

Our work in supporting Africa far from over

By Nicole C. Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A few weeks ago, I appeared on Tavis Smiley's State of the Black Union. It was held at the New Orleans Convention Center, where only 2-1/2 years ago, residents packed into its structure seeking from protection from a storm that, for many, never ended. While there was much debate about the show itself, for my part, I wanted to impart a simple message: our work in support of the African World is not done.

Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois understood the connections between Africa and African-Americans. DuBois was an original convener of the Pan African Congress in 1945, where the declaration read, "We believe the success of Afro-Americans is bound up with the emancipation of all African peoples..."

The movements of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to space for a social consciousness within the Black community. The anti-apartheid movement in the U.S., led by African-Americans, began to take hold and Americans proved once again that we could change the oppressive policies of our government. Today, the discussion on activism, particularly advocating for a different foreign policy, is laced with skepticism. Do African-Americans still care about Africa? After apartheid,

what is next for Blacks to struggle for? As one writer asked, "is Pan-Africanism" dead?

I experienced the U.S. anti-apartheid movement through the lens of a junior high school student in Buffalo, New York. I was the only Black student in my grade and the only one with a "Free Nelson Mandela" button on my jean jacket. I wore it proudly. I was hundreds of miles away from the action in front of the South African Embassy. I didn't understand the complexities, but viscerally I understood the movement held meaning for me.

Since then, much has happened for me and for the African World. Globalization coincided with the fall of the apartheid regime, and the Cold War political blocs in Africa shifted dramatically. New questions began to emerge. How much U.S. engagement is good in Africa? Free trade or fair trade? In the midst of conflict, should the U.S. intervene unilaterally or take a multilateral approach? Should we focus on charity or on sustainable development?

While there are questions, there are also many new opportunities. African-Americans



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have begun to travel in record numbers to Africa and throughout the Diaspora. Blacks continue to enter into all different forms of activism, and consistently work on behalf of the continent. The influx of African immigrants, and their transition to becoming citizens, has changed the debate on U.S. involvement in the continent.

This new generation of students and young professionals examine the current state of the African World from many angles, not just relying on the evening news, but also on articles from African newspapers, the Web and blogs. Overwhelmingly, this new generation believes that we, as a global African people, cannot be treated like mere collateral damage in this new millennium.

Black Americans are making connections that have never been made. The new discussions around Afro-descendants in Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Mexico broadens our children's awareness of our broader identity, history and struggle in this hemisphere. The effects of economic policies that benefit the few rather than the many pervade our local economies. African-Americans must understand that the war on terror is a global war

and it destroys international civil liberties and threatens advancement in the African World.

The best human rights movement wisdom tells us that we must continue to listen and learn from each other's struggles across the globe. We have to make the connections between our own oppressions and those felt around the world by the children of Africa. It isn't about charity. It is really about justice; justice in a world where Africa and her Diaspora has been consistently exploited for over 400 years, prohibiting any possibility of a level global playing field.

The U.S. anti-apartheid movement was a forty year struggle to recognize and educate the American people about a horrible system of oppression supported in its totality by our own government. Agitation from inside of South Africa toppled the regime and we stood in support of that struggle. Today, we must continue to fight all policies, domestic and international, that do not put the dignity and welfare of African peoples at the center of the discussion.

Perhaps we will see another experience similar to the Free South Africa Movement. But, we may also have a movement on our horizon, more extraordinary than we could ever imagine.

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Low-income taxpayers need help to get their due

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Great news: Within the thousands of pages of tax law lies a provision called the Earned Income Tax Credit that enables many working poor families to climb out of poverty.

The bad news is that many low-income taxpayers are unaware of the EITC and don't know how to take advantage of it.

Nevertheless, the most recent estimates show that the Earned Income Tax Credit lifts more children out of poverty than any other anti-poverty program — 2.4 million children in 2005.

Without this crucial infusion of cash, it is estimated that the child poverty rate that year would have been nearly one-fourth higher.

However, \$3 billion dollars in EITC benefits intended for working families were diverted in tax year 2005 to commercial tax preparers and lending institutions that often charge excessively high fees for tax preparation.

