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4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

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*Sharon F. Griffin is an ICWA  
Fellow studying the language,  
culture and politics of KwaZulu-Natal.*

## Freedom Square: People with a Vision

BLOEMFONTEIN, South Africa

October 1996

By Sharon F. Griffin

Namibia, Kapanong, J.D. Mafora and Freedom Square are the names of shacklands that have taken root along the edges of greater Bloemfontein, capital of the province on the Free State, within the last six years. The informal settlements grow like kudzu, a hardy and indomitable vine that clings to the American South, sprouting offshoots of itself in the blink of an eye. Tens of thousands of black South Africans who are among the poorest of the poor live in these shantytowns. Most of the shack dwellers have migrated from dusty, remote corners of the Free State, and one settlement is indistinguishable from another — except for Freedom Square.

Freedom Square is different, and what makes it different from neighboring squatter settlements is the initiative of its people. From the start, the people of Freedom Square have possessed a vision of and for themselves. The adage, the world makes a way for people who know where they are going, fits this community. Slowly but surely, and with disciplined determination, the humble dwellers of Freedom Square are breaking free of the adverse conditions that bound them.

"Listening to Petrus, one gets the impression that the first squatters to erect shelters in the settlement believed that they had arrived at their promised land."

The shack dwellers invaded the land that is now Freedom Square, but even the invasion was well organized. There was nothing chaotic about either their choice of land or their actions. "We were busy looking for a place to relocate," Ben Petrus, a

community leader, said. "What made us decide to take this place... was the *veld* [open space]." Literally, *veld* means field in Afrikaans. But it symbolizes much more — room for growth — in any South African language. "We only saw four old dilapidated houses, white elephants. So we decided to come and stay here." Listening to Petrus, one gets the impression that the first squatters to erect shelters in the settlement believed that they had arrived at their promised land. Even the name of the settlement, Freedom Square, speaks to a collective belief that the people liberated themselves.

## SEVEN MILLION SHACK DWELLERS

Estimates vary, but approximately seven million people are living in informal settlements throughout South Africa on land occupied either legally or illegally. How many people live in Freedom Square is unknown. Guesses range from 50,000 to 75,000. An accurate count of the population will emerge only when the results of a national census are revealed early next year.

Changing household patterns, a population explosion and, most importantly, mass migration from rural areas and neighboring countries, have led to growing squatter settlements. A United Nations report says that between 30 to 60 percent of housing in developing-country cities is illegal, with 75 percent of homes in cities

such as Kenya's capital, Nairobi, and its Bangladesh counterpart, Dhaka, built without permission.

One of the greatest challenges to South Africa's Government of National Unity is to provide housing to the poorest of the poor. They comprise 70 percent of the South African population. With an income per family of less than \$319 a month, these households stand no chance of securing financing through banks. They are completely reliant on a government housing subsidy. Ken Owen, former editor of a Sunday newspaper here, once commented that "to most whites it will not be readily evident that the successful purchase of a house demands of a black buyer as much determination and skill as might be required, say, to organize a revolution."

Government restrictions on home ownership during the apartheid era have resulted in a housing backlog of 1.45 million units, with demand for new houses growing by 250,000 each year. Furthermore, better accommodation for 400,000 migrant workers in 200 hostels is needed. The African National Congress (ANC) made a pre-election promise to build one million houses by the turn of the century. However, with time running out, the ANC-led government will not be able to honor this promise. ANC leaders have admitted in Parliament that only about 10,700 homes were built in its first year in office, 50 percent fewer than were constructed in the last year of apartheid.

The government blames banks and builders for holding up housing delivery. It cites an unwillingness on the part of financial institutions and large-scale developers to build low-cost houses. The greatest gap in the market is for homes in the \$3,829 to \$10,638 range, the natural niche for those earning between \$212 and \$532 a month.

## LIFE IN A SQUATTER SETTLEMENT

Contrary to televised images beamed to American audiences, shack settlements are neither hellish places nor breeding grounds for chaos and anarchy. In fact, it might surprise many people to learn that a lot of creativity and talent goes into the design and construction of shacks, as well as into the physical layout and social arrangements of the settlements.

