



AAUC Policy Briefing with Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

June 24, 2009 Washington, DC — The United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ambassador Johnnie Carson, promised that he will "remember to listen and not forget to learn." During a briefing and conversation organized by the African American Unity Caucus (AAUC) at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, Ambassador Carson outlined a broad agenda, saying the Africa policy of the Barack Obama administration will focus on four key areas: (1) promoting and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law; (2) assisting in the prevention and resolution of conflicts; (3) encouraging long-term development and growth; and (4) working with African nations to address old and new challenges. "Enormous progress" over the last fifteen years "is evident," said Carson, citing successful elections in Ghana and South Africa over the last six months. Nine African nations are "clearly defined as free and democratic," he added, referring to a Freedom House poll. Another twenty-three, according to this poll, are "partially free." He added that in 1973 most African nations were categorized as "not free." "We constantly have to encourage those in civil society to be the voice and conscience of their countries, and we have to promote constitutional democratic governments, strong court systems, strong legislatures, regular elections, free media, and religious tolerance," Carson said.

There are huge challenges, Carson told the audience. "Democratic instability in Kenya" is a large concern and in Sudan, despite a peace deal reached in 2005 "all is still not perfect; all is still not well." Although he gave no details, Carson noted that rival Sudanese parties have been engaged in talks in Washington this week. Some analysts think that the 2011 referendum on whether the south continues as a part of Sudan will be postponed. Zimbabwe, Somalia and the eastern Congo are also of great concern. Global recession is battering Africa. And there are new previously unforeseen challenges, said Carson. Global warming heads this list. The ice glacier atop Mount Kenya is rapidly melting and may actually disappear in another decade or two with Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro is suffering the same fate. The loss of water from spring snow melt will affect both commercial and non-commercial lowland crops. Drug trafficking "is now a significant issue," said Carson. In Guinea-Bissau, there is "strong suspicion" that the recent assassinations of presidential candidate Baciro Dabo and former defense minister Helder Proenca may be related to the drug trade. Carson called the West African nation Africa's first "narco-trafficking state." Solutions to all of Africa's problems, and helping the continent reach its full potential, won't come quickly or easily, but, said Carson, "Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is actively engaged." Furthermore, in his experience, "No American president has engaged Africa this early in his administration." President Obama will visit Ghana next month and other visits to Africa are likely, said Carson, either on the way to, or coming from, other parts of the world.

Mel Foote, President and CEO of the Constituency for Africa congratulated Ambassador Carson for his willingness to participate in the AAUC Policy Forum and share his insight and analysis of how the constituency of "Americans of African Descent" can be involved in helping to shape US-Africa foreign policy. He also acknowledged the various co-sponsors of the event to include: the African American Unity Caucus, Africare, the AGA Group, LLC, Celebrate Africa Foundation, Chevron Corporation, Coca Cola Company, The Ford Foundation, GB Herndon and Associates, Leadership Africa USA, Opportunities Industrialization Centers International, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, Shell Oil Company and Thompson, Cobb, Bazilio and Associates.

The African American Unity Caucus (AAUC) was established in 2002, as a non-partisan alliance of committed leaders and organizations of African ancestry focused on challenges, issues and concerns affecting Africa and the African Diaspora. The mission of the AAUC is to marshal human, material and social capital in order to enhance the overall sustainable development of African people. Through strategic decision-making, the AAUC initiates and fosters actions; and forges effective partnerships among public and private entities in Africa and the African Diaspora to impact US foreign policy. The AAUC is a program of the Constituency for Africa.

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