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Lucas Khahleli Buys the Farm

BLOEMFONTEIN, South Africa

October 1996

By Sharon F. Griffin

One of the worst lies perpetrated during the apartheid era was that only white Afrikaners, that is boers ("farmers," in Dutch), could farm successfully. This lie was made to seem like the truth and the truth a lie by unjust laws that gave South Africa's most fertile land to a few whites and the least productive to the majority of blacks. Successive white governments gave white farmers financial and technological assistance, and engineered a system of "legal" oppression that made African farm workers near slaves to a white *baas* (boss).

This month, at the age of 57, Lucas Khahleli broke free of this apartheid lie when he became the owner of a farm called Kaalspruit. Khahleli had lived and labored on the farm he now owns for 49 years. In 1947, when he was 8 years old, he moved there with his father, mother and siblings after the farm's white owner, "Mr. Slabbert," hired his father as a field hand and his mother as a domestic servant.

Since childhood, he lived on the farm continuously, except for a brief time when he moved away to take a job in the city to raise money for *lobola* (bride wealth) to marry his wife. Otherwise, Khahleli has been there, harvesting wheat and maize, tending dairy cattle; the most he has earned is \$31 a month.

Even in his dreams, Khahleli never thought that he might own a farm. This is because racially-discriminatory laws prevented Africans from owning land outside the former Bantustans — in other words, blacks were barred from land ownership in 87 percent of South Africa. But all this has changed. Khahleli co-owns Kaalspruit with 49 other individuals, all of whom successfully applied for govern-



Ten of the new owners of Kaalspruit pose for a group photo.



Joshua Khahleli, a brother of Lucas Khahleli, and Lady, the dachshund. Lady belongs to the former owner of Kaalspruit, Eric Knauff, but her heart belongs to Joshua. She refused to leave the farm when Knauff moved in September. She follows Joshua everywhere.

ment grants that made the purchase of the farm possible.

"God has helped us to get this land," said Johannes Khahleli, a brother of Lucas Khahleli and a co-owner of the farm. "Since our fathers could not leave us anything, God has given us this inheritance."

South Africa has embarked on a land-reform program to restore rights to people who lost land or were denied access to land because of unjust laws passed by apartheid governments on or after June 19, 1913. These laws include the 1913 Natives' Land Act, which gave Africans ownership rights to little more than seven percent of the land area of South Africa; the Development Trust and Land Act of 1936, which ex-

tended black ownership rights to 13 percent; the Asiatic Land Tenure Act, which restricted where Indians might live and trade; and the Group Areas Acts of 1950 and 1966, which carved up towns and cities into white, coloured and Indians areas.¹

Poor people like Khahleli cannot afford to buy land on the open market. Therefore, the Government of National Unity allows needy households to apply for a Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant of up to \$3,333.² Recipients can use this grant to buy land, to upgrade existing living conditions, to start small businesses or to set up small-scale farming operations.

The "supreme" goal and challenge of the land-reform program is to achieve peace, reconciliation and stability. The government wants to circumvent massive land-grabs like those that have occurred in Brazil, where the unequal distribution of land — nearly 90 percent of the land is owned by 20 percent of the population — has bred violence. It is further hoped that a sound land policy will lead to economic growth and secure livelihoods.

The land-reform plan is divided into three categories — land restitution, land redistribution and land-tenure reform. Land restitution aims to restore or compensate people for land rights they lost due to apartheid laws. Approximately 3.5 million South Africans were dispossessed because of forced removals. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, 745,000 people were forcibly removed between 1948 and 1982. Of this number, about 105,000 were removed from "black spots" — land in "white" South Africa that black people owned. About 300,000 people were removed from farms and 295,000 through the Group Areas Act.

The land-tenure reform program is still being developed. However, its general aim is to establish a diversity of secure tenure rights for farm workers, labor tenants, people living in informal settlements and on communal land. Land redistribution involves helping the poor to purchase and develop land, and depends largely on transactions between a willing seller and buyer. Expropriation of land will be used as a last resort.

