The 21st Annual Africa/African Diaspora Conference Report

Organized by: Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution, CSUS & Pan African Studies Program
In Collaboration with the CSUS Honors Program

Conference Theme: Africa at the Crossroads: Revolution, Democracy, Youth Empowerment, Social Media and Non-Violence

Date & Venue: April 26-28, 2012, University Union, CSU-Sacramento
The 21st Annual Africa/African Diaspora conference focused on understanding the nature of dilemmas faced by Africans and the African Diaspora at the beginning of the 21st century. Organized under the title “Africa at the Crossroads: Revolution, Democracy, Youth Empowerment, Social Media and Non-Violence”, the conference was especially interested in highlighting issues pertinent to the African youth (both in Africa and African Diaspora) against the backdrop of youth-led non-violent revolutions and protest in North Africa and the Middle East as well as activism for free and fair elections across Africa. Under this general theme, the conference presentations were organized into 14 panels and a concluding plenary. There were a total of 30 individual presentations (including keynote speakers) over the 3 day conference; see 2012 Conference Program at www.csus.edu/org/capcr.

The conference site registration commenced at 12:00 pm on Thursday April 26, 2012. The actual presentations started at 1:30 with a panel (Panel 1) focusing on Africa/African American History with presentation by 5 student panelists from San Joaquin Delta College’s Black Student Union. This was followed with two concurrent panels, namely, Panel 2 that focused on Gender, Youth, History and the Politics of Change and Panel 3, which was concerned with Causes and Consequences of Religious Youth Activism. All the presentations were well received, with many follow up questions by audience and answers by the presenter. The day's conference activities were concluded with screening of the film "Egypt: The Story Behind the Revolution" which was combined with a conference reception. Approximately 200 people attended the first day of the conference, mostly CSUS students and faculty.

On the second, formal opening day of the conference on Friday April 27th, the program began with a tree dedication and plaque in memory of the late Dr. and Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai (who visited CSUS in 2007), behind CSUS’s Tahoe Hall. The ceremony was led by Dr. Sheree Meyer, CSUS Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, with remarks by representatives of the event co-sponsors: CSUS-CAPCR Director Uwazie, Pan African Studies Director Mosupyoe, CSUS Honors Coordinator Vanessa Arnaud; plus the Conference Keynote Speaker Sanders. Students from CSU Sacramento’s Honors Program and CAPCR Board as well some of the conference guests also witnessed the ceremony. The plaque reads:

“Wangari Muta Maathai (1940-2011) Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Founder of Kenya’s Green Belt Movement. “’Like a seedling. . .the roots of our future will bury themselves in the ground
and a canopy of hope will reach into the sky.’ In honor of the seeds of hope she planted at Sacramento State, September 21, 2007.”

Upon conclusion of this ceremony, the main conference opening commenced with an African drumming by Tyehimba Kokayi of the Lion King Entertainment, Sacramento. The conference was called to order by Dr. Data D. Barata, 2012 conference planning committee chair, followed by formal opening remarks by Dr. Ernest Uwazie, Director of CAPCR. Following the conference formal opening, key university representatives presented their welcome remarks: Dr. Jessie Gaston, CAPCR Board Chair; Dr. Vanessa Arnaud, Coordinator, Honor’s Program; Dr. Boatamo Mosupyo, Director Pan African Studies & Cooper Woodson College; Dr. Robin Carter Associate Dean College of Health & Human Services; Ms. Laura Gonzalez, President, Associated Students Inc.; Dr. Ted Lascher, Associate Dean of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Provost and VP Academic Affairs, Dr. Joseph F. Sheley.

