Edna Madzongwe.

as a strong minority voting bloc in the Democratic Party Caucus to develop effective coalitions, a novel strategy to delegation members whose parties enjoy overwhelming majorities in their home legislatures.

The dozens of framed documents adorning the walls of Assemblywoman Gloria Davis' office, copies of bills the Bronx Assembly member had sponsored and guided to passage, stimulated several questions from the southern Africans, as they operate in systems where individual legislators cannot introduce legislation.

"The fact that in the U.S. individual legislators can introduce legislation is very appealing. If it was easy for us, we could change many things for our constituents," noted Deputy Speaker Madzongwe.

In a meeting with State Comptroller H. Carl McCall the three legislators pursued their concern about how elected officials secured funding for poor people in the face of competing budgetary demands. "My office has the power to conduct an audit of any organization that receives state funds so as to make certain those funds are used for the purposes intended in the laws passed by the state legislature," said Mr. McCall.

In New York City the delegation met with non-governmental organizations involved in providing various community services, including those serving youth and battered women. They also visited a shelter for the homeless run by the Community Church, where they talked with people who are often forced to live on city streets.

### WASHINGTON, DC

As the delegation arrived in Washing-

ton, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was seeking to beat back yet another Republican attempt to cut aid to Africa. In an extended private meeting with Congressman Donald Payne, Chair of the CBC, delegation members explained the destructive effect that reduced aid to Africa would have on their constituencies.

Stressing the importance of continued U.S. funding of the Development Fund for Africa and the African Development Bank, Deputy Speaker Madzongwe



Delegation members consult with New York State legislators.



Joy MallinImpact Visuals

Congressman Donald Payne, AFRICA FUND Executive Director Jennifer Davis and Projects Director Dumisani Kumalo, Representative Irma Hunter Brown, AFRICA FUND Chair Tilden LeMelle, Koti Nyama, Lucia Basson and Edna Madzongwe.



Joy MallinImpact Visuals

Congresswoman Maxine Waters (right) with Lucia Basson and Edna Madzongwe.

talked about her district in Zimbabwe. "People in rural areas grow lots of food but there are no good roads to transport their produce to city markets. So it either goes bad or is bought at next to nothing prices by white farmers who have heavy trucks able to maneuver the deeply rutted mud roads. Better transport will help build economic independence."

In a series of meetings with senior staff members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and the National League of Cities, the delegation discussed the role such organizations played in empowering locally elected officials.

The delegation also briefed local community leaders and activists at a gathering hosted by Dr. Tilden LeMelle, President of the University of the District of Columbia and Chair of THE AFRICA FUND. While thanking them for their past support the southern African legislators stressed the urgent need for Americans to stay engaged in this new and difficult era.

**ILLINOIS**

Long before the American public was aware of Namibia's political struggle the Evangelical Lutheran Church, whose missionaries had provided education and health care to the black majority, was supporting the Namibian people in their struggle for freedom against apartheid rule. In Chicago the southern African legislators met with activists from the Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa, along with housing, labor and community organizers, in a round-table discussion which ranged widely over possible links to help with the tasks involved in building new societies.

A meeting hosted by Senator Alice Palmer, Chair of the International Affairs Committee in the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, provided a forum in which to exchange ideas with Illinois state legislators about effective ways to meet the needs of constituents. These exchanges were continued in a discussion with Chicago City Councilmember Helen Shiller and other members of the Chicago City Council.

**GEORGIA**

Mayor Lucia Basson was an honored guest at the National Conference of Black Mayors' annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, and she addressed a breakfast meeting of the Black Women Mayors' Caucus. She was surprised to discover that many of the mayors present came from towns smaller than her own. "In Marietal, which has a population of only 14,000, I sometimes feel like I live in a town that is smaller and poorer

than most others in the world. It is exciting to meet mayors who understood the small town problems I have to deal with everyday," said Mayor Basson.

The search for ways to increase the flow of funding from national to local levels was a dominant theme in Basson's discussions with her colleagues. She shared with them the story of how in her area only strong community organizing, petitions and many meetings finally induced a government minister to establish the "Build Together" program, which will provide funding for housing for the homeless.

She was also struck by the scope of local control exercised by U.S. mayors. "U.S. mayors can speak with the authority that comes from being elected by the community, rather than by a town council, as happens in Namibia," she commented several times.

The delegation's visit to Atlanta reenergized the southern African supporters. Tandi Gcabashe, southern Africa



Meeting with U.S. Conference of Mayors staff Mike Brown (far left) and Kay Scrimger (far right) are Rep. Irma Hunter Brown, Edna Madzongwe, Jennifer Davis, Lucia Basson, Koti Nyama and Dumisani Kumalo.



