



African Chamber of Commerce of the Pacific Northwest

Promoting bilateral trade and investment between the Pacific Northwest US and Africa

Local Business Leaders Gather for Conference on Business with Africa, featuring Bill Gates, Sr. as Keynote Speaker



On Saturday, November 13th, nearly 200 people gathered at the Red Lion Hotel for the 12th Annual Africa Day Business Forum. Organized by the African Chamber of Commerce of the Pacific Northwest (ACCPNW), the day-long conference seeks to promote business in Africa and trade relations between Africa and the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Attendees included local African business owners, business professionals pursuing business opportunities in Africa, non-profit leaders doing work in Africa, and experts on international commerce.

The theme of the event was “Africa is open for business”, and many of the speakers gave evidence to support this assertion. Haddis Tadesse, a manager at the Gates Foundation, cited statistics from the McKinsey Global Institute saying that Africa has a collective GDP of \$1.6 trillion, expected to grow to \$2.6 trillion by 2020. He also cited the Economist Intelligence Unit in saying that countries from Africa took three of the top five spots last year and two of the top five this year on the list of fastest growing economies in the world. John Brislin, President of the Export Finance Assistance Center for Washington, spoke about the Export Import Bank of the United States. Since 1999, the Ex-Im bank has supported over \$5 billion in transactions to sub-Saharan Africa. Kagnew Asfaw, the regional director for Ethiopian Airlines, mentioned his company’s recent purchases of Boeing long haul jets, which represent a significant monetary value of trade with Washington and enable Ethiopian Airlines to better service the growing business markets in Africa. Kevin Boyd, of the US Department of Commerce, addressed the perception of corruption in Africa. He referenced Transparency International’s transparency index to point out that countries such as China and India have a transparency rating similar to many countries in Africa. Furthermore, the 2011 World Bank Doing Business report puts three of the top ten reforming countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Mrs. Kgopotso John, Vice Consul from South Africa, spoke of investor confidence of South Africa, specifically referencing investments totaling over \$15 billion from ICBC, Barclays, Vodafone, and GM. Though there certainly are obstacles in the way of doing business in Africa, the evidence points to a fast growing, profitable market that is open and ready to do business with the rest of the world.

Other speakers during the event included Tony Carroll, Vice President of Manchester Trade, Ltd; Gary Ryan, President of Airport Brokers Corporation; Rob Holland, a commissioner of the Port of Seattle; and Anthony Newton, of the US Department of State’s Bureau of African Affairs. Besides speaking of the opportunities in Africa, several of the speakers went into more specific detail about how to do business in Africa. They spoke of assistance available from the US government, specific regulations to be aware of, and pitfalls to avoid.



The highlight of the morning was Bill Gates, Sr., a co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who was the keynote speaker during lunch. Highlighting the evening was a performance by African dance group ADEFUA and a post-dinner gift presentation from Mrs. John of South Africa to Peter Gishuru, President/CEO of the ACCPNW, as a gesture of gratitude and in the hopes of a strong ongoing relationship between the South African Consulate General of Los Angeles and the ACCPNW.