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Executive Director's Report, Trustees Meeting, 17 May 1995

U.S. State legislators to southern Africa

As we meet, our first delegation of U.S. local elected officials will be in southern Africa, travelling with Dumisani Kumalo. We have an impressive delegation, including Rep. Art. M Hamilton, immediate past President of the National Conference of State Legislatures, Rep. Irma Hunter Brown, Arkansas, and Senator Virgil Smith, Michigan. Thanks to a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, we have been able to move ahead with our efforts to sustain and broaden the engagement of the network of U.S. local officials which played a key role in shaping U.S. policy in the struggle against apartheid. They were vital to achieving sanctions. Now we believe they can play an equally important role in advocating a U.S. policy that supports efforts for democratic transformation and the achievement of economic and social justice in Africa.

The legislators will hold forums with their counterparts at the local or regional level in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. The plans includes meetings with Presidents Mugabe, Nujoma and Mandela, with Cabinet ministers, representatives of labor unions, human rights organizations and citizens of the communities they visit.

The trip will achieve several goals. It will strengthen the understanding the legislators have of the critical issues facing the countries they visit, so that they can better intervene on behalf of appropriate U.S. policy. It will also seek to strengthen legislative capacity in the countries they visit and create ongoing links between the legislators and their southern African counterparts.

Our plans have been worked out in detail with legislative leadership in all three countries, and we have been warmed by the enormous enthusiasm with which the project has been greeted there.

Preserving Assistance for Africa

Ironically, just as the final elimination of apartheid's destructive hold opened up exciting new possibilities for people across southern Africa, the rightward swing in Washington threatens to block U.S. participation in the new era of

reconstruction and development. Much of our effort in the first months of the year has been focused on heading off the Republican attempt to cut off aid to Africa.

Beginning in December 1994 the staff, together with Jim Cason, our consultant on aid, developed and distributed nationally a series of action alerts designed for key local activists, local elected officials and religious leaders. The alerts provided recipients with basic information about the threatened Development Fund for Africa (DFA), and contained action suggestions, including letter writing campaigns and district meetings with area Congressional representatives.

In our opposition to the efforts to cut foreign aid we were careful always to link them with the attack on social spending in the U.S. In January, Projects Director Dumisani Kumalo briefed members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors on the dangers threatening the Development Fund for Africa, enabling the International Affairs Committee to pass a resolution with good language supporting both the DFA and social spending for the disadvantaged in the U.S. The resolution (attached) was sent by the U.S. Conference to over 1000 mayors, along with an Africa Fund memo laying out the background.

Many individuals and groups adopted the Africa Fund petition drive, which was aimed at building awareness through Black History Month. It called on Congress not to cut support for poor people in the U.S. or Africa, and several thousand signatures were delivered in April to Senator McConnell and Representative Sonny Callahan, respective Chairmen of the Senate and House subcommittees responsible for approving foreign aid.

Trustees may recall that ACOA Vice President and Religious Action Network Secretary General Wyatt Tee Walker and I delivered petitions expressing similar sentiments from congregations and synagogues in 21 states to White House officials Mort Halperin and MacArthur de Shazer on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination, April 4.

The Clinton Administration has so far continued to defend foreign aid characterizing Republican attacks on foreign assistance as "isolationist" and damaging to U.S. interests, but it remains to be seen how hard they will fight in the end..

In early March The Africa Fund successfully participated in an

emergency campaign to block Republican efforts to delete \$110 million from the current \$802 m DFA by transferring it from Africa to fund housing for Russian army officers returning home from postings in eastern Europe.

We continue to provide educational materials to concerned individuals and legislators, some of whom have begun to develop city council resolutions in favor of continuing Africa aid. We have received strong support for this work from African leaders, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

I prepared testimony for the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations Export Financing and Related Programs which held hearings on the issue 30th March. We challenged strongly the view that Africa is unimportant to the U.S. expressed by Senator Mitch McConnell, Senate Chair of the parallel Senate Appropriations committee. McConnell told reporters "I have a hard time justifying expenditures in most of Africa. I have a hard time finding an American national interest."