*The Freedom Quilting Bee in Alberta, Alabama is a women-owned cooperative.*

Program Director for the American Friends Service Committee, brought together over thirty local activists for a dialogue with the delegation on Africa and U.S. policy. Later, at a meeting of more than fifty pastors, Reverend Gerald Durley, Chair of the Atlanta Concerned Black Clergy, told the delegation, "We are committed to supporting development that will strengthen your democracies."

**"It is refreshing to come to the U.S. and discover that people here face the same problems."**

**— Edna Madzongwe,  
Deputy Speaker,  
Parliament of Zimbabwe**

**ALABAMA**

Alabama afforded the southern African legislators a first-hand answer to their question "Where are the rural areas in America and how do they deal with their people?"

The Alabama itinerary was planned in conjunction with The Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a service and advocacy association for low income families and 100 rural cooperatives. The delegation covered many miles, visiting Sumter County, one of the poorest counties in the U.S., and several centers where

communities are developing innovative approaches to achieving self-sufficiency.

The Alabama visit opened with a call on Governor Fob James and a series of meetings with state legislators in Montgomery, organized by Representatives Joseph Mitchell and Laura Hall. "This is a great opportunity for us to learn how the state legislature addresses the needs of the almost forgotten people. My own country, South Africa, is wrestling with a similar problem," Deputy Speaker Nyama told her counterparts.

Ernest Johnson, pioneer of the credit union movement in the South, guided the delegation in Epes, recalling for them

the origins of his work. "It used to be that banks would not give any loans to African-American people. So I helped create credit unions so that our people who wanted to start small businesses would be able to secure loans."

He showed the delegation several small businesses in Demopolis that were funded by a local credit union. "We have become so successful that these days the big banks are offering our people all kinds of loans," Johnson reported. Delegation members were excited by the potential the credit union model might have in southern Africa, enabling people with no resources to gain access to credit.

In Alberta the delegation visited the Freedom Quilting Bee, an organization born out of Black women's efforts to support themselves independently. With more than twenty members, the Quilting Bee now produces highly sought after quilts and has diversified to supply a variety of handmade products to many Fortune 500 corporations.

Summing up the impact of the trip shortly before heading back to South Africa, Deputy Speaker Nyama told THE AFRICA FUND that "I did not realize how much I had learned until it was all over." Zimbabwe's Deputy Speaker spoke for everybody when she added, "Sometimes, we in southern Africa think we are facing unique problems. It is refreshing to come to the U.S. and discover that people here face the same problems. Now, if we can just combine our solutions. ..."



*Mayor Lucia Basson (second from right) with fellow mayors on the dais at the National Conference of Black Mayors annual dinner in Atlanta, Georgia.*

# U.S. AND AFRICAN WOMEN CONNECT

When Edna Madzongwe and Koti Nyama represented their countries at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 they were inspired by the determination of women who had come from all over the world to transform the vision of a better life into reality. Now, wherever they go, they raise the themes contained in the Platform for Action which was adopted there, seeking to advance women's lives in areas such as equality and power-sharing, education, health, domestic violence and economic independence.

Traveling in the U.S. this spring in THE AFRICA FUND delegation of southern African legislators, Madzongwe and Nyama were joined by Lucia Basson, an active advocate for Namibian women. The delegation frequently articulated the concerns of millions of women who comprise more than half of their region's population.

Meetings on a person-to-person basis generated a strong sense of solidarity between U.S. and African women leaders. These contacts should help broaden the U.S. policy debate affecting Africa so that it incorporates greater sensitivity to the urgent needs of women.

In Washington the delegation had a lively discussion with Leslie Wolfe, President of the Center for Women Policy Studies, about the center's efforts to develop a national policy agenda for women focused on HIV/AIDS prevention. The desperate health crisis being generated by the AIDS epidemic in southern Africa makes effective health education for young women a critical issue for the three southern African legislators.

In discussions with Representative Waters, the delegation focused on funding for "micro-enterprises" and exchanged ideas on how to ensure that women impact on the policies that affect their lives by achieving elected positions. Representative Waters and Arkansas State Representative Irma Hunter Brown agreed on the need to work "top down" through women's political organizations while simultaneously developing innovative grassroots voter education and literacy programs.

Edna Madzongwe described the results of a recent voter education initiative spearheaded by the Zimbabwe Women Parliamentarians Association. The outcome of workshops run by every woman member of Parliament prior to local governmental elections was an upsurge of women's participation that

more than doubled the number of locally elected women officials.

