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The 7th Annual AGOA Forum to be Held in Washington, DC

The 2008 U.S.-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum, better known as the AGOA Forum, will be held in Washington, D.C. July 14-16, 2008. The official Ministerial will be held at the State Department on July 15. The Private Sector Session will take place the next day, July 16. It is expected that the Civil Society Event will occur on Monday, July 14, but no plans have yet been firmed up.

Over the past several years, the trend has been toward greater integration among the three components of the Forum, which culminated in a single combined event last year in Accra, Ghana. The U.S. Administration has decided to backtrack away from that model for the 2008 Forum. Indeed, the three component events will be essentially separate this year. Only a small number of private sector delegates will be invited to participate in the Ministerial. Private sector delegates must apply to be invited to attend the Ministerial, and such applications are due by June 15 in order to allow time for the State Department Office of Diplomatic Security to conduct security clearance reviews. Efforts by the private sector planning committee to obtain greater participation in the Ministerial were politely but firmly rebuffed by the U.S. Administration.

The theme of the Ministerial will be mobilizing capital for investment in Africa. Two plenaries and a series of breakout sessions will be held on this topic. The breakout sessions will include topics such as: banking and insurance, infrastructure, information and communications, agribusiness, manufacturing, the health care sector, private equity investing, listed securities, funding for SMEs, foreign direct investment, local debt markets, and infrastructure financing.

The Private Sector Session will consist of three informal roundtables during the morning of July 16 on: textiles and apparel, agribusiness and finance. Each session will include a panel of experts who will respond to the issues of interest to the delegates. The concept is to have a genuine give and take of ideas between the expert panelists and the delegates, instead of the more traditional speeches followed by questions and answers. ACT President Paul Ryberg will moderate the textiles and apparel roundtable.

The roundtables will be followed by an invitation-only lunch program sponsored by the Whitaker Group. The lunch program will focus on mobilizing resources for investment in Africa. Further details about the Private Sector Session will shortly be available on the official U.S. Government AGOA website: www.agoa.gov.

ACT and the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) are exploring the possibility of sponsoring a "video trade expo" for the Forum. Given the short lead time available, it is not practical to organize a full trade show, but the proposed video trade expo would provide publicity for African goods available for export to the United States under AGOA. Anyone who is interested in having their goods or services featured in the video trade expo should contact ACT for more information.

No details are yet available about the plans for the Civil Society Event.