Think about it: talent and design skills are needed to construct a shelter out of industrial products such as corrugated and sheet iron, plywood boarding and plastic sheeting. The self-built homes are usually rectangular and have only one room. This living space might be shared by as many as 15 family members — parents, children, grandparents. Living in a tight space demands knowledge of what is practically needed to make sure that order is maintained.

During one of several visits to Freedom Square and Kapanong, I was struck by the tidiness of homes and the attention given to decoration. I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, home is home, regardless of

whether it is the size of a portable tool shed or made out of a cardboard box, like the ones in which Mexican migrants live after picking the California fruits and vegetables that Americans enjoy at the dinner table.

In one shack I glimpsed what looked like custom-designed kitchen counters and cabinets. The cabinets were white, with doors painted baby blue. It is not uncommon to find trendy furnishings in a shack — a sofa and matching chair, a small table, curtains to provide privacy. One important lesson I learned is that practically any and everything has some use. What I consider a ragged box might serve as a storage container for clothing or blankets. Newspapers are used as tablecloths. Jelly jars, plastic milk containers and toilet rolls become storage for all sorts of domestic items.

Telephoto pictures of shacklands give the impression that one structure intrudes on another. It's true that shanty settlements are typically crowded into small areas — too crowded — in most cases. However, a leisurely walk around a settlement leaves one with a more accurate picture of how the limited space is shared. The physical layout of Freedom Square, for example, allows for free and easy movement between houses. Walking paths cut across the land, and there's also space for neighborhood activities such as sports, trading with hawkers and gossiping across clothes-lines.

In Kapanong, I passed a shack with a verandah. The roof of the house was made of corrugated iron. It was held down by rocks and other weighty objects. An extra sheet of iron extended from the roof of the house, and it was held up by timber frames. An old man and woman sat beneath the iron sheet, relaxed and definitively shielded from the sting of the sun.

Squatter settlements in greater Bloemfontein are located on the margins of the city. In Durban, shack settlements are located on the periphery as well. But you'll also find them along sidewalks and underneath highways. Shacks on sidewalks exist because urban land is not available in Durban; virtually all inner-city areas are developed. Local authorities have threatened to remove shack dwellers from their sidewalk residences. However, steps to this effect have not been taken because suitable housing alternatives have not been identified. City officials eventually decided to deliver clean water to the squatters on a regular basis. This was done to prevent the possible spread of disease, which threatens all citizens.

Another situation that exists in Durban that is not found in the Free State — at least not yet — is squatters constructing shacks in the backyards of private homes. The problem is serious and growing, and it is this type of land invasion that breeds social unrest, chaos and racial tensions. The land invaders are African. The homeowners are primarily white and Indian, although squatters have also built shacks on property adjacent to houses owned by middle-class Africans in black townships. A housing survey conducted last year found that

24 percent of greater Durban's population eke out an existence in shacks.

## DEVELOPMENT WITH DIGNITY

1990, the year that squatters claimed Freedom Square, proved significant in one other way. A month after the then-president of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk, released Nelson Mandela from 27 years in prison the National Party founded the Independent Development Trust (IDT). The apartheid government set aside \$425 million in the national budget to address the problems of the poor through community-driven development.

Applications for the funds poured in and among them was one from Freedom Square. The settlement succeeded in securing \$52,553 for two years of training for its community leaders and a further \$6.3 million for development. The \$6.3 million was allocated through the IDT's Capital Subsidy Scheme, which provides serviced sites — that is, plots of land with taps and toilets. Today, 100 percent of the houses in Freedom Square have outside toilets and fresh-water taps.

Part of the \$54,553 was used to establish the Freedom Square Upgrade Community Trust, a legal entity headed by a board of trustees and administered by a chief executive director and administrative staff. Seventy-five percent of the people serving on the board of trustees are professional people — doctors, lawyers, teachers, university professors — none of whom live in Freedom Square. The remaining 25 percent are members of the community.

