

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 suburbs. 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 has 200,000 residents crammed into one square kilometer. Apartheid has created these conditions.

During the 1970s, 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 state 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 delegitimized 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 apartheid policy. The government recently added one kilometer to Alexandra and contracted with private white developers to build homes at prices far out of the reach of Alexandra residents. The effect of the government's efforts would eventually remove the residents, neutralize a key resistance point, and reshape the community according to the apartheid government's plan to maintain white rule.

The Alexandra Civic Organization

The Alexandra Civic Organization (ACO) was formed in 1982, and spearheads the organized resistance to the government. Its leaders have been victims of apartheid harassment and detention. **Moses Mayekiso** is ACO's Chairperson.

Mayekiso is the General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the nation's second largest union. He helped to organize the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and used trade union tactics in the organizing of township resistance. For these efforts, Mayekiso was arrested in 1986, and later charged with treason, subversion and sedition. An international labor solidarity campaign on his behalf was waged in 1987-89 at the request of NUMSA and COSATU. After a lengthy trial, Mayekiso was acquitted of all charges and he returned to Alexandra in May 1989.

One of ACO's major goals is to force the government to grant Alexandra more land for low-income housing. It has mounted an **Affordable Housing for All Campaign** demanding that the government, rather than private developers, build affordable housing. It is also pushing for rents tied to income and for 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 established linkages between U.S. cities and South African communities threatened with removal. The project is endorsed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the African National Congress, the United Democratic Front, the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in S.A., and other anti-apartheid groups.

The people of Alexandra contacted Chicago because they believe their U.S. Sister Community can expose the on-going brutal policies of apartheid. We, as a Sister Community, can respond to crisis situations.

For further information

The Chicago-Alexandra Sister Community Project is sponsored by the **Chicago Committee in Solidarity with Southern Africa**, which welcomes support from you and your organization. Contact Joan Gerig at (312) 421-5513.

The project is endorsed by the **Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid**. Contact Kathy Devine at (312) 583-6661.

CHICAGO-ALEXANDRA SISTER COMMUNITY PROJECT ENDORSERS

(in formation)

American Friends Service Committee, African-American Program
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicago Conference of Black Lawyers
Chicago Committee in Solidarity with Southern Africa
Chicago Metropolitan Association of United Church of Christ
Chicago Sexual Assault Services Network
Church World Service of Greater Chicago
Clergy and Laity Concerned, Chicago Metro
Cook County Democratic Women
Eighth Day Center for Justice
First Church of the Brethren
Gorham United Methodist Church
Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Mozambique Support Network, Chicago
National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression
National Assembly of Religious Women
National Organization of Women, Chicago
Our Lady of the Westside Catholic School
Providence-St. Mel High School
Rogers Park-Niles Township Emma Lazarus Club
St. Elizabeth Catholic Worker
St. Mark's United Methodist Church
Synapses
Third World Conference Foundation
Transafrica
United Black Staff, Olive Harvey College
U.E. District 11
Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition
Wheadon United Methodist Church
Women United
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Chicago Branch
YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Fr. Bryan K. Benoit, Priests of Sacred Heart
Rev. B. Herbert Martin, Progressive Community Church
Fr. Dan Montalband, St. Sebastians
Rev. Chester Smith, St. Anselm Catholic Church

Alexandra Civic Organisation

Houses, Security and Comfort!



TO: CHIGACO SISTER COMMUNITY PROJECT

C/O: JOHANNA

FROM: ALEXANDRA CIVIC ORGANISATION

DATE: 2/4/90

FAX NO: 091 312 4215762

DEAR FRIENDS

WE HAIL AS A VICTORY AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY WELCOME THE MOVE BY THE CHIGACO CITY TO DECLARE THE ALEXANDRA CIVIC ORGANISATION A SISTER COMMUNITY PROJECT.

ON BEHALF OF THE ALEXANDRA CIVIC ORGANISATION AND THE PEOPLE OF ALEXANDRA WE GLADLY ACCEPT.

WE ALSO ACCEPT THE CONTENTS OF THE RESOLUTION THAT WILL BE PUT FORWARD.

FORWARD TO A GOOD FUTURE, STRENGTHENED BY THE RELATIONSHIP THAT WILL DEVELOP BETWEEN THE CITY OF CHICAGO AND THE TOWNSHIP OF ALEXANDRA!

YOURS FRATEERNALLY


MOSES MAYEKISO
ACO CHAIRPERSON