

Solidarity with Africa in the Struggle against Ebola

Roughly 50 years ago Operation Crossroads Africa's founder, James H. Robinson, wrote in glowing terms of an "extraordinary acceleration of [American] interest and activity in Africa" that was spreading "like wildfire" among U.S. "citizens groups, colleges, and voluntary agencies." Since 1958 when Crossroads Africa was founded, it has sent approximately 10,000 U.S. volunteers to Africa for short-term service projects. The U.S. Peace Corps, founded three years later, has sent more than 70,000 U.S. volunteers to Africa. More than 16,000 U.S. students and scholars have studied or lectured in Africa since 1949 through the Fulbright program, and thousands more students and scholars have traveled to Africa through other programs for academic purposes. Since the 1800s, thousands of American missionaries have served in Africa, and hundreds of American non-governmental organizations have done work in or pertaining to Africa. Moreover, a million or more Americans have visited Africa in each of the last five years alone and almost 500,000 Africans currently visit the U.S. each year.

Connections between American citizens and Africa have grown increasingly stronger. Nevertheless, escalating concerns about the spread of Ebola onto U.S. territory currently threaten to reverse what have been decades of gains in an evolving spirit of cooperation and friendship between the peoples of the U.S. and Africa.

In the urgent effort to halt the now transatlantic spread of the Ebola virus, one result of heightened American alarm has been a helpful U.S. medical sector mobilization and public health sector vigilance. Another result however of this alertness to sometimes real and sometimes imagined American public health vulnerabilities has been damaged relations with Africa and Africans. This has been caused by what has seemed at points to be a lack of common cause with Africans caught at the center of the Ebola crisis.

American relations with Africa are larger than the present Ebola crisis, not only because of the political, economic, and cultural interdependence of our world, but because of deep American historical ties to Africa. These ties have proceeded from tragic initial connections between the two continents to, more recently, the promising horizons signaled in Robinson's remarks. Nevertheless, it is possible that American relationships with Africa could be defined for years to come by how we respond to the present moment, and we want the people of Africa to know that there are many Americans standing in solidarity with them during this present crisis and beyond.

To show friendship and solidarity with the peoples of Africa—in ways that go viral in the most beneficial sense and that indicate the scope of America's "wildfire" of "interest and activity in Africa"—those signing onto this statement:

- Endorse this statement of support for Africa through our individual or organizational sign-on;
- Commit to circulating or otherwise sharing this statement among our networks for additional mobilization of signatures—and upon completion of the signature phase of the statement commit to circulating or sharing it with our African friends and networks in the U.S. and abroad;
- Pledge to make a financial donation (in whatever amount possible) to one or more organizations working in West Africa as front-line responders to the Ebola epidemic (there are many options—see a list of groups at interaction.org, or go to specific group websites such as peacecorpsconnect.org/ebola-fund/, or denominational sites such as ame-church.com, lottcarey.publishpath.com, or catholicrelief.org); and
- Continue to seek opportunities to strengthen personal and professional connections to Africa and its people.

Signatories (beginning here and continuing via the online site),

- Mr. Willis Logan, Chairman, Operation Crossroads Africa
- Dr. R. Drew Smith, Co-Convener, Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race; Professor, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- Dr. Reginald Hughes, MD., President, The African Cultural Exchange; Assistant. Professor, Albert Einstein College of Medicine
- Bishop John R. Bryant, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., President and Founder, Rainbow PUSH Coalition
- Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference
- Dr. James C. Perkins, President of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- Dr. Tyrone S. Pitts, General Secretary Emeritus of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- Dr. Jonathan Weaver, President, Pan-African Collective; Pastor, Greater Mt. Nebo AMEC, Bowie, MD
- Mr. Melvin P. Foote, President and CEO, Constituency for Africa
- Mr. Glenn Blumhorst, President, National Peace Corps Association
- Rev. Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention
- Ms. Kelita Svoboda Bak, Chief Executive Officer, National Youth Leadership Council
- Dr. Emilie M. Townes, President, Society for the Study of Black Religion
- Dr. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary Emeritus, Reformed Church in America
- Dr. Robert M. Franklin, Director of the Religion Program, Chautauqua Institution; Professor in Moral Leadership, Emory University
- Dr. Leon Wilson, Interim Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Alabama State University
- Rev. Robina M. Winbush, Director of Ecumenical Relations, Presbyterian Ch. (USA); President, Churches Uniting in Christ
- Dr. Dale Irvin, President, New York Theological Seminary
- Dr. Forrest Harris, President, American Baptist College; Associate Professor, Vanderbilt Divinity School
- Dr. Alton B. Pollard, Dean, Howard University Divinity School
- Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
- Mr. Julius E. Coles, Interim Director, Andrew Young Center for Global Leadership, Morehouse College
- Dr. Joel Carpenter, Director, Nagel Institute for World Christianity, Calvin College
- Rev. John Welch, Chairman, Gamaliel Foundation; Vice President for Student Services, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- Rev. Frederick A. Davie, Executive Vice-President, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York
- Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson, Chairman, Conference of National Black Churches
- Mr. Jamye Wooten, Founder, Kinetics