The chief executive of the Upgrade Community Trust is Ben Petrus. He and members of the administrative staff all live in Freedom Square, and they count themselves among the first "settlers" in the area. Beyond the administrative staff, the hierarchical structure of the Trust devolves to the community level. Fifteen community-based associations and organizations tackle a variety of residential needs, everything from business development to community policing. Collectively, the community-based groups comprise the Freedom Square Development Forum, which is a division of the Trust. More than half of the 15 groups receive financial support from the Trust.

There is, for example, a Freedom Square Creche Committee. The Trust, in response to a request from this committee, allocated funds for the renovation of a building that now serves as a child-care center. Other groups include a minister's forum, a youth committee, a woodworking association and a women's collective. The youth group is finalizing plans for the establishment of a Sports Centre. Land for both the

center and playing fields has been designated. The women's group wants to establish a sheltered workshop for people who are physically and mentally disabled.

## GOVERNMENT BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE

A visit to Freedom Square begins at the "White House," at which are located the administrative offices of both the Upgrade Community Trust and Freedom Square Development Forum. Just as the name Freedom Square embodies special meaning for residents of the settlement, so does the name White House. The White House is, so to speak, the center of "government" in Freedom Square — a government run by and for the people. When asked why people chose this particular name, Petrus said, as if the answer should have been obvious to me, "because here in South Africa we don't have a White House."

The building was formerly a farmhouse, one of the four "white elephants" the squatters found on the property when they invaded. Today, it is nicely furnished and outfitted with telephones and computers. There's a small kitchen on the premises.

Johannes Nkoe and Khatazile Masilo are members of the administrative staff. Nkoe's title is trust officer and Masilo is a liaison officer. Hanging on the walls of their uncluttered office are four "NO SMOKING" signs, a calendar featuring President Nelson Mandela and the photocopied words of two Nobel Peace Prize winners — the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Chief Albert Luthuli, President-general of the African National Congress from 1952 to 1967, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960. "There remains before us the building of



a new land, a home for all ... a synthesis of the rich cultural strains we have inherited," are the words of Chief Luthuli. They are coupled with King's: "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where ... they will be judged by the content of their character." The words evoke a profound feeling that Nkoe, Masilo and the people of Freedom Square truly believe that the future is theirs for the making.

Dozens of people can be found at the White House during the day. Most sit or lean against white bannisters on a front porch, waiting to submit their applications to obtain a government housing subsidy. Even the ward councillor for Freedom Square, James Masiu, can be found there. Masiu's good working relationship with the staff of the Trust is another indication of the uniqueness of this place and its people. A visit to a neighboring squatter settlement, Kapanong, highlighted the extent to which this relationship is unique.

### A COMMUNITY DIVIDED CANNOT STAND

Kapanong is divided into four wards and the largest is named after the late Chris Hani. Hani was the general secretary of the South African Communist Party, as well as chief-of-staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the former armed wing of the African National Congress. He was gunned down on April 10, 1993 in the driveway of his home by a Polish immigrant.

The elected councillor of Kapanong (and therefore of Chris Hani) is Jackson P. Klaas. Klaas is a representative of the African National Congress (ANC) and, like his counterpart Masiu, he is new to politics. But unlike Masiu, he is engaged in a power struggle with two organizations operating in Chris Hani. One is a local branch of his own party, the ANC, and the other is the South Africa National Civic Organization (SANCO). SANCO was founded in March 1992 to coordinate and represent civic associations on a national level. Its roots stretch back to the 1980s, when civic groups organized themselves around grassroots issues such as rent and township services. SANCO claims more than 3,000 affiliate civic associations. However, the leadership of SANCO is weak. After the democratic elections of 1994, its top leadership took positions in national, provincial and local government. Stripped of its sharpest brains, the civic association is struggling to redefine its role in the new political order.

