

Black lawmakers unite behind Millions More Movement

By Askia Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Just as individual members have done for some time, the Congressional Black Caucus, as a whole, is now preparing to play its part in the Millions More Movement.

Although their meeting was interrupted several times by calls for CBC members to go vote on the House Floor, nearly all of the 43 caucus members eagerly attended parts of or the entire two-hour session at the Capitol on July 20 with Minister Louis Farrakhan and several leaders of the 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the Millions Man March to be held in Washington on Oct. 14-16.

Following the unpublicized strategy session, CBC Chair Melvin Watt (D-N.C.) told

reporters that the caucus supports the October mobilization. The CBC is determined to become involved before and, most importantly, after the commemoration to ensure that the Millions More Movement is an ongoing movement that addresses the concerns of our people. Individual members were also enthusiastic about their collaboration. "I'm a strong supporter of this effort," Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) told *The Final Call* shortly after the meeting. "Minister Farrakhan made a great presentation to us, and the caucus is going to be very supportive." A veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, Rep. Lewis spoke at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.

The mobilization's national leadership team participated in the meeting, including

Reverend Willie Wilson, national executive director; Leonard F. Muhammad, national deputy director; Dr. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, mobilization director; and Reverend Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, former executive director of the CBC.

"The Millions More Movement continues the Million Man March of several years ago, and it's critical," Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), often called the Dean of the CBC, told *The Final Call*. "Because from that experience, we now understand more clearly than ever the importance of follow-through and organization, particularly after the march.

"It's much easier to have a successful march than it is to have the issues that are generated being worked on across the country and in Washington. I'm glad that Minis-

ter Farrakhan and his contingency were received with open arms by the Congressional Black Caucus," Rep. Conyers concluded.

The meeting took place one day after President George Bush nominated John Roberts to the U.S. Supreme Court and CBC members joined other concerned Black activists questioning Judge Roberts's commitment to civil rights and expressed concern that the nation's highest court could shift to the right. The Supreme Court's decisions determine U.S. policy on workers' rights, affirmative action, voting rights and education, and the CBC will carefully evaluate the record of Judge Roberts in light of that history, said Chairman Watt.

Askia Muhammad writes for *The Final Call*.

Africa

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needs," said Foote.

In Niger alone, thousands of children have died from starvation and communicable diseases amidst drought and the worst infestation of crop-devouring locusts in 15 years.

The United Nations has warned of increasing deaths as it has targeted \$2.5 million for emergency food aid while the need exceeds \$9 million.

That does not count the 15 million Africans who have died from AIDS since the epidemic started two decades ago.

Former Congressman Ron Dellums, known for his leadership in helping to end apartheid in South Africa and his current fight against AIDS/HIV in Africa, told the audience that because of the spread of AIDS around the world, America must now see assistance to Africa as a part of its own self-interest.

In other words, "Help me because to not help me kills you, fool," he said, breaking the audience into laughter and applause.

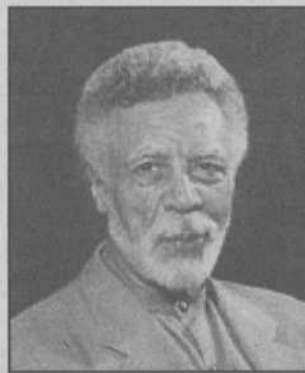
"This is 2005. The level of our rhetoric, the level of

our strategic thinking has to change. Health is now a global strategic issue. So, everyone's self-interest at this point is engaged. The extent to which the Diaspora is disproportionately disadvantaged and vulnerable is the extent to which the rest of the world is also disadvantaged and vulnerable."

Foote outlined a list of solutions that could begin establishing strong relationships between Africans and African-Americans.

"We would urge the National Urban League to move quickly toward developing a strategy for positive engagement with African peoples and issues. We truly believe that our collective efforts are vital to the future political, economic and social well-being of Africa and the Diaspora as well as the United States and eventually the entire world. How about a 'Whitney M. Young Institute for African Affairs?'" Foote said to loud applause from the audience.

Young, the fourth national executive director of the Urban League, drowned in Lagos, Nigeria on March 11,



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— Ron Dellums
Former California
Congressman

1971, while attending the third African/American dialogue.