A steadfast commitment to sisterhood and deep roots in the struggle for justice were apparent in the warm greeting extended to the delegation by Dr. Dorothy I. Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Recalling that the organization's founder, Mary McLeod Bethune, was herself the child of slaves, she embraced the three legislators who had won positions of leadership in their countries and said, "We have come through many struggles to achieve this moment where we welcome the Deputy Speakers of two African parliaments. We as women are making our own history."

In the course of meetings with the NCNW and similar organizations, issues of common concern to U.S. and

out of money, it is the girl who must leave school."

Throughout southern Africa under apartheid rule Black women were often forced to live in desolate rural areas while their men worked in towns. Responsibility to ensure family survival falls on the women. Koti Nyama, whose constituency includes many such women, talked about the absence of choices available to their daughters. "She doesn't go into full blown prostitution — but the man in the Mercedes can buy her stockings. Soon she drops out of school with a baby."

Expressing similar concerns about teenage pregnancy, Lucia Basson emphasized the need for programs to train girls to work with their peers, encouraging them to return to school, and helping them to acquire skills and jobs once



Dr. Dorothy I. Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women, welcomes Arkansas Representative Irma Hunter Brown, Koti Nyama, Lucia Basson, Edna Madzongwe, Mrs. Alice Hilda Midzi (wife of Zimbabwe's Ambassador to the U.S.) and AFRICA FUND Executive Director Jennifer Davis.

African women were identified. One such issue is the need for skills training. Most women in southern Africa work constantly — walking miles every day to fetch wood and water, digging fields, and caring for children. But their labor is largely unpaid.

As Madzongwe put it, women also suffer under the principle of "last hired/first fired" because they are only hired as unskilled workers. Southern African women in rural and urban environments need skills. Many seek training in running small businesses.

Extending literacy is another vital goal, Madzongwe told the NCNW, which operates an office in Zimbabwe. She described the hurdles girls must clear in order to obtain a basic education. "The girl child is in trouble in Africa," she said. "Because girls don't carry the name forward; when a family runs

they had left school. "Young girls don't listen to people they see as old ladies. They need to hear the message from their sisters," she said.

NCNW's Lucy Thomas described the work they were doing to combat teenage pregnancy and violence against women in the U.S. These themes produced an instant response from Edna Madzongwe who works closely with the Masasa Project, a program for battered women in Zimbabwe.

At the close of the meeting with the NCNW, Dorothy Height told the southern Africans that, "The blood that unites us is stronger than the water that divides us" and went on to commit NCNW to strengthening links with African women. "Women work in a special way — convening and conversing," she said. "We will find ways to build together." ■

## **NIGERIA CAMPAIGN EXPANDS**

In Nigeria the military dictatorship continues to deny basic human rights and has jailed numerous union leaders, civil rights advocates and journalists. In the U.S. THE AFRICA FUND is working to build support for Nigerian democracy.

### **CITY ACTION**

On February 6 New York became the first city to publicly condemn the Nigerian military dictatorship and call for U.S. economic sanctions. The resolution was introduced by Councilmember Wendell Foster. The action followed a briefing on the political and human rights crisis in the west African nation by THE AFRICA FUND and Nigerian pro-democracy advocates. Advocates included: Owens Wiwa, the brother of executed environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa; Hafsat Abiola, the daughter of imprisoned Nigerian president-elect Moshood Abiola; former New York Mayor David Dinkins and AFRICA FUND Executive Director Jennifer Davis. New Orleans later adopted a similar resolution.

In May Oakland, California, adopted a divestment, banking and selective purchasing ordinance against compa-

nies that do business in Nigeria. AFRICA FUND Human Rights Coordinator Mike Fleshman played a key role, providing background material on Nigeria and identifying witnesses for hearings.

### **STATE ACTION**

In December 1995, following a presentation by AFRICA FUND Projects Director Dumisani Kumalo, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) adopted a resolution calling on the Nigerian regime to release all political prisoners and restore democracy and urging U.S. support of sanctions to achieve these goals. In March NBCSL members refused to participate in a trip paid for by the Nigerian regime and organized by a paid lobbyist to observe bogus "elections" for local government. There was no secret ballot in these elections, no political parties were allowed, pro-democracy candidates were disqualified and the dictatorship gave itself the power to remove elected officials at any time.

### **PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS**

THE AFRICA FUND is working with other human rights organizations including

Amnesty International to save the lives of 19 Nigerian environmentalists and human rights activists who will soon be tried before a military tribunal on the same charges that sent Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others to the gallows last November.

For information on what you can do and a free copy of our newsletter *Nigeria Democracy Update* contact THE AFRICA FUND. ■

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