

# The New State of Readiness Of Black America

## The Recognition Of An Urgent Need To Develop And Protect Our Own Organizations, Businesses, Churches And Other Institutions



Rev. Dr. Leon H. Sullivan

**"O**UR people need to focus on self help and development of our own communities"

*"Companies benefitting from our cities must put something back"*

*"There is a tremendous block regarding Africans' and African-Americans' capabilities that must be removed"*

*"Many of our people need to get the image of Tarzan out of their minds"*

*"I'm glad to see a new state of readiness to want to learn"*

**Y**ES. These were the sentiments expressed on the morning of March 7, 1990 in Washington, D.C. by the Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan—who along with Dr. Calvin W. Rolark—are the Co-Founding Enablers of AOIP. Many of us in AOIP and other pursuits toward justice and equity had heard them many, many times before.

But, this time it was neither for primary support of OIC nor was it for the primary support of AOIP. Rather, his urgent pleas for help on this occasion were for his newest organization, the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH)—the fulfillment of his dream of establishing an organization to serve as a catalyst to help Africa educationally in its drive toward economic independence.

Awaiting his arrival in one of the huge and magnificent chambers of Cannon House Office Building in Wash-

ington were more than 20 ambassadors and other senior diplomats from Third World countries seated in the front rows. And, to his rear were more than a dozen Congressmen. Flanked at the side of this great "warrior for justice and equity" were three whom Dr. Sullivan referred to (along with Congressman William Gray and Dr. C.T. Wright) as among his closest friends and trusted supporters—Rev. Ed Hales, Rev. Elton Jolly (in whose care the affairs of OIC had been placed) and Dr. Calvin Rolark (to whom he left his responsibility for the further development and care of AOIP). It was these latter three that Dr. Sullivan insisted be seated in that special place reserved only for Congressmen.

The occasion was the signing of an agreement with the United States Agency for International Development (AID) allocating \$2,050,000 to IFESH for supporting self-help programs in three African countries—the federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Niger and the Republic of Guinea.

**I**N his familiar booming and commanding voice, his encouragement of Black or African-Americans to do far more for their own was first heard by many when he was an assistant to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. on the streets of Harlem.

"Folks aren't ready for us to do much on our own," they would say. Yet, Adam Clayton Powell (with Leon Sullivan's early help) went on to become the most powerful Black man America had ever known. He got more bills through Congress, mostly in the area of education, than ever has been done.

**M**OST of us heard that same refrain in Philadelphia when Dr. Sullivan created, among many other things, the first Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) in an abandoned city building.

"Folks aren't ready for that," others said. Yet from that humble beginning, OIC and the idea of self-help grew and proliferated around the world.

We in AOIP heard his voice—with similar refrains urging self-help—when we had only eight or nine organizations signed individually as affiliates for our self-esteem-engendering and/or "community-building" approach in terms of Black folks assuming far more responsibility for removing the "root causes" of illiteracy and the many other resultant "ills" from our communities.

We who were in AOIP from the early beginning remember when folks reminded us, with no doubts whatsoever on their minds, that "experience had shown" it would be impossible to dream realistically about getting 40 or 50 national Black-led male and female organizations (as was our initial goal) to commit themselves to work together long term. Their overwhelming evidence was that—"despite many tries over many years"—aside from the all-female and renowned National Council of Negro Women and the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.—"none existed".

"Additionally", some would tell us with an air of added authority, "Black leaders eagerly get together for headline-getting events like the March On Washington, shake hands and soon start fighting again the moment it's

over". And to put just a light coat of cement over what they felt assuredly was our "grave of hope," they would tell us that we would be "lucky to get a dozen to go along" with any movement to build our communities—and motivate our people through "togetherness". And for a time, it looked (to us) as if our folks really weren't ready.

**B**UT those of us who were there will never forget that Saturday evening in Chicago when—in response to Dr. Rolark's plea—Dr. Sullivan confronted 39 presidents of Black-led organizations as they were being entertained lavishly by a major airline.

He reasoned in peerless fashion with these leaders about the need for self-development of our own organizations, our own churches, our own businesses, our own professional entities, our own schools and other institutions and told them in his loudest of voices that "if you leaders can't get together behind the 'community-building' focus of AOIP, you might as well HANG IT UP, HANG IT UP!"

It was on that night that AOIP's affiliations moved from less than ten to almost fifty Black-led organizations. And, it was then we knew that—with Dr. Sullivan's urging—Blacks could move more swiftly to "a new state of readiness." (More on this great leader and how he helped to bring this about within Black America, through work with some of his closest corporate enablers, will appear in an upcoming issue of this AOIP series.)

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### "Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"...A Series

*Have you joined AOIP?*