In the case of Kaalspruit, which sold for \$129,777, the willing seller was Eric Knauff, whose father bought the farm from "Mr. Slabbert" in 1957. It was not difficult to convince Knauff to sell. He suffers from an eye problem and had not been able to work the farm for some time. Furthermore, he did not want to sell to someone who might force Khahleli off the farm. "We grew up together on this farm," Khahleli said,

1. The Rural Coloured Areas Act of 1963 and the Community Development Act of 1966 are two additional laws that denied blacks ownership of land in areas of South Africa "reserved" for whites.

2. For grant purposes, the government's definition of a household is as follows: a single adult (18 years or older) with one or more dependents, or two or more adults with or without dependents. Households with an income of less than R1,500 (under U.S.\$500) per month can apply for a grant. For a group application, the average income of all households together must be less than R1,500 per month.

"and he would not like to see me struggling in a shanty in town."

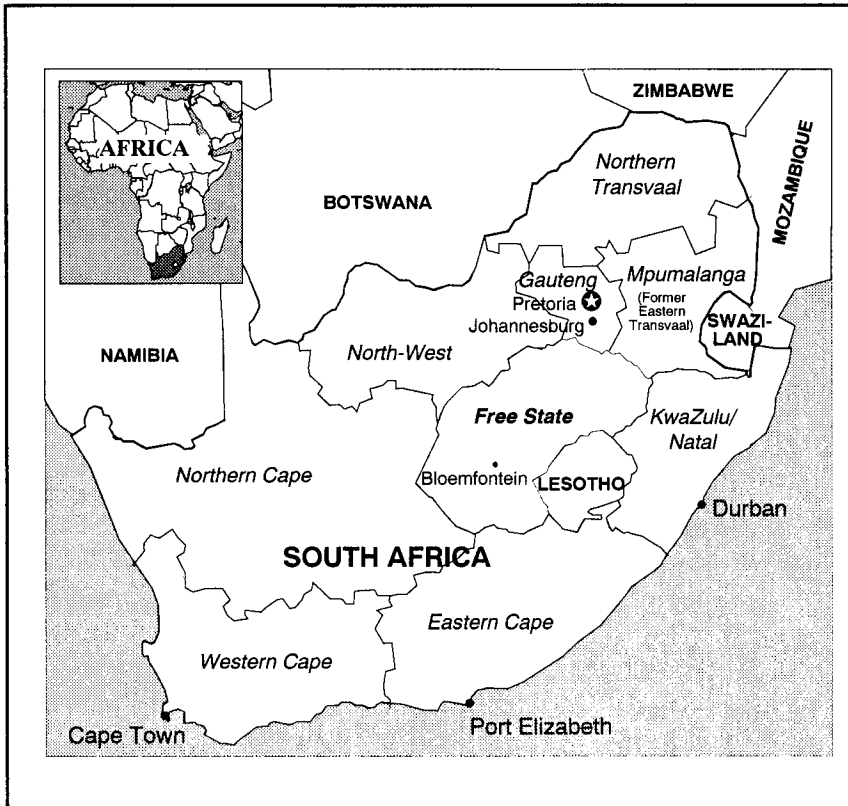
The land transfer was coordinated by the Land Reform Pilot Program in the province of the Free State. The pilot program began last year in October as a project of the government's Reconstruction and Develop-

ment Program (RDP), which is designed to redress decades of racial discrimination in housing, education and welfare services, as well as generate jobs. The RDP has set a target of redistributing 30 percent of the country's productive land by 1999. To meet this goal, a mix of incentives is being used to bring land onto the market, including taking over indebted or underused land, removing financial and legislative obstacles to black land acquisition, strengthening the tenure rights of people who already occupy land and state grants or subsidies.

Each of South Africa's nine provinces has a Land Reform Pilot Program that started before the Department of Land Affairs established its offices. As a national program, the pilots fall under the direct responsibility of the Department of Land Affairs and may be thought of as "test balloons" for the department. Their purpose is to test as many forms of land transfer as possible. The various forms include farm workers purchasing land of their own; the transfer of state land to private beneficiaries; informal-settlement-dwellers purchasing farm land; new farmers forming conservancies; farm workers purchasing equity in agri-businesses; transfer of state land for communal conservation programs; and the upgrading of tenure rights on state land. Experience gained from the pilots will be fed into on-going policy development for a more comprehensive land-reform program.