Following these welcome remarks, Dr. Donald Taylor, Assistant Vice-President for Academic Programs and Global Engagement, CSU, Sacramento introduced the keynote speaker of the conference, Dr. Robin Renee Sanders, former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria (2007-2010). Dr. Sanders's keynote address was titled "Reframing Africa: 2012 & Beyond: Africa's Value-Chain Contributions to the Global Community - The Positives, Challenges & Way Forward." Dr. Sanders's keynote address provided an excellent overview of some good news coming out of Africa such as fast growing GDP, decreasing debt, expanding middle class, and decreasing inflation. Dr. Sanders also addressed some of the challenges facing Africans, including issues of democracy, good governance, human rights, security, and poverty. As a way forward, Dr. Sanders emphasized the importance of Private-Public sector partnership, good governance and leadership. She remarked that everyone (including those living on the Continent wanting peaceful change and those in the international community as regards to who it supports and when) has a responsibility to ensure that there is an improvement on these fronts, to ensure a better future for the African youth. Dr. Sanders concluded her lecture by suggesting that we need to reframe the discussion on Africa to reflect its multidimensional reality, but also create and define shared values on the way forward in 2012 and beyond. Dr. Sanders also highlighted some of these issues in her live interview on the Capital Public Radio Insight program, aired on the eve of the conference keynote.
In addition to DR. Sanders's lecture, conference participants had the chance to listen to many excellent speakers including a young Egyptian Hebatallah M. A. H. Elwa (Egyptians' Rights Support Movement). Elwa shared her first-hand experience of the Arab spring/revolution at the Tahrir Square. We also heard from an Ethiopian youth group leader Masresha Tilahun, (Presidnet, Ethiopian Youth National Movement, Washington, DC). Tilahun’s presentation highlighted his group’s use of the social media to empower his fellow Ethiopian youth around the idea of peaceful youth political engagement. We also had research papers given by many distinguished scholars from various parts of North America, the Caribbean, Europe and the African continent, all discussing a globally important issue: how social media is empowering the African youth towards a non-violent political participation. Among important backgrounds that prompted us to focus on this theme is the stereotypical media image of the African youth in particular, and disadvantaged youth in general as downright violent or violence- prone at best. Approximately 300 people attended the second day of the conference.

Day 3 (April 28), began with a forum of 2 families(parents and children) whose children were sent to study in Africa for purposes of learning the respective cultures and acquiring the languages, namely in Nigeria and Ghana. The 3 parents articulated their reasons for the decision to send their children to Africa, reaffirmed their beliefs that they made the right decision, and suggested some useful lessons for prospective parents intending to do so. The children/students found the experience challenging, although useful for learning and being more serious students; almost all agreed that they would do so again, with one stating that she would have appreciated it more at a later, high school than elementary school age. Although the students did not fully acquire the languages, they could understand and relate to the cultures better. Overall, the experience was viewed to have added value for increasing academic performance, appreciating one’s culture, and promoting proper self-discipline and respect for the elder/community.

Final panels focused on presentations regarding the prospects and challenges of The US Affordable Care Act(now Obamacare), problem of Health Disparities and Impact on the African Diaspora, and Youth Empowerment. Approximately 60 people attended the 3rd day of the conference.

The CAPCR post conference peace awards was a good way to conclude the 3 day event, with an authentic African food, cultural entertainment and dancing, and memorable night for the 4 peace
award recipients (Dr. Hazel Mahone, Dr. Joseph Marshall, Prof. Mathilde Mukatanbana, and Sen. Curren Price) and the 200 people in attendance. The peace award lecture was presented by California State Senator Curren Price, on the theme of managing health disparities in California; a topic that informed the choice of the 2013 Africa/Diaspora conference on Health and Human Security.

**Notable points from Conference evaluation feedback**

Feedback from survey of participants was overwhelmingly positive on key areas including the registration process, overall content of conference, organization, and the conference staff. Suggestions were made on conference publicity and paper publications as well as increase in attendance/participation of African scholars.

- What the respondents liked most
  - welcoming atmosphere
  - key note speakers
  - having speakers from the African continent
  - informative on global issues

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- Honors Program
- Multicultural Center
- Pan African Studies

Report compiled by

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With Review/Input from Dr. Ernest Uwazie, CAPCR Director