I was introduced to two leaders of the local ANC and SANCO branches, Tsietsi Khatla and Nathanael Sefali, while they rested beneath a shade tree outside a run-down building used as a community office. The three-room building contains one desk, two chairs and a hardwood bench. Little else is there, except an architectural drawing that indicates the most suitable sites on which to build houses, schools and recreational fields in Chris Hani.

Khatla and Sefali were excited to tell me about a community cleanup that they were organizing. They had

canvassed the community to gain support for the project and secured a commitment from the local Department of Public Works to supply garbage bags. They even invited the mayor of greater Bloemfontein. However, the plan ran into trouble. The mayor agreed to attend the kickoff for the cleanup campaign provided Klaas attended. The mayor made clear his desire that the community activists work through accountable local government structures. But they could not guarantee the attendance of their ward councillor. They claim Klaas has never set foot in the area.

After sitting and talking with Khatla and Sefali for almost two hours, I could see that a power struggle between them and Klaas is rooted somewhere deep in the past. The crux of the dispute, however, remains a mystery to me. I listened intently, but failed to comprehend what is really happening outside of a tug-of-war of egos and mistrust on all sides. "We want the councillor to come here," Khatla said. "But before anything [development] is done in Chris Hani he must come to the community. He can't just come into the community without first talking to SANCO."

It is ironic and unfortunate that both Khatla and Sefali have taken as gospel a statement made by the slain communist party leader they so admire. "Don't trust the politicians," Hani once said. "I should know — I'm one myself."

### KAPANONG'S GOT PLENTY OF NOTHIN'

In the end, the cleanup never happened and Chris Hani remains hostage to litter and grime. But that is not the worst of it. As unsightly as the trash is, the greater problem is the decaying spirit of people in Kapanong. Most are so poor that they do not meet the minimum requirements qualify for a \$3,191 low-income housing subsidy from the government. This means they do not earn up to \$170 a month.

None of Kapanong's more than 4,000 shacks have toilets and only a few have tap water; about 2,800 of the 4,000 shacks are located in the Chris Hani section. There are no schools, medical clinics or child-care centers in the community. Yet there is a temporary police station, which has been there since 1993.

Unemployment has a stranglehold on Kapanong. The jobless rate is estimated at 86 percent. One of the few businessmen in Kapanong is Frances Khalla, a mechanic. Khalla has lived in Kapanong for four years. Originally from Lesotho, a land-locked country inside South Africa, he worked at gold and diamonds mines in Kimberley and Johannesburg until they retrenched. Rather than "work for another white man who cheats me," he said he decided to repair cars. Junked cars litter the property that Khalla occupies. Inside the rusted shell of one car, I spotted a school-age boy, perhaps age six or seven. I asked Khalla if the boy was his son. "No," he said, "this boy has nothing and nowhere to go. He likes to play here and I don't mind."



*Frances Khalla, a mechanic in Kapanong*

A significant number of school-age children in Kapanong are in the same predicament as the boy in the car, which is to say they do not attend school. Those who do attend Rodenbeck School. Rodenbeck is housed in an old storefront, next to a liquor/convenience store. Fifteen teachers instruct 604 children in eight makeshift classrooms. Holes in the ceiling of two classrooms are so large and deep that you can see the sky. "The poor children get sick a lot because the windows are broken, the doors are shot up...and the roof can fall at anytime," Phillip Mohanoe, Rodenbeck's principal, said. Mohanoe added that there are no toilets at the school. "The children go to the *veld* to release themselves."

Schooling is compulsory for children between the ages of seven and 15 in South Africa. No child may be turned away from a public or state-aided private school for lack of money. However, many schools are like Rodenbeck. They do not have the resources to accommodate all children. Other reasons children do not attend school include hunger, which affects learning; a lack of shoes and clothing; and parental apathy. Parents who themselves did not attend school see no value in sending their children to school.

Across South Africa at least 2,000 new schools need to be built, 65,000 new classrooms equipped, 50 million textbooks printed and some 60,000 new teachers educated, trained and eventually paid. What's more, nearly half of all educators currently teaching at black schools are under-qualified or unqualified.