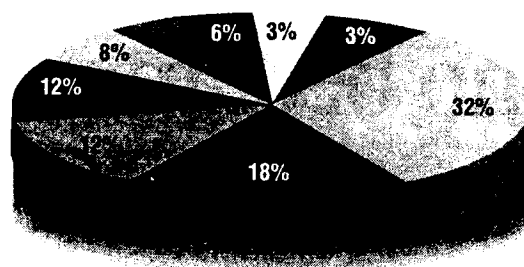
In the Free State, the pilot program is dealing with 105 projects affecting some 11,224 beneficiaries and 106,119 acres of land. Allocated funds total approximately \$2.4 million. The pilot office is also studying the best forms of tenure upgrading and land use on tribal land in an area known as Thaba Nchu, which was part of the former homeland of Bophuthatswana. This project alone could end with a budget of between \$33 million to \$44 million.

Outside the pilot program, the Free State Department of Land Affairs is involved in land transfers affecting several hundred more families and individuals. One large project involves the purchase of three farms for \$622,222 for the settlement of 200 farm families in an area called Odendaalsrus in the northern part of the Free State. Forty percent of the households in this group are headed by women. The group in-



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With 32%, the Free State has by far the largest portion of South Africa's arable land, while Gauteng's puny 3% puts it at a disadvantage

Redistribution of land

Grants

A Grant is money from the Government which does not have to be paid back. It is like a present. There are 2 kinds of Grants you can apply for. These are **Settlement Grants** and **Planning Grants**.

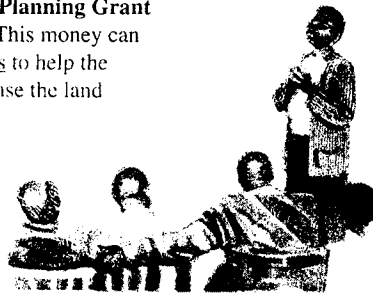
You can apply for a **Settlement Grant** if you are a person or community who wants to...

- buy land
- buy shares in a farm
- improve housing, water and electricity

shares

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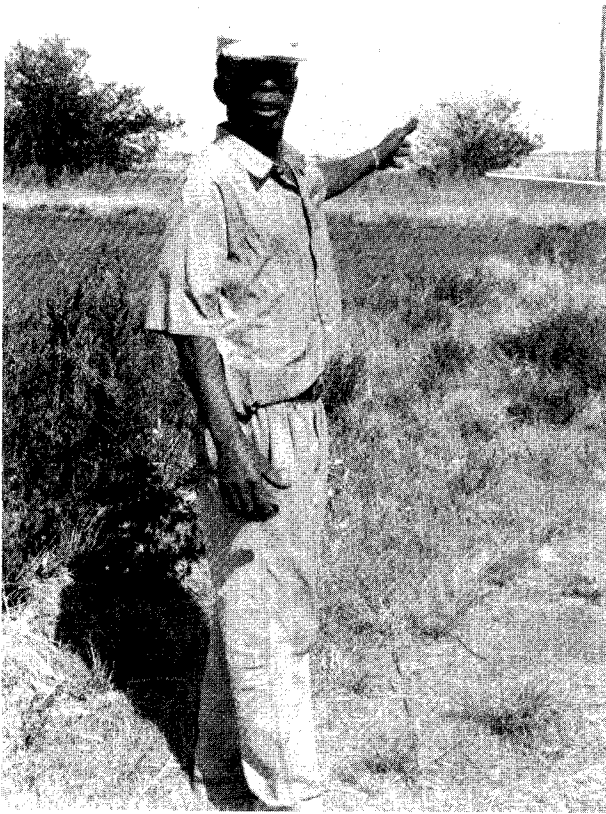
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tends to engage in crop production, as well as raise livestock, poultry and pigs.

A further six settlement deals have been concluded in Brandfort, Kroonstad, Petrusburg, Koppies, Fouriesburg and Henneman. In Henneman 46 families plan to engage in sunflower and wheat production, and to develop egg, milk and pork enterprises to market locally. In Koppies, 10 families are involved and five of the 10 are women-headed households. They will start with broiler production and market their goods locally.