They also entice many low-income taxpayers to take out Refund Anticipation Loans, which causes an even greater loss of money

among them.

According to Internal Revenue Service figures, more than 22 million taxpayers received the EITC for the 2005 tax year, with an average benefit amount of \$1,894.

The total EITC revenue paid out represented a \$41.8 billion gain for those individuals, children and families and the communities in which they live and work.

These tax refunds due for low-income taxpayers also spur local economies, with surveys showing that most EITC recipients use their refunds to meet short- to medium-term needs such as catching up on rent and utility bills, purchasing clothes for their children or repairing their car.

In San Antonio, each additional dollar received through the EITC generated about \$1.58 in local economic activity.

For a number of years, the Children's Defense Fund has helped low- and moder-



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ate-income tax filers gain access to tax credits for which they are eligible—including the EITC and the Child Tax Credit—by raising awareness and providing free tax preparation assistance through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

The IRS partners with organizations to certify and train volunteers to help prepare tax returns. VITA sites, often sponsored by community organizations, are located at neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls and other convenient locations.

The need for free tax preparation to help low-income taxpayers is great for several reasons.

First, for millions of tax filers, complex federal and state tax laws, difficulty understanding forms and the time required to figure them out make the prospect of preparing and filing tax returns daunting.

This is especially true for low-income fil-

ers who heavily depend on commercial tax preparation sites. For tax year 2005, almost 71 percent of EITC recipients in the United States paid to have their returns completed professionally, which took nearly \$2.3 billion in EITC benefits out of the pockets of families and individuals most in need.

A portion of their hard-earned income is also diverted to short-term, expensive Refund Anticipation Loans based on the filer's expected tax refund. RALs often carry triple-digit interest rates and a \$100 charge for the filer to get their refund only a few days earlier than normal.

Ultimately, RALs cost the typical EITC recipient 8.1 percent of his or her federal refund. CDF issues reports warning low-income taxpayers about RALs and is seeking better legal protections.

As we enter the 2007 tax season, it is essential that low- and modest-income families benefit fully from the EITC and other tax refunds.

To make that happen, CDF continues its campaign to increase taxpayer awareness of available free tax help, decrease reliance on RALs and train community groups across the country to conduct VITA programs. CDF runs VITA programs or works with coalitions and other VITA programs in several states including Texas, South Carolina, California, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Mississippi and the District of Columbia.

Recent data show that RAL usage among EITC recipients decreased for the second consecutive year.

CDF was able to help families recoup more than \$65 million in tax refunds during the 2004 tax season, more than \$105 million during the 2005 tax season, and over \$169 million during the 2006 tax season. These dollars mean a lot to struggling families.

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Yes, folks, and the joke is on us.

The sad part about this entire scenario is, despite the many problems we face, most of which were caused by George Bush's administration and his band of thieves and exploiters, John McCain may be our president in January 2009.

Imagine a 74-year-old anachronism, having to be corrected by his handlers, still searching for that "Cuban that came to the prison camps of North Vietnam and tortured and killed my friends.

We'll get him and bring him to justice, too." Will somebody shake this guy and tell him that was 40 years ago, if it happened at

all. You know the saying, "The older we get the better we were." McCain is probably illusionary by now.

McCain is trying to be elected on the basis of having been a POW. In my estimation, he needs much more than that. Oops! Maybe not. Bush did eight years, didn't he?

We are so dumbed-down as an electorate. As we fight over Obama and Clinton and allow so-called conservative talk show hosts to control our agenda, which is reactive at best, old John may just get in.

So get ready, just in case. Get ready for more war, more needless death, more insulting excuses and rationales, more economic hardships, more corporate welfare, more in-

vasions of sovereign nations, more cuts in services, more high prices for essentials of life, more lies, more arrogance, more being ignored, disrespected, and disregarded, more greed, more thievery, more fear-mongering, more invasion of privacy, more Clarence Thomases and Anton Scalias, more presidential puppet masters, and more of Joe Lieberman.

Back to the Miller High Life brother: This is a "common sense check." Want 4,000 more slain?

Just elect John McCain.

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black economic empowerment book series.