Klaas said the community identified a site where it wants the government to build a school. However, squatters have occupied the land and now no one, in-



*A little boy plays inside of a rusted car on Frances Khalla's property.*





*Phillip Mohanoe, principal of Rodenbeck School in Kapanong*

cluding himself, knows what to do. Local government should have direct control over the land, but it does not. As a result, it is nearly impossible to prevent or redirect growth in the shanty settlement.

The needs of Kapanong tower over Klaas, a humble 39-year-old who as a child wandered with his family from one rural white-owned farm to another. He describes his rural past as "the time of slavery." He said his father pushed him to drop out of school to work as a farm laborer but he refused. "No way was I going to work for a white man to make him rich. I'm not afraid to say this: The white people treated us like slaves so I really (felt) I needed to go to the urban area." Klaas left home to live with a sister in a township near Bloemfontein, but with no money for school fees he was forced to drop out of high school anyway.

Klaas readily admits that while his determination to better Kapanong is strong, he lacks the education, resources, networks and community support needed to alleviate the endemic poverty and hardships experienced by people living there. "Most of the people are having empty stomachs," he said. "They are only thinking of something to eat."

Paved roads, houses, water and other basic services will eventually come to Kapanong. For now, Klaas desperately wants a municipal bus stop in the community. A ride from Kapanong to Bloemfontein on a municipal bus would cost less than five cents, compared to a fare of 30 cents in a taxi-van. "If we can get a bus stop," the ward councillor said, almost prayerfully, as he turned his eyes to the sky, "maybe the people can get jobs. This



*Children at Rodenbeck School closed in around me when they saw my point-and-shoot camera*

place is still behind," Klaas added. "But we've got that hope."

### ELBOW GREASE + COMMUNITY SPIRIT = PROGRESS

Like Kapanong, Freedom Square has residents who go to bed with empty stomachs. And its community leaders are no more educated than Klaas. They, too, are products of Bantu education.\* However, Freedom Square has one thing going for it that Kapanong does not. In Freedom Square, government and community leaders work as partners in development.

Drive around Freedom Square and you'll see low-cost, brick-and-cement block houses being constructed — eight a day, to be exact. The money for the construction comes from a \$1,595 government housing subsidy. The subsidy allows first-time home buyers who earn less than \$319 a month to build a starter unit, which is 22 x 11 feet and has two rooms, one door, four windows and one middle wall.

Rather than apply for individual subsidies, residents of Freedom Square decided to apply as a group. A Project-Linked Subsidy is available from the government to communities of people who want to build a number of houses as a group with the help of a developer. The Freedom Square Upgrade Community Trust is the developer of the Freedom Square Housing Consolidation Project. As the developer, the Trust contracted with a private builder, New Housing Company, to construct the houses. This contract stipulates that the builder must employ workers from Freedom Square. "We don't want anyone coming in

