



MEDIA ADVISORY
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High-Powered US Delegation Heading for World Festival of Black Arts in Senegal

African American Artists, Mayors, Senators, Scientists to Participate

For only the third time in 50 years, an unprecedented gathering of black artists, writers, filmmakers, academics, scientists, and other leaders in many fields will convene in Africa for an historic celebration. The World Festival of Black Arts and Cultures, under the auspices of President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and his fellow African leaders, begins Dec. 10 in Dakar, Senegal, and will continue through Dec. 31.

A high-powered U.S. delegation of more than 200 African-American leaders will participate in the Festival, including groups from the National Conference of Black Mayors, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, and the African American Unity Caucus (AAUC), who will travel to Senegal from Dec. 8 - 17 for the event. In all, thousands of delegates from 80 countries will converge on Dakar.

Among U.S. delegates are Dr. Julius Garvey, son of Marcus Garvey; actor Richard Gant; jazz legend Randy Weston; Professor James Turner, Cornell University; Dr. Jhonetta Cole, Director of the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institution; Professor Leonard Jeffries, City University of New York; Runoko Rashidi, noted historian; Dr. Elsie

Scott, the President & CEO of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Mississippi State Sen. Frazier Hillman; New York State Sen. Bill Perkins; Columbus (Ohio) Mayor Michael B. Coleman; Wayne Watson, president, Chicago State University; and Ron Himes, founder/director, The Saint Louis Black Repertory Theater.

In a letter to members of the delegation, President Wade said he looked forward to welcoming them to Senegal. "The African Union has requested that Senegal organize the Festival, which will be the largest global gathering to date of black artists, writers, filmmakers, intellectuals, scientists and other luminaries, and we anticipate that people will travel from all over the world for the occasion," said President Wade.

Dr. Djibril Diallo, Coordinator of the U.S. Committee for the World Festival of Black Arts and Cultures and Senior Advisor to the Executive Director of UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS), said the size and depth of the delegation underscore the historic nature of the Festival. Melvin Foote, the President and CEO of the Constituency for Africa and the Founder of the African American Unity Caucus, was also pleased with how the delegation came together. Said Foote, "I think that the quality of participants taking part in the delegation to Senegal speaks volumes about the potential of the African Diaspora. I think the visit will provide a unique opportunity to build trust and collaboration amongst Diaspora leadership in the United States."

"The Festival will be a landmark event, bringing together great artists and intellectuals from around the world to celebrate the theme of African Renaissance," Dr. Diallo said. "The Festival will also be an important opportunity to highlight the role of art and culture in promoting development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, including progress in reversing the AIDS epidemic."

One highly anticipated event is a discussion involving President Wade and members of the National Conference of Black Mayors, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education and the National Basketball Association/Africa (NBA/Africa) at the recently completed Monument of African Renaissance on the theme of African Renaissance, looking towards the creation of the United States of Africa in 2017, as declared by the African Union.

While in Senegal, the delegation will meet privately with President Wade and participate in myriad Festival activities, including attending concerts by Rihanna, Jay-Z, Angelique Kidjo, Youssou N'Dour, and Baaba Maal; a soccer match between Senegal and Brazil; a visit to Gorée Island, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in commemoration of the painful history of the Atlantic slave trade; and participation in the Forum on African Renaissance.

A Roundtable on Friday, Dec. 17 at 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Méridien President Hotel will focus on ways that the Festival and other cultural activities can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, with the campaign against AIDS as entry point. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS and Under Secretary General of the United Nations,

will give a keynote statement, and participants will include Professor Iba Der Thiam, Forum Chairman of the Festival; Lebohang Morake (Lebo M), Eminent Member of the Advisory Board of the Festival and UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador; and Syndiely Wade, Deputy General Coordinator of the Festival.

The Festival will foster dialogue between Africa, its Diaspora, and the entire world regarding the contributions of black cultures to humanity. The guest of honor will be Brazil, which has one of the largest black populations in the world. A delegation of more than 200 Brazilians is expected in Dakar for the festivities.

This is the third World Festival of Black Arts and Cultures, following previous festivals in Dakar in 1966 and Lagos, Nigeria in 1977. Former Senegalese President Leopold Sedar Senghor initiated the festivals to highlight the visible and tangible products of African peoples' struggles to win back their dignity in a land that had only recently been returned to African rule.

Among musical stars who will perform are Hugh Masekela (South Africa), Salif Keita (Mali), , Bembeya Jazz (Guinea), Marcus Miller (U.S.), Habib Koité (Mali), Chucho Valdes with the Afro-Cuban Jazz Messengers (Cuba), Lokua Kanza (Congo), Kassav (Martinique/Guadeloupe), Alpha Blondy (Côte d'Ivoire), Orquesta de la luz (Japan), Haitian Toubadors (Haiti), Chico Freeman (U.S.), and I Jah Man (Jamaica).

Dr. Diallo expressed thanks to Melvin Foote, President of Constituency for Africa; Dr. Gloria Herndon, President of GB Herndon and Associates; Vanessa R. Williams, Executive Director of the National Conference of Black Mayors; and LaKimba Desadier, Executive Director of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators , for assistance with arranging for participation by political leaders in the U.S. delegation; and to Professor Leonard Jeffries for assistance with participation by academic experts.

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