

seen on the scene



A New Beginning for US-Africa Relations Sister Cities International Africa Summit

by: Ellen Israel Goldberg



More than 500 delegates from around the world attended the Sister Cities International (SCI) Africa Summit in Cape Town February 20–24, 2023. The volunteer non-profit citizen diplomacy organization was founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956. Its goal is to bring people together for projects that promote peace and mutual understanding.

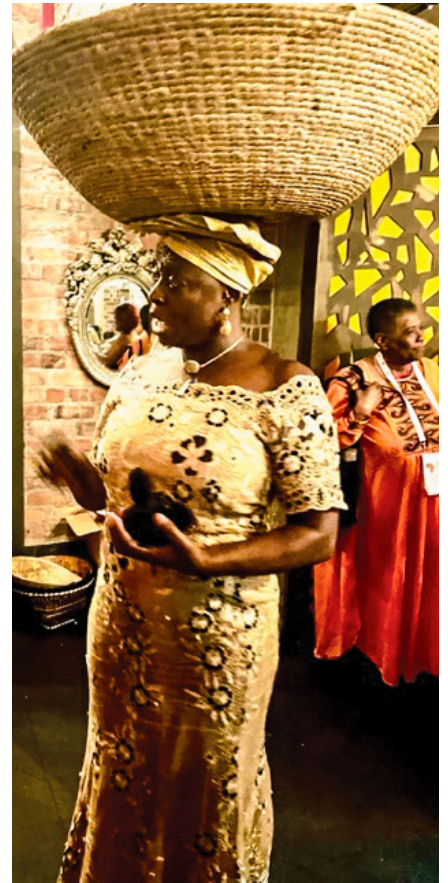


The theme of the conference was Transforming SCI Africa: Honoring Traditions, Creating New Partnerships. Well-planned sessions highlighted topics ranging from business, education, sustainability, women's leadership, and sports diplomacy, to culture, and humanitarian projects. Special roundtables featured Consuls General, Mayors, and Ports. Ndileka Mandela, oldest grandchild of the late President of South Africa, was a Plenary Speaker. She is the Founder and CEO of the Thembekile Mandela Foundation named for her late father. Its two main pillars are health and education. Because of her medical background and love for her grandfather, she was his nurse during the final period of his illness.



Africa, which has 54 countries, is finally being recognized as a powerhouse whose potential has not been fully realized. It has natural resources such as gold, diamonds, oil, and titanium in addition to a well-educated young population. Mayor Sylvester Turner and Houston have hosted several annual Africa Day events, bringing African Ambassadors to our city. They also held the first Houston-Africa Energy Summit. Heads of State, Ministers, energy CEOs and business leaders from the African continent and the Greater Houston area gave timely information to those who attended.

SCI's stated goal is to create 500 new African sister cities to join with American ones in the next five years. Since there are 54 countries on the continent, attendees are optimistic about succeeding. In addition, a pilot project between Sister Cities International and NBA Africa is being established. Houston and Luanda have been chosen as one of 5 US-African sister city pairs to participate. A Junior Basketball League and clinics will be established in each city,



targeting boys and girls between the ages of six to 18. It will begin at a community level, then will spread to schools and other cities. Exchanges between the young players from Houston and Luanda are also planned.

Not everything during the conference was work. The locale is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Mountains and beaches are just a short ride away. The welcome reception was held at the official residence of Todd Haskell, the Consul General of the US in Cape Town. February in South Africa is summertime, and the weather cooperated, bringing sunshine, warm temperatures, and an abundance of flowers. Other receptions were equally interesting. One was an evening at the Castle of Good Hope. Built between 1666 and 1679, it is the oldest surviving building in the country. Musicians playing jazz made the group feel as though they were in New Orleans. Another reception featured the Groot Constantia Winery, the oldest wine estate in the country. It, too, was begun in the 1600s.

The closing gala was held at Gold Restaurant, a unique venue featuring a 14-dish safari of fine African cuisine. Everyone was dressed in African attire, and enjoyed unusual entertainment—Mali puppets, native drum lessons, singing, and dancing. The highlight was the ceremony honoring African Elders chosen not only for their age (70 or older) but for their longtime work on projects with Africa. It was a night — and trip — to remember.