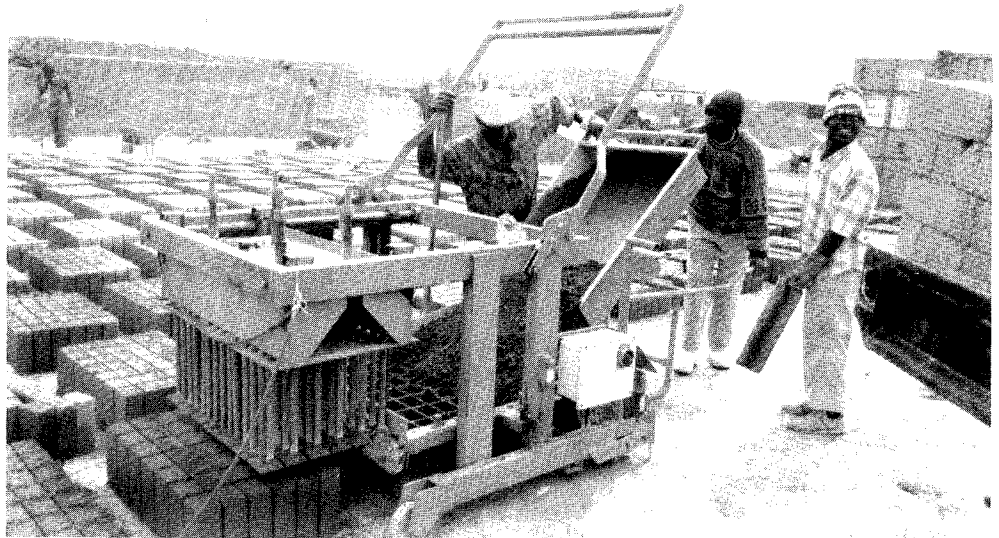


*James Masiu, the elected ward councillor for Freedom Square, points to a foundation where a house will be built.*

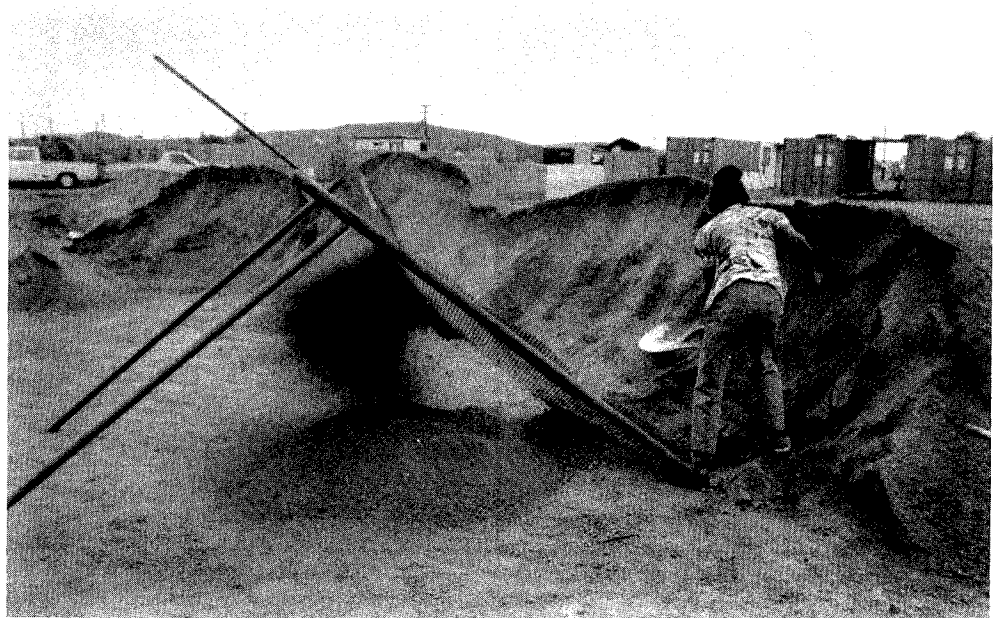
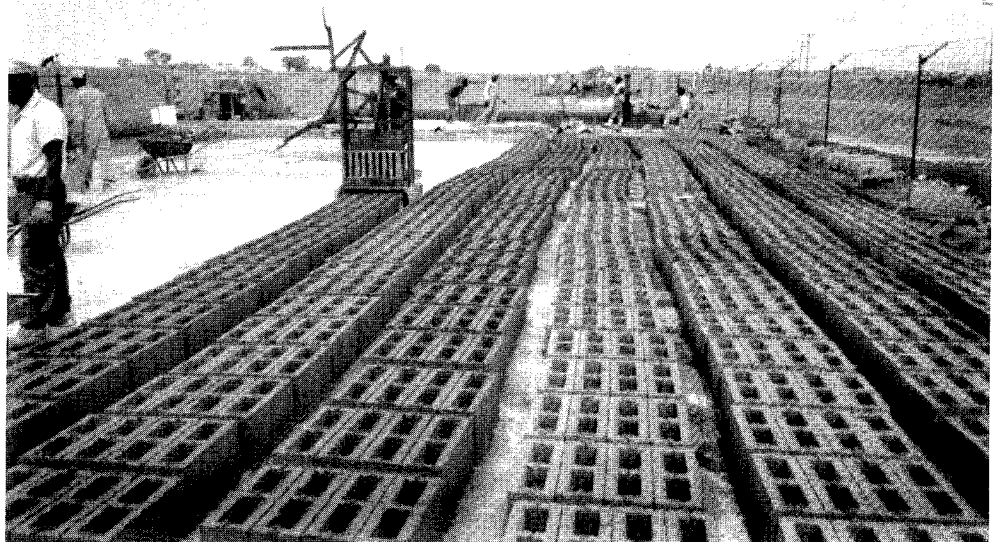