Urban League President and Chief Executive Officer Marc Morial told the audience that the League realizes the importance of Black organizations taking up the cause of African/African-American relationships.

"It's important because we have a growing community of people in the United States of people who are from the Caribbean and from Africa," said Morial. He added that even enlightened people have let down their guards as if the struggle in Africa was over after the crumbling of apartheid more than a decade ago. But Afri-

can causes must be renewed among African-Americans, he said.

Ron Walters, University of Maryland political scientist who moderated the panel, agrees that South Africa protest strategies must now be applied in other ways, including against government oppression in Sudan, where a government army of about 20,000 is blamed for vicious attacks, rapes and murders of non-Muslim civilians in the Darfur region.

More than 2 million people have died either by violence, disease or other war-related impacts over the past decade, according to GlobalSecurity.org.

Applauding the work of

WOL radio talk show host Joe Madison in his fight against the violence in Sudan, Walters said Madison was recently honored in Newark, N.J. as Gov. Richard J. Codey signed divestment legislation similar to sanctions against South Africa. Chicago will attempt a similar strategy, he said. "We're hoping that by using this same tactic, we can be successful in bringing some of the pain that people in Sudan are suffering today to an end."

From oppression to AIDS and other diseases, to war and famine, dark-skinned people around the globe suffer disproportionately.

Ron Daniels, executive director of the New-York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, said that Haiti has been all but ignored. The 7.5 million people of the war-torn nation are the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, with 80 percent living in poverty.

"We need more aggressive government enforcement by way of U.S. government in collaboration with Haitian authorities; we need

jobs programs, massive public works programs, and medical assistance," said Daniels, founder of the Haiti Support Project. "We must focus on both justice and reconciliation."

The needs of the Diaspora are daunting, said Morial, but, he said he believes it's time for a unified effort.

"We are just going to continue to think about ways that the Urban League and other historic African-American organizations can in fact develop a unified agenda, how we can make sure that these issues are on the agenda," Morial said.

"At the very, very least, we have to re-energize the conversation. Whether it's Haiti or the Sudan; whether it's the economic issues related to global or debt relief; whether it's related to the continuing problems of poverty and AIDS; or whether it relates to the issues of fair trade, economic aid — whatever the issues are — we've got to educate, and we've got to enlighten the people, and we've got to first begin by understanding the issues ourselves."

Clingman

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this elite class of Black folks. Many of our brothers and sisters think they are more equal than others of us.

The sobering reality is that if these upper class elites get caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, or if they get themselves into trouble with the law, or if they do or say something their White superiors do not like, they will get their wake-up call.

They will see that they cannot be promoted from being Black; they cannot move away from being Black; they cannot graduate from being Black, and they cannot get enough money to

change them from being Black.

The most important thing is that we can not, should not, and must not deny who we are; and we should understand that if anyone is going to lift us out of the muck and mire, it will be us, by the "work of our own hands." Since we comprise only 14 percent of this nation's population, it is only logical that we must work together, rich and poor, old and young, light-skinned and dark-skinned, straight-haired and curly-haired, upper and lower economic groups, to obtain and sustain our collective economic freedom.

To think and act as though some of us are "more equal" than others puts us in the same category as the pigs who, after the revolt by all of the farm animals, took control and ended up treating their brother and sister animals just as badly as Farmer Jones did. The pigs failed to realize that they were farm animals as well, which was the common factor that brought them together to revolt in the first place. They soon forgot how they rose to power and status.

Our common factor is Blackness, not just on the outside, but a Blackness that is dictated and supported by

our consciousness, our culture and our commitment to future generations.

We must not get hung-up on who has the most intellect, because if the intellectuals are only talking and not getting some dirt on their hands trying to solve our problems, their words ring hollow.

We cannot make deities of our rich and famous simply because they have a lot of money.

If they are not using some of their money and influence to move us forward, then they are merely Black folks who have a lot of money. Also, we cannot make superstars of slick-talking, fash-

ion-plate pastors, because they will lead us to their own prosperity and leave ours behind.

No matter what you have or what you know, you are

not "more equal" than any of us.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies Dept.

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