Puseletso Tlhapuletsa is a field worker for the Free State Land Reform Pilot Program. She explained that the

process of land redistribution takes anywhere from six to 18 months and involves a number of phases. Once a community has applied for a redistribution grant, suitable land has to be identified. In the case of the Kaalspruit farmers, they identified the land they wanted to purchase and approached the owner. Negotiations on how the land will be utilized and negotiation of a purchase price are two additional steps in the process. Groups must also establish a legal entity — a trust, a company or closed corporation — to hold the land on their behalf as beneficiaries. The Kaalspruit farmers formed a trust. The government encourages and expects communities to pool their resources to negotiate, buy and jointly hold land under a formal title deed.



Lucas Khahleli points to an irrigation system and a field where wheat has been planted.

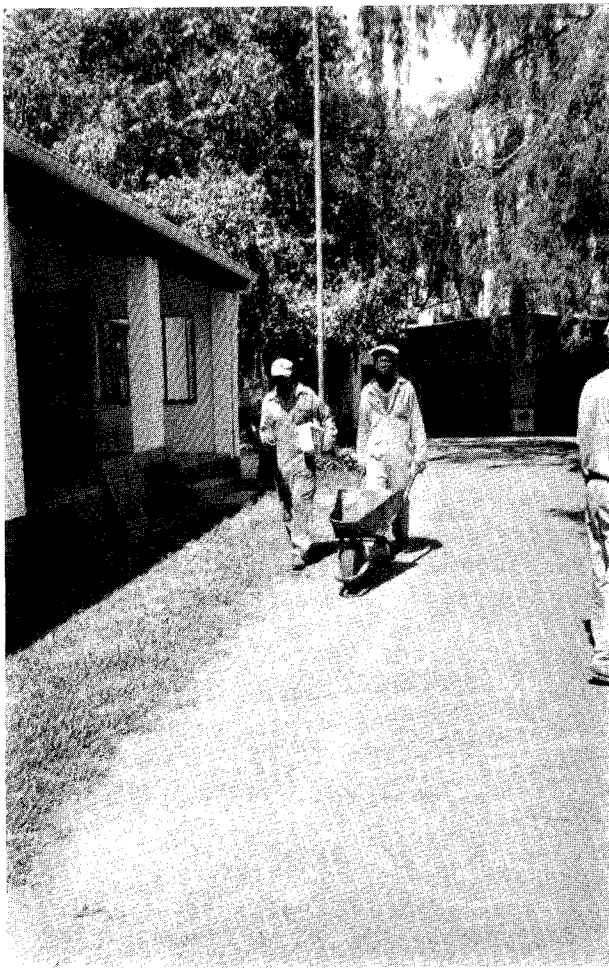
Another step in the process involves valuation of the property. Knauff wanted \$144,444 for Kaalspruit. However, its worth was appraised at \$122,222. This figure was arrived at based on a number of factors, including recent sales in the immediate area. Still another stage in the redistribution process involves capacity building. Prospective farm owners receive help in developing a business plan, which includes infrastructure development and plans for agricultural use. Two additional steps include conducting a community profile and advertising the property to make sure it is free from encumbrance.

When all phases are completed, a "recommendation of designation" is made by the Department of Land Affairs and passed on to the Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, for approval. Money to purchase the land and to pay for development is made through the Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant. The money is not paid to the beneficiaries; instead, the government pays the seller on behalf of the buyers. If any grant money is left, it usually goes to infrastructure development.

Government involvement does not end there. Local and provincial government departments provide "aftercare" support, such as agricultural extension services and marketing and enterprise development, as well as assistance with the operation and maintenance of infrastructures.

Tlhapuletsa described the Kaalspruit farmers' land





The former owner of Kaalspruit gave laborers a pair of shoes, trousers, a shirt and overalls every Christmas. In a moment of light humor, the men asked Lucas Khahleli if he planned to do the same this year.

transfer as her most successful project. "I'm very proud of them," she said. "They're united and they take the initiative." She wishes she could say the same about other redistribution projects. However, some fail before they get off the ground. One example of failure is a case in which she began helping a group of young men in a squatter camp apply for grants to purchase a farm. But the process takes months, more than a year in some cases, and patience was not a virtue among members of this particular group. One left for Johannesburg, two others lost interest and still another decided to apply for a housing grant rather than a Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant.