*Bricklayers start construction on a standard two-room house.*

\*Bantu is a term used by pre-1976 National Party governments to describe the country's African population. It succeeded the previous government term, "Native." Bantu and Native education prepared Africans for an inferior place in apartheid society.



*Scenes from the  
brickyard at  
Freedom Square.*





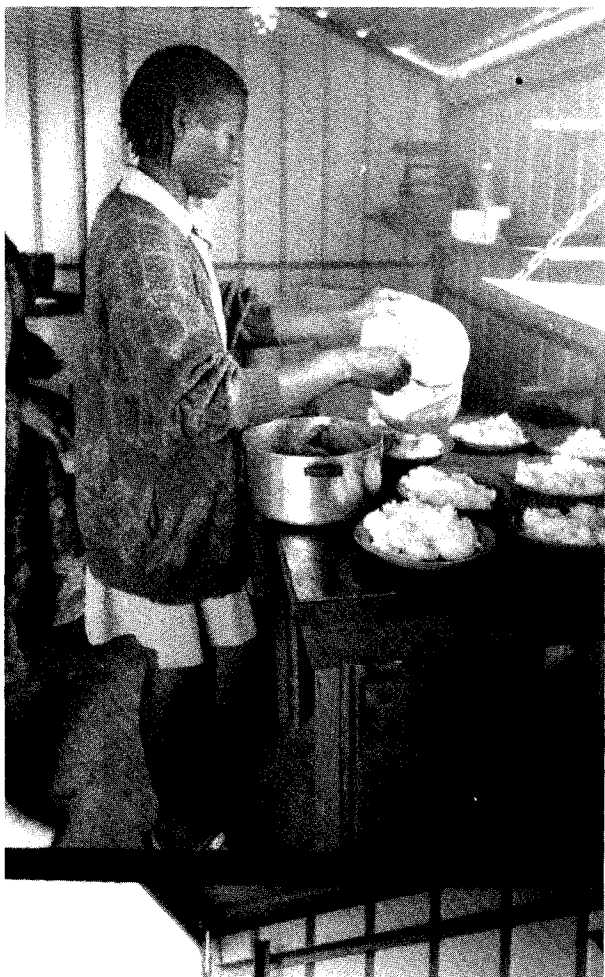
here [from outside] doing all the work, when our people need jobs," Masilo said. "And we're not going to buy [materials] from outside."

The block and bricks used to build the houses are manufactured by the Freedom Square Brickmakers Association, which is one of the 15 community-based projects initiated by the Freedom Square Development Forum. Seventy-five brickmakers belong to the association and, collectively, they own it. The artisans produce 72,000 concrete blocks and 192,000 small bricks a month.

