

REPORT ON ACAS ACTIVITIES OF 2003-2004

Meredeth Turshen and Michael O. West, ACAS Co-Chairs

We produced three issues of the ACAS Bulletin:

ACAS Bulletin #67 "US Trade with Africa: Exchange or Assault?"

ACAS Bulletin #68 "The Warri Crisis, the Niger Delta, and the Nigerian State"

ACAS Bulletin # 69 "Academic Freedom Under Attack"

We sent out ACAS Alerts on the catastrophic situation in Darfur, Sudan, written by our friend and frequent Bulletin contributor, Eric Reeves, and on the situation in Cote d'Ivoire, sent in by Tom Bassett of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

As part of the "On the Edge" commentaries, we circulated a provocative piece on genocide in Darfur by Eric Reeves. Note that this was sent last April, months before the wider public debate and Congressional action.

As a continuation of our interest in the militarization of Africa, discussed in Bulletin #66 and prominent on our website, we circulated an article by Todd Pitman from salon.com about Al-Qaida and the U.S. military in Africa.

The meeting on the Warri Crisis was postponed. Although we had a full list of participants and a fully paid venue, we raised only half the money needed; it wasn't enough to bring the participants from Nigeria. But we did use the background papers for the Bulletin on the Niger Delta.

The ACAS Exec is looking for ways to honor our colleagues' activist work and is thinking of creating the "Bud Day Award for Activist Work for Africa and Africans" (another name could be suggested). The award would not necessarily be made annually, but as the occasion warrants. Although we have no funds, one suggestion is that the award ought to carry some monetary value, say \$500, and that we might raise the money among ourselves by imposing a tax on the exec and board, say \$50-\$100 a person. This award would mainly be symbolic, but perhaps it could help the honoree in his/her work and make ACAS more visible. We could perhaps profile the chosen colleague in the Bulletin or on our website and maybe use the ACAS membership meeting at ASA as the occasion to make the award. We would need to think of criteria for the nomination of such honorees. Suggestions are: this award to go to someone working in the US for Africa/Africans; someone involved in ongoing work (in other words, not for past performance), work that spotlights a neglected group or problem or critical situation, and work that relates in some way to US policy (a problem that is a result of US policy or a situation that we would like to see US policy affect in a positive way). We would need a nomination and selection process. One possibility is to advertise a call for nominations on the ASA website/listserv (if we have access). We are looking for ideas and suggestions from you. Please come to the ACAS meeting and let us know what you think.

PS: A personal note from Meredith on ACAS's Future

ACAS has had outstanding cooperation this year from board and exec members Caleb Bush, Imani Countess, Al Kagan, Bill Martin, Kris Peterson, Joel Samoff, Carol Thompson, Michael West, David Wiley, and Noah Zerbe. In addition I wish to thank all of the contributors to the Bulletins, including readers like Jessica Beaumont Walker (AFSC) and ACAS members Asma Abdel Halim, George Caffentzis, Kassahun Checole, and Terisa Turner. I think this is a superb set of issues!

The problem is that our membership is now reduced to 50-60 people (and a few libraries). I feel that the effort required to produce Bulletins and the cost to our tiny treasury are disproportionate to the small circulation. I think we should stop producing them. Certainly, I am resigning as (de facto) editor.

Here are the suggestions I leave you with (though I realize that a decision to end the Bulletin probably deserves a debate on the purposes of ACAS):

1. We could place greater reliance and emphasis (and perhaps more resources) on our excellent website. More than 2200 people have opened our website since Noah installed the counter.
2. We could produce more "On the Edge" commentaries and ACAS Alerts, placing them on the website rather than using unreliable email lists.
3. We could liaise more closely with ROAPE and use ROAPE pages for briefings and debates.

ACAS worked with a number of organizations last year, both in the U.S. and abroad: AFSC, AFJN, WOA, Community Technology Development (Commutech, Harare), COSATU, as well as ROAPE. We may be small but we are well networked. The question is, how can we expand our reach and increase our influence?