

## Secretary's Report to the A.G.M. 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2004

We said at last year's AGM that in 2004 our main focus would be on celebrating 10 years of freedom in South Africa, and so it has certainly been. This 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year has seen a level of activity that has stretched us to the very limits of our capacity as an organisation, with some highly successful major events and a huge number of smaller things going on throughout the year. We stressed also last year the importance of ensuring the celebration was not just a year-long party finishing on Hogmanay, but should be used to broaden and strengthen long-term support for our work and for building links with South and Southern Africa. I believe we have achieved that also, though the extent of it will only become clear over the next few years.

**ACTSA's main events.** We have had four major celebration events that were specifically our own, though they all depended on co-operation with and from others. In April we brought Mara Louw to perform briefly on the main stage at the STUC's Congress, followed by a full concert that evening and a spot at the STUC President's Dinner.

In April/May we took a delegation to South Africa to attend the public celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the inauguration of President Thabo Mbeki, and then to undertake a sponsored walk of the Wild Coast hiking trail in aid of four projects in Eastern Cape with which we had had contact. Money raised to date is £14,500, but the main purpose was to strengthen our relationship with Eastern Cape.

In June we held a symposium with major South African and Scottish writers, called "Exiles Within". The South Africans were all writers who had lived and worked inside South Africa during the apartheid years, and this symposium was one of a set of three prompted by the High Commissioner in different parts of the country and under different auspices.

In November Peter Magubane came to launch our exhibition of his photographs at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, and we plan to have this touring the country for the next two years or so.

**Other celebrations.** Other events in the anniversary year with which we have had very widely varying levels of involvement (from simple attendance or help with publicity to doing as much as for our own main events) have included: A ceramics exhibition; a celebration service in St. Giles Cathedral; "South Africa in the Gardens", a huge two-day series of open-air concerts in Edinburgh, with participation by senior figures from all nine South African Provinces; another symposium of South African writers; a celebration event at the Edinburgh Book Festival; a reception on the actual 27<sup>th</sup> April anniversary given by Glasgow's Lord Provost, who also made 10 years of freedom the theme of her annual Lord Provost's Procession; a series of three celebration concerts organised by promoter Billy Kelly, culminating in a performance by Miriam Makeba; a series of events at Glasgow Caledonian University, including displays of Scottish Anti-Apartheid Movement banners and history, a lecture by Brian Filling, a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert, a South African songs workshop and a showing of the film "Amandla"; a resolution of congratulations to South Africa from Midlothian Council; performances by the South African Navy Band and the Eastern Cape Children's Choir; and Brian Filling's attendance at the official inauguration ceremony for President Mbeki and at Mogale City's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration as guest of the city's Executive Mayor Lentswe Mokgatle (once of Edinburgh Anti-Apartheid Group).

**Developing Links.** Many of the events described above have led directly to new or strengthened links between Scotland and South Africa, which have always been very high on our list of objectives and which are probably the most important result of the celebrations.

Two of the projects visited by the Wild Coast walkers, and for which funds were raised, were Blythswood Institution and the Masimanyane Women's Support Centre.

Arising out of this, Glasgow City Council Education Department adopted Blythswood as its project for this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, and 18 Glasgow schools have chosen to become involved in learning about Blythswood and South Africa more generally, and in raising funds for this old Scottish-founded school. Masimanyane had been exchanging correspondence with sister projects in Glasgow, and only this week a senior member of the Centre's staff came to Scotland to meet people doing similar work, and found tremendous interest here in building ongoing connections.

Meetings were held after the Walk with representatives of Amathole District and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipalities to identify possible areas of co-operation with Glasgow City Council in particular, and delegations from both those authorities have since visited Scotland to look at practical work being done here which could be worth studying further. Applications for funding have been submitted through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum to meet the costs of visits and mutual assistance on some very practical projects to increase local economic development in both those municipalities. The January visit to Mandela Metropole by Glasgow's Lord Provost also helped to prepare the ground for this co-operation.

A discussion with the Education Department's District Manager for Port Elizabeth could encourage a link with Glasgow schools.

The Walk also revived our link with the Phelophepa Health Train, and Ayrshire ACTSA Supporters' Group recently held a ceilidh in its support.

A visit to the Mandela Museum in Mthatha (where photographs and other items from Scotland were presented) produced some suggestions for future co-operation, and our Writers' Symposium led to an ongoing link with Mzi Mahola and his work with other writers in Port Elizabeth and wider Eastern Cape.

The appointment of Nosimo Balindlela, with her interest in Scotland, as Premier of Eastern Cape last April could potentially help develop the twinning link with Scotland, and she did express continuing interest during a telephone conversation during the Walk visit, and in brief conversation during her visit to "South Africa in the Gardens". Contact was also established with some of her senior officials. We are not aware of any developments from Jack McConnell's contacts with Eastern Cape in 2002, but we submitted a paper on the Eastern Cape connection to the European and External Affairs Committee of the Scottish Parliament, which we hope might bear fruit. The First Minister's continuing interest in Southern Africa was shown by his participation in the launch of "Africa Matters" at the Scottish Parliament this week.

Local Authority ACTSA at UK level has revived over the past year, with some strong input from Scotland, and one practical result was one-week placements for 4 local government councillors from South Africa with Edinburgh and Glasgow City Councils.

Our links with the South African High Commission in London have never been stronger. The High Commissioner or her staff seem to have been in Scotland almost continuously throughout the year, attending one event or another, and we are grateful for their help with several of our own events. Scotland went down to London en masse in February for the second annual Burns Supper at the High Commission.

**Book Appeal.** This has been overshadowed by the more high profile events of the year, but has gone steadily forward week by week thanks to sterling work by a small number of committed volunteers. Victoria Williamson in particular has worked hard throughout the year, and Glasgow Volunteer Centre's website has been a fruitful source of new help. Books have continued to come in from all over Scotland, at a rate that we are able to cope with, and the next container-load should be ready in the next few months. We are grateful also to Elspeth Hogg for her fundraising through the Glasgow Half Marathon.

**Political Campaigns.** We have continued our active involvement with the Scottish end of the Trade Justice Movement, and particularly its launch of the "Vote for Trade Justice" postcard campaign at the Scottish Parliament in October. This has led on to our involvement in planning the "Make Poverty History" campaign which will be a major feature of 2005, especially around the G8 Summit at Gleneagles in July.

We distributed material about the Global Fund on Aids campaign, and have started putting out the new Economic Partnership Agreements campaign cards.

**Southern Africa.** The emphasis this year on South Africa's anniversary inevitably meant less attention being paid to the rest of Southern Africa. We have kept in touch with the Scotland-Zimbabwe Group, and were glad to meet the Namibian High Commissioner through Friends of Namibia Scotland. We were sorry not to be involved with Zambia's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration weekend, which happened to clash with 7 other events which we were committed to, but we are glad a new support group is planned.

Over the year we have successfully involved more people in helping our work than at any time since the height of AAM campaigning, including both new contacts and previously inactive members. Even so, we have struggled to cope with the volume of work and have had to let opportunities go past because we did not have the capacity to attend all events or follow up all potential contacts or suggestions. Despite our limitations we have made great progress this year, and can safely say the effects of the year's work will continue long after the bells on 1<sup>st</sup> January. Unfortunately, getting the most from this potential will take relentless hard work from all of us, but that was always the case and we do now have a bigger pool of potential support to work with than we did 12 months ago.

**John C. Nelson**