

The New Orleans Declaration

Reflections on the Significance of the State of the Black World Conference II
“Recommendations on the Road Ahead”

by

Ron Daniels, Ph.D.
President, Institute of the Black World 21st Century

November 19 – 23, 2008, more than 1,000 people of African descent convened under the auspices of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century in New Orleans, LA for the first major gathering of Black people after the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America. Filled with hope and expectations for the dawning of a new era in the history of this nation and the world, the participants came to celebrate a monumental achievement but also to somberly assess the state of Black people in America and the world. Centered on the theme *Return to the Source: Restoring Family, Rebuilding Community, Renewing the Struggle*, New Orleans was selected as the site for the conference because it is the metaphor for the myriad of maladies that afflict urban communities across this nation as a consequence of massive disinvestment, deindustrialization, globalization and decades of blatant neglect.

Accordingly, a major goal of State of the Black World Conference (SOBWC) was to discuss a ‘Priority Public Policy Agenda’ to serve as a framework and guide for articulating the immediate concerns and needs of the masses of the Black poor, workers and the struggling middle class to the new administration in the White House. Equally important, the participants were urged to examine and discuss internal strategies, projects, programs and initiatives to enhance our capacity to build stronger and more sustainable communities and nations.

Though the deteriorating economy resulted in a lower turn-out than anticipated, SOBWC has universally received rave reviews as one of the most significant conferences in recent history. The quality of the program/substance was superb, a testimony to the consciousness, commitment and brilliance of the scores of speakers and panelists (too numerous to list individually) who volunteered/gave of their time and talent to engage the participants in informative analysis and dialogue around issues and solutions. Moreover all participants were viewed as resource persons who brought their life’s experiences, skill and expertise to the table to contribute to the deliberations.

Synopsis of the Proceedings

- ◆ The Damu Smith Leadership Development and Organizer Training Institute provided an overview and political analysis of the state of the race in the U.S. and the world and engaged the participants in basic exercises designed to equip them to be effective servant leaders in the Black community.
- ◆ At the National Town Hall Meeting, which was recorded by C-SPAN, notable scholars and activists re-affirmed the right of Black people to formulate an agenda to present to the new administration. A range of issues and policy proposals were discussed as reflected in the Recommended Priority Policy Agenda developed by the Institute of the Black World (IBW).
- ◆ In the Special Session on Haiti the rationale for building a constituency to support the first Black Republic in this hemisphere was articulated and there was great enthusiasm, especially among students and young activists, to become directly involved in projects to strengthen the process of democracy and development in Haiti.
- ◆ The Katrina Policy Roundtable focused on the gaps in policy formulation and implementation which have resulted in the fact that an estimated 150,000 displaced persons have yet to return to New Orleans. It was recommended that IBW embrace the call for 100,000 jobs to aid the economic recovery of New Orleans and the gulf coast in the aftermath of Katrina.
- ◆ The Pan African Policy Forum explored the role of the Diaspora in contributing to development of sustainable African nations and communities within the context of the philosophy/ideology of Pan Africanism. There were lively exchanges about the need for reciprocity between nations on the continent and the Diaspora in terms of building mutually respectful and beneficial relations.
- ◆ One of the highlights of SOBWC was the Opening Ndaba which featured a stellar panel of young leaders who have assumed their roles in the forefront of the Black Freedom Struggle. While paying homage to the legacy of the elders who paved the way for their ascent to leadership, the young leaders offered a variety of thoughts and strategies for addressing the contemporary crises plaguing our communities.
- ◆ The fourteen (14) issue/area Working Sessions were considered the most important component of the conference by the organizers. Each session examined models and strategies to strengthen Black communities and offered specific recommendations for follow-up
- ◆ In a moving celebration, IBW presented Legacy Awards to a number of veteran civil rights/human rights/nationalist/pan-Africanist leaders and elders. The Final Call Newspaper ran a full story with photos of the Legacy Award recipients.

◆ Last but not least, the Call to Faith and Action, the concluding Ndaba of SOBWC featured exhortations to support President-Elect Barack Obama as a “blessing” to America and the world. However, there was a cautionary note that President Obama will not be able to resolve all the problems confronting Black America – Africans in America and the world must organize and mobilize not only to keep the new administration accountable but to do for self in those areas where we can utilize our own resources to meet our needs.

One of the Great Gatherings of the Last Half Century

In terms of the strategic timing and quality of the substance, some have hailed SOBWC as being in the lineage of the great gatherings of people of African descent in the past half century -- the Black Power Conferences of the 60s, Congress of African People and Gary Black Political Convention in the 70s, the founding conventions of the National Black Independent Party and National Black United Front in the 80's as well as the first State of the Black World Conference in 2001. The latter gave rise to the call to form the Institute of the Black World 21st Century.