Although 50 households form the trust that owns Kaalspruit, only 11 men and their families actually live and work there. Amos Cele, known as "the old man," is one of the 11. Cele began working at Kaalspruit in 1981. Back then he earned \$4.60 a month and somehow managed to support a wife and 10 children on that meager wage. He recalled that a visit to a doctor's office cost \$6.80 in 1981, which meant he couldn't afford to send his children to a doctor when they became ill. In emergency situations, Cele said he borrowed money from Knauff, who then deducted the money from his pay. "The white people killed us [spir-

itually and morally]," Khahleli said. "We had to struggle to keep alive."

The farm laborers did not pay for housing, water or electricity. And every Christmas, Knauff gave the men a pair of shoes, trousers, a shirt and overalls. That might sound somewhat generous. But the men and their families live in what's best described as shacks, and the yearly allotment of clothing did not extend to wives and children.

Despite this situation, the men insist that Kaalspruit was the best farm on which to work — far better than other white-owned farms in the area. They said that Knauff allowed social workers to hold workshops on health and living standards at a nearby farm school every Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. The men added that neighboring white farmers complained bitterly when Knauff agreed to sell his farm to them.

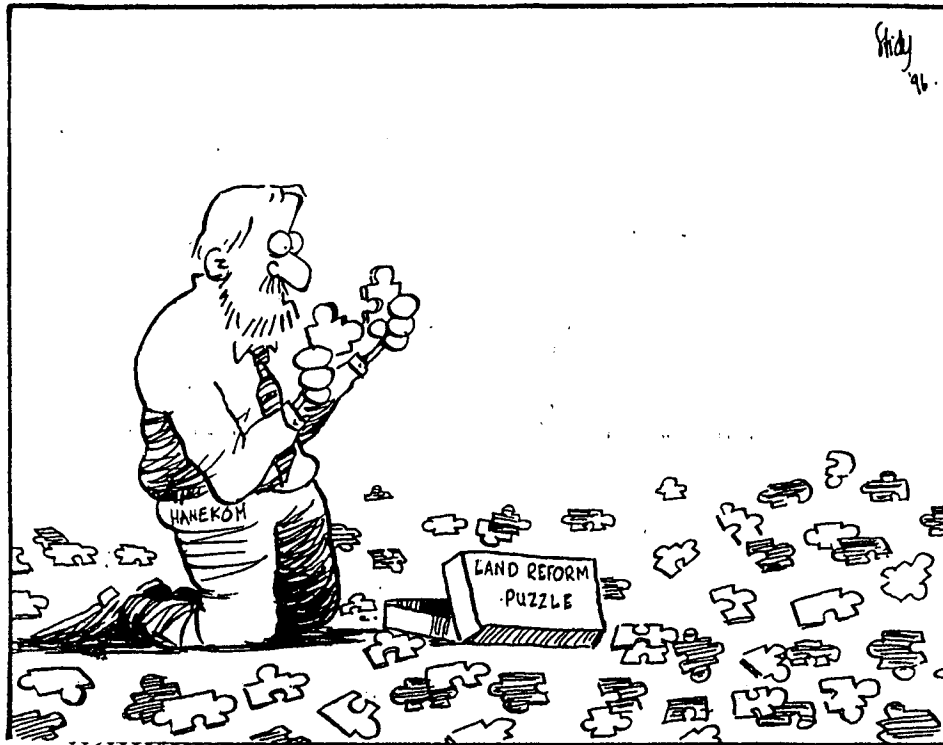
The men are both convinced and determined that they can manage the farm better than in the past and produce profits that will allow them to live above the level of poverty. After all, it is their labor that has sustained the farm all these years. Knauff simply supervised, they said, mostly while sitting on the porch of his house. "Now that we're on our own we're going to do more than we used to do," Khahleli said. The men say they plan to raise chickens. Three of them have already attended courses offered by the Free State Department of Agriculture. They also intend to establish a brickyard on the farm.