Human Rights - Nigeria

The Africa Fund continues to play an important role in the gathering U.S. movement for restoration of civilian rule and democracy in Nigeria. The effort, pursuant to a decision by the board and Trustees to develop program outside southern Africa, has focused largely on the U.S. labor movement. The Africa Fund has done a number of action alerts on the detention of trade union and democracy leaders in Nigeria, and on repression of the independent labor movement by the Abacha military regime.

In March the Africa Fund drafted a set of policy recommendations for Senate Africa Subcommittee chair Nancy Kassebaum urging strong U.S. support for the Nigerian democracy movement, and the use of America's considerable economic leverage to press the military to return to barracks. Our Labor Desk has become a major source of information and education on Nigeria for the U.S. labor movement, and is part of a national working group on Nigeria that includes Amnesty International, TransAfrica, the Service Employees International Union and Greenpeace.

Labor Desk coordinator Mike Fleshman briefed Human Rights Watch in advance of their mission to Nigeria and provided them with trade union contacts in Lagos. Fleshman was a featured speaker

on a nationally syndicated Pacifica Radio show on Nigeria earlier this month, appearing with Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union Vice President Calvin Moore.

The Africa Fund is currently working with Nigerian expatriates and human rights activists on an effort to encourage City Councils to take a position in support of Nigerian democracy which is being abused and violated by the Nigerian military. The New York City Council has tentatively scheduled a hearing on the first such resolution for June 15. We hope to turn the hearing into a major community education event. We are trying now to confirm the appearance of Nobel Prize winning writer Wole Soyinka and other prominent human rights leaders at that event.

Human Rights -South Africa

The Africa Fund continues U.S. distribution of the South African Human Rights Committee's monthly reports. Although the end of apartheid also ended the human rights emergency in South Africa, the reports usefully document continuing political violence in KwaZulu/Natal and developments in human rights policy, including creation of a "truth commission" to investigate apartheid-era abuses.

As part of this project we have also begun to distribute an ANC news-letter on the ongoing rewriting of the South African Constitution to interested Americans.

With an eye toward maximizing the effectiveness of the HRC materials, we have just completed a major review of the current mailing list to better target the U.S. human rights community.

Educators to South Africa

With the assistance of Evelyn Rich, the Africa Fund and the Phelps Stokes Fund are jointly sponsoring an educators trip to South Africa for 12 high-school and elementary school teachers. Funding for this project has been sought and the application granted by the U.S. Department of Education under the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program. This is a further step in our effort to keep a broad constituency engaged with southern Africa as it tackles the urgent problems of a post apartheid world.

Evie Rich will be serving as the Project Director. Evie has already put in an enormous amount of work, on a volunteer

basis. Africa Fund staff will bear considerable responsibility for the S.A. end of the program.

Research and Publications

The drastic reduction of our staff has made it impossible to keep up a steady flow of publications produced in house. We continue to handle many questions, from a wide variety of enquirers, including the press and media, elected officials, foundation heads, etc.

We have several pieces in preparation, including, close to completion. an in depth review of U.S. AID activities in South Africa and Mozambique in the last five years.

Briefings

In January we organized a briefing by several visiting South African women parliamentarians for members of our Womens' Desk network. Staff speak frequently at meetings, Conferences, etc. It might amuse some of you to know that one of my recent speaking ventures was at Columbia University, on a platform with Chester Crocker discussing "Do We Still Need An Africa Policy"

Personnel and Fundraising

I think we can be proud of the work we have done this year.

But we have worked under extremely difficult circumstances for the first five months of the year, responding to the uncertainty of our funding by not replacing our Associate Director. This came on top of the serious program loss of Rachael Kagan, our Women's Desk Co-ordinator, late last year.

I will discuss our current personnel and financial situation in greater detail at the Board meeting. I would urge the Trustees to think creatively about ways in which members can be more pro-active in assisting me to seek funding.