

Letter from South Africa

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

In-depth Report: [CRIMINALIZE WAR](#)

Hello, as promised, I'll give you a brief report from my visit to Cape Town, South Africa.

First of all, I was hosted by two activists who founded Channel Four News, a hard-hitting, truth-telling, non-special interest news outlet serving Cape Town and all of South Africa. But because of their hard-hitting questions to elected leaders, the post-apartheid era government chose to enact regulations that resulted in their temporary shutdown. Undaunted, they organized a very informative film festival chock full of documentaries recalling the South Africa-Israel connections that beefed up repressive capabilities in both states; the role of Coca Cola during the sanctions era; scenes from Gaza after Israel's Operation Cast Lead; and stories of general Palestinian life with plays, songs, and films. Please click here to hear one of the most moving songs I have heard in a very long time:

The name of the group is Desert Rose. The woman singing loaned me her makeup because I was without my suitcases, and it turned out that she sang the most heart-wrenching song of the night, Ayala Katz. The song has been banned by certain Rabbinical authorities in South Africa. Please share this song with all of your friends. I listen to it every day.

Much is at stake today in South Africa at a time when criminal charges have been brought against the South African National Police Commissioner and those charges have implications for the country's leading political party; in addition, there are ongoing investigations into arms deals that could lead all the way to top ANC leaders; information is beginning to leak out about secret negotiations between certain elements of the black resistance and the global elite even before ANC took power; and all of this information coming out at this time might indicate that the people's interests were sold out long before the ink was dry on these arms deals. It is good that South Africans are beginning to look critically and more closely at what they (and we, the progressive forces in the world) actually won and to investigate whether they voluntarily stopped short of complete victory. Of course, it was the people on the ground, inside South Africa, who bore the brunt of the struggle and who should reap the benefits of the victory. And they are not, and that's why this line of questioning is more prevalent.

Likewise, for us, prudence dictates that we all now pay very close attention to what is happening in the "post-racial" economy of the U.S. I am absolutely certain that there are lessons in the South African experience for us today.

Just before I arrived in Cape Town, approximately 60,000 textile workers had been on strike all over the country since September 15th. Before that, South Africa had seen general strikes called by municipal workers (over 150,000), construction workers, doctors, and taxi drivers.

I've just been told that the second electricity price hikes have been announced in order to pay for the 2010 World Cup infrastructure needs. If you'll recall, the 2006 World Cup was stolen from South Africa by one racist voter on the Committee who refused to follow his country's instructions and vote for South Africa and instead voted for Germany and the World Cup governing body, FIFA, allowed the vote to stand, so the 2006 World Cup went to Germany, instead. Well, 2010 is South Africa.

And are they building stadium after stadium! And they're beautiful. But the problem is that apartheid-era economic divisions remain and they are stark. On one side of the mountain are the pristine manses, but they have to be served by the blacks, who still live in squalor, so on the other side of the mountain is the most putrid poverty one could witness. Unfortunately, ANC leadership went along with changing the face of the political apartheid regime while allowing the gross, mean, ugly economic apartheid to remain rigidly in place. Land reform, one of the more obvious disparities, is not even on the agenda, I was told.

At the Film Festival, I debuted a short documentary on the murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California. This documentary shows the occupation of black and brown neighborhoods by a militarized, local law enforcement apparatus that parallels, in many ways, the current experiences of neighborhoods of color in post-apartheid South Africa, and of Palestinians on their own occupied land.

The film was done by Operation Small Axe (from the Bob Marley song) and it is narrated by Pacifica's and the San Francisco Bay View Newspaper's own J.R. Valrey, known in the Bay Area as the Minister of Information. The film was very well received by the South African audience who told me that their experience is exactly like that experienced by the young people of the Bay Area, up to and including the murder of Oscar Grant, as chronicled in the film. The South African audience could not believe that they were watching actual footage of a young man's murder.

After seeing what I've seen in Cape Town, it appears to me that the World Cup in South Africa will be just like the Olympics were in Atlanta: the public treasury was expended for the benefit of the fat cats and political insiders who managed most of the private reward. In Atlanta, the citizens were lucky if they got street lights and sidewalks from the deal. Gentrification, a nice way of saying ethnic cleansing, was accelerated and black homeowners were pushed out of the central city-much by design. And along with them went much of their powerful political punch.

A blockbuster book is about to be written by one of South Africa's leading journalists, whom I was able to meet, about the still-brewing arms scandal where, upon inauguration of the post-apartheid government, \$5 billion was spent on arms with BAE Systems, rather than on the people. The only thing is that the deal was sealed with what authorities call "financially incentivising" politicians to the tune of £100 million.

And remember, just last year, Mark Thatcher, Margaret Thatcher's son pleaded guilty to gun running and coup plotting in oil-rich West Africa, in a story that Channel Four News played a central role in breaking and developing.

So, I was with this same Channel Four News outfit that was so chock-full of information about post-apartheid South Africa, from the triumphs to the disappointments of the people. It was sad as I rode through the many townships of the Cape Town area and saw sewage

running through the streets, no land for any type of community gardening or farming, not even trees for a brief respite from the sun, or from which to pluck a piece of fruit.

As we made our way to Robben Island, the famous prison of South Africa's most famous political prisoners, I could see and hear Steve Biko, Chris Hani, Robert Sobukwe in my mind; my hosts told of their apartheid-era exploits—everyone played a role in the liberation of South Africa, but everyone must now also play a role in its stewardship and the management of the reward and the people's resources.

I'll go back to South Africa, I want to spend even more time with my hosts, and learn more about their struggle, experience the incredible vistas, and find ways to apply their knowledge to the problems confronting us inside this country today.

Probably, the most important lesson from Cape Town and Paris is this: We are a part of a global movement for truth and justice. And we cannot be stopped.

Coming up:

1. Houston
2. Glen Ford at U Maryland
3. Paris
4. Bike Ride for Peace
5. Pacifica Subscribers, Please Vote Today

1. The Progressive Candidate Coalition
(Alfred Molison, Deb Shafto, Don Cook)

CYNTHIA MCKINNEY

moderating the Robert Greenwald film, RETHINK AFGHANISTAN

Saturday evening 7:30 pm

708 b Telephone Road (easy to get to from I-45 S or Leeland St.)

at the home of Houston Institute of Culture and new home of CANVAS

for more info call

Don Cook 7.705-5594

Bart Boyce 8.867-9960 or

Ivan Espinosa 7.732-1947

2. October 21, 2009 at 7:00PM in the Nyumburu Cultural Center featuring Glen Ford. Glen Ford is the Executive Editor of Black Agenda Report and A Certified Elder within the field of Progressive Black Journalism. The title of Mr. Ford's lecture is: "Black is Back: Why We Need a Reinvigorated Black-Led Movement for Peace and Social Justice."

3. The Green Party exploded in the most recent European elections and sent 14 Green Party candidates to Brussels as European Parliamentarians. I met Cécile Duflot who is the national leader of the Party and is standing for French national elections to the French Parliament. In December, I'm going back to knock on doors, make phone calls, and show support. Wanna go do the same with me? Let me know if you're interested.

3. Cross Country Bicycle for Peace:

A group of us are planning a cross-country bike ride for peace and I'm so excited about it! Please let me know if you're interested in riding with us all or part of the way. We're working on the route now, but we hope to begin at Oakland's House of Common Sense and end at the White House--so far, very much in need of some.

5. And for those of you who are Pacifica voters, please vote. I received my ballot in the mail and sent it in. Please do the same. Community radio and our continued voice depend on us casting an informed vote in these elections.

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