Regarding the cultivation of crops, they plan to diversify and grow more than wheat and maize. They will plant sorghum, cabbage and potatoes. Pumpkin, peanuts, beets, tomatoes and spinach have already been planted in one section of the farm. The seeds for the crops have been purchased with money contributed by all stakeholders in the farm. Each urban household contributes \$11 a month to a kitty and each of the 11 men living on the farm contribute \$4.40. Khahleli said the harvested crops will be sold in urban areas by family members living in those areas.

The day that I visited Kaalspruit, a white family was moving into the house formerly occupied by Knauff. The farm's new black owners said they decided to rent the house rather than argue among themselves over which of the 11 families should live in it. They further said they needed the monthly rent of \$222.

The only snag in the business plan developed by the farmers is that it failed to address the interests of women living on the farm. The wives of the men want to develop a market for their sewing and needlework. As a result, the business plan is being revised to reflect their desire to establish micro-enterprises.

None of the farmers at Kaalspruit could say how profitable the farm has been in the past. Knauff never shared that information with his laborers. Last season



The cartoon appeared in the Natal Witness on 2 Feb. 1996 on page 12. The kneeling caricature is Derek Hanekom, South Africa's Minister of Land Affairs.

the farm produced one ton of maize, which sold for \$155. Khahleli said he gained access to this information because he helped plan and manage the farm after Knauff's eyesight grew progressively worse.

Khahleli and Knauff are close in age and they've always gotten along fairly well. Khahleli recalled a time when Knauff's father gave him and Eric a whipping for getting into some teen-age mischief. The cherished memory causes Khahleli to smile and adjust the tattered Los Angeles Raiders cap on his head. When time allows, Khahleli said he visits Knauff, who now lives on the farm of the ophthalmologist who treats him. "Even if he treated us badly," Khahleli said, "he taught us most of the things we did not know" — especially the practical skills needed to farm.

Not all black farm workers can claim a good relationship with the white owners of the farms on which they have worked and lived. Hundreds of black people have been evicted from farms. Reasons for the evictions vary. Some farmers evict workers before the sale of a farm. In the special case of labor tenants, who pay their rent in cash or share their crops with the registered owner, they have been evicted by white farmers attempting to contravene the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Bill. This new bill entitles labor tenants to purchase the portion of land their families have worked for two, three or more generations.

Whatever the reasons for evictions, people who

have lived on farms for many years believe they have a historical claim to some of the land. To them the land is more than the ground beneath their feet. They have emotional and ancestral ties to it. The farms are where they have raised families and buried their forefathers. Today, an estimated 1.2 million black people work on white-owned farms in South Africa. When their family members are added to this figure, the number of blacks living on white-owned farms skyrockets to an estimated six million.

Khahleli and I rode around Kaalspruit in a *bakkie* (pickup truck). We rode past a dam on the property and stopped at a field where wheat is planted. We stopped near a field of alfalfa, and Khahleli explained that it is fed to the farm's 20 head of dairy cattle when dry and sold to a nearby farm for rabbit feed when green.

Like millions of other black people who have spent their lives on white-owned farms, Khahleli has a deep regard for the land he has worked. He raised his four children at Kaalspruit. His father died there in 1966, after working at the farm for 19 years, and his mother still lives there with him and his wife. Kaalspruit is his life's work. Between him and his father, they have invested 68 years for the benefit of white owners. But that's all in the past. Today, what really matters to him and the co-owners of Kaalspruit is that they finally have an opportunity to plot their own destiny and reap themselves what they sow themselves. □

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Institute Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey and Central Asia, and their importance as actors the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and

Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

Sharon Griffin. A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. [sub-SAHARA]

John Harris. A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of post-graduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Pramila Jayapal. Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber, an accounts manager for

the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, and manager of a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is tracing her roots in India, and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

John B. Robinson. A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar, John spent two years as an English teacher in Tanzania. He received a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1995. He and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two young sons, Nicolas and Rowland, where he will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population. [sub-SAHARA]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a juris doctor from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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