

Malcolm Carpenter | NAACP Rhein-Neckar | February 2012

"South Africa at the Crossroads"

A symposium marking "100 years of the African National Congress (ANC)"

"South Africa at the Crossroads", a symposium marking "100 years of the African National Congress (ANC)" asked the questions – What has become of the ideals of the movement of liberation? What role does South Africa play today in Africa and in the world? The two-day symposium presented eye witnesses from the history of the ANC struggle for equality and justice and experts from South Africa and the region. The event was held in Heidelberg at the German-American Institute (Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut (DAI)) on Friday and Saturday, 3 and 4 February. Our branch was one of the sponsors of the symposium, and we had an information and membership stand set up there both days.

The South African Ambassador, Rev. Makhenkesi Arnold Stofile, took part in the opening ceremony Friday night and the panel discussion on Saturday. Ambassador Stofile studied in South Africa, Germany and the U.S. A. Throughout much of his life he has been active in politics and fighting for a just society. From 1983 to 1986 he was an officer in the United Democratic Front. In May 1987, he was convicted under the then Ciskeian Internal Security Act (similar to the South African Internal Security Act, which was used to crush resistance against the Apartheid government) and later sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Starting the event on Friday evening was Denis Goldberg, South African social campaigner, who was active in the struggle against Apartheid. He spoke on "South Africa through changing times: From the Anti-Apartheid-Front to the Big Player in Africa." Mr Goldberg was imprisoned by the Apartheid government for 22 years along with other key members of the anti-Apartheid movement. Lively entertainment was provided at the opening and closing of the program by the Africa Choir Mokolé of the Music School (under the direction of Eva Buckman).

On Saturday morning the first presentation was "Transition without transformation? South Africa's path since 1994", presented by Liepollo Lebohang Pheko. Ms Pheko is a lawyer and social activist in Johannesburg, South Africa. She has worked in community-based organiza-



Simone Knapp, Ambassador Stofile, Michael Allimadi



Liepollo Lebohang Pheko, South African social activist, with Simone Knapp, Coordinator with KASA (Ecumenical Service on Southern Africa)

tions and NGOs in both the United Kingdom and Southern Africa in areas including refugee/immigrant rights, welfare law, human rights, economic justice, citizen participation, gender and capacity building. She briefly worked at the amnesty office in London. Upon returning to South Africa from exile, Ms Pheko worked in the public sector managing a public participation process to engage members of the public with provincial government processes.

Later, Saturday morning, Mr Goldberg returned to discuss "Claims and reality: The Freedom Charter in the world of today." Mr Goldberg told about how, when the apartheid regime came to power in 1948, he joined other leading white members in forming the Congress of Democrats, of which he became leader. This in turn allied itself with the African National Congress and other 'non-racial' congresses in the Congress Alliance. He was detained in 1960 and spent four months in prison without trial.

After a lunch break, the Zimbabwean poet, songwriter, and writer, Chirikure Chirikure discussed "Freedom organizations in light of the democratic change". Chirikure's work belongs to the oral tradition in Shona literature, which was a vehicle to express oppositional ideas during the colonial era. After Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980, Chirikure adopted a critical position and a satirical tone in his writing. Through his poems he denounced abuse of power and selfishness, attesting to the importance of community. Other poems of his alluded to Africa's postcolonial distress, to that storm which grew out of the »wind of change« after the liberation of the continent. In his third volume of poetry he brusquely called on his countrymen not to yield to the overwhelming pressure of the regime.

Rounding out the 2-day event was a panel discussion: South Africa quo vadis? Panel members included Ms Pheko, Mr Chirikure, and Mr Goldberg and special guest, the South African Ambassador, Rev Stofile. Moderator for the panel was the German journalist, Birgit Morgenrath.

The entire program was in English (with German translation). The symposium promoters were the KASA (Ecumenical Service on Southern Africa) and DAI Heidelberg. Partners included the Pan-African Organisation, the Verein Afrikanischer Studierender an der Universität Heidelberg (VASUH) (The Organization of Africans Studying at Heidelberg University), the Ausländerrat/Migrationsrat (AMR) (Foreigners Council), and the Rhein-Neckar Branch, NAACP. In connection with the DEAB, the program was sponsored with funds from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



Chirikure Chirikure, the Zimbabwean poet, with Rhein-Neckar Branch, NAACP, International Chair, and President of the Pan-African Organisation and Ausländerrat/Migrationsrat (AMR) (Foreigners Council) Michael AlliMadi



Liepollo Lebohang Pheko and Chirikure Chirikure