SOBWC II validated the vision and mission of IBW as a mechanism committed to the basic proposition that the power/capacity of the Black community can be dramatically enhanced by facilitating the connection of various movements, organizations, institutions, projects, programs and initiatives. All too often the value of cross-fertilization of ideas and learning through networking, cooperation, collaboration and operational unity has been underappreciated in our struggle. This is also true of the application/utilization of specialization and division of labor among organizations working for the advancement/uplift of the Black community. Thus, IBW is firmly committed to relentlessly promoting and modeling these basic institution, community and nation-building ideas as a progressive, African-centered, action-oriented think tank. The IBW is to become a vital resource center and engine for global Black empowerment.

The Road Ahead

As a result of SOBWC II, IBW has potentially moved closer to that goal. Accordingly, in the period ahead, IBW seeks to build on the momentum of the conference as follows:

- The Recommended Priority Policy Agenda will be posted on the IBW website in a downloadable form so that it can be distributed widely. We encourage people to vigorously act to mobilize organizations, institutions, agencies and individuals to contact their Congressional representatives to press for the passage of bills in the Agenda.

- The Recommendations from the Working Sessions at SOBWC will be posted on the IBW web site along with the names of the individuals and/or organizations who have agreed to take the lead in implementing various proposals.
- Though all of the programmatic components of SOBWC were important, the imperative for the elder generation to share the torch and pass the torch to the next generation dictates that the extraordinary intergenerational dialogue initiated in the Working Session on the Reviving the Black Arts and Cultural Movement: Hip Hop and the Future of the Black Freedom Struggle must be prioritized and institutionalized.
- Enlarging the pool of individuals with leadership and organizing skills committed to revitalizing and empowering our communities is an important objective of IBW in this crucial period. Therefore, institutionalizing the Damu Smith Leadership Development and Organizer Training Institute is a major priority moving forward. Indeed, the faculty of the sessions at SOBWC II is recommending that a plan and strategy be devised to hold training sessions in various locales across the country.
- In the spirit of the Millions More Movement which gave rise to the Black Family Summit, we will continue to explore ways and means of making this formation a viable vehicle for convening Black professional organizations to holistically address issues confronting the Black family and formulating policy consistent with IBW's Martin Luther King-Malcolm X Community Revitalization Initiative.
- Given the critical need for theoretical and applied research to effect change in our communities from a progressive, African-centered perspective, IBW will actively work to create a Research Consortium to devise public policy proposals and initiatives for internal development -- as well as the essential communications and advocacy strategies for implementation. In the spirit of IBW's vision/mission, this will be a cooperative project which will be achieved working collaboratively with existing institutes and think tanks.
- While IBW seeks to play a role in the African Union process to engage the Diaspora as the Sixth Department and wishes to build relationships with institutions and organizations on the continent and the Caribbean, our primary focus will remain building a constituency for Haiti through the work of the Haiti Support Project (HSP). Having emerged as the principal organization undertaking this crucial task, IBW/HSP will intensify its efforts to achieve the mission of having African Americans become a major partner in strengthening the process of democracy and development in Haiti.

Building the Capacity to Achieve the Vision and Mission of IBW

Prior to SOBWC an urgent message was sent to key allies and supporters of IBW with the following declaration: “The State of the Black World Conference is the defining moment in the evolution and development of IBW. It is designed to be both a qualitative/political and quantitative/financial success.” This formula was calculated to elevate IBW to a status with the scope and scale to realize the goal of becoming “an engine for global Black empowerment.” By all reasonable measures, SOBWC emphatically achieved the qualitative aspect of the “success” formula. However, on the quantitative side, the number of registered participants was insufficient to accrue the financial resources necessary for IBW to move from a largely volunteer operation to an institution with the basic infrastructure and capacity to effectively implement the follow-up to SOBWC and execute our vision/mission into the future.

“Tell no lies, claim no easy victories,” a dangerous deficit imperils our future. But the energy, enthusiasm, inspiration and momentum generated by SOBWC cannot, must not be dampened or destroyed – especially at such an incredible moment in our history. Therefore, we issue an urgent call to allies, friends, supporters and concerned people of good will to join us in an intensive one hundred day capacity-building fundraising campaign to include the following elements:

- Tax deductible individual, organizational or institutional contributions to IBW online: www.ibw21.org
Email: sobwc@ibw21.org 888.774.2921 or by mail – Checks payable to Institute of the Black World, 31-35 95th Street, East Elmhurst, NY 11369
- The widespread marketing of SOBWC DVD’s and Tee-Shirts via the IBW website www.ibw21.org
Email: sobwc@ibw21.org 888.774.2921 <http://stateoftheblackworld.blogspot.com/>
- Speaking engagements at colleges and universities during Black History Month and beyond with leaders or key supporters of IBW
- Community based fundraising events featuring leaders or key supporters of IBW
- State of the Black World Mini-Conference and Benefit “Party with a Purpose,” Commemorating the 7th Anniversary of the Founding of IBW and the “39th” Birthday of the President, tentatively scheduled for April 24-25, 2009 in Washington, D.C.