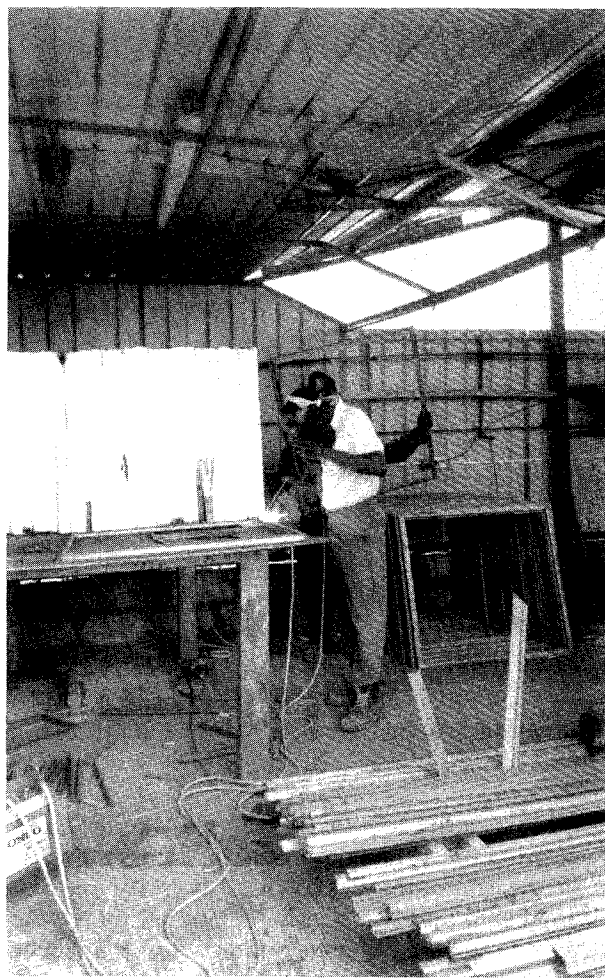
The brickyard itself is owned by the Trust and, to date, it has invested \$85,106 in the operation. One of the long-term goals of both the Trust and the brickmakers association is that neighboring informal settlements will use bricks manufactured at the brickyard when construction there begins.

A half-dozen welders produce the metal window frames that go into the houses. Lucky T. Rabela is the person in charge of Learn & Teach Steel Supplier, the company that makes the window frames. Rabela can't write, and probably can't read, but he knows his job and he is teaching welding to other men in the community.

The actual construction of the houses is done by



*Rosa Matekane, 25, dishes out porridge and chunks of stewed beef for workers at the brickyard.*



*A welder concentrates on making window frames*

workers who belong to either the Freedom Square or Morning Star builders associations. Once again both associations were initiated by the Trust. So far, the builders have erected 811 houses and by the time they are done they will have constructed 4,132.

Homes are not the only things taking shape in Freedom Square. Two new primary schools opened last month and a secondary school will soon follow. The government built the schools and pays the salaries of teachers, but there's no money for janitors. So every day, from 2 to 4 p.m., 56 mothers and grandmothers, armed with brooms, mops, buckets and dust rags, give 84 classrooms a good, thorough cleaning. As much as they'd like to earn a paycheck for their services, Ouma Kitsa, the one mother who spoke English, told me that their main concern is the upkeep of the school. In their view, a sound education, which includes a clean, safe learning environment, is like money in the bank. "We want to take care of our community," Kitsa said.

A similar sense of commitment was expressed by volunteers at a pre-school in the settlement. Five women spend eight hours a day, five days a week, caring for 87 babies and toddlers. "Yes," they said, they would love to earn a salary. But circumstances don't allow them that "luxury." Parents pay \$10.63 a month



*Volunteer cleaners at Toka elementary school*

and the amount is just enough to cover food for the children.

Pam Mfila and Leonora L. May manage an adult-literacy program in Freedom Square. Neither woman lives in the community. May lives in a neighboring black township and Mfila in a "coloured" (South Africa's term for persons of mixed descent) area. The literacy classes, however, are held at Toka elementary school — one of the two grade schools that opened recently. *Toka* means justice in the Sotho language.

Learners in the program number 161 and they range in age from 18 to 64. Nearly all are women. "Men become bored very easy," May said, "and they don't like to compete with women, who catch on easy." The program started last February and students were scheduled to write their first exams in November, an exercise that they eagerly awaited.

The adult-literacy program came about as a result of another community project in which Mfila and May were involved. With money from their own pockets, the two decided to train women for jobs as housekeepers. Their idea was to teach women to clean a house; to buy groceries; to treat minor injuries; to manage a budget; to cook "European" food; to set a dinner table; to wash, iron and fold clothes; to care for children; and to take care of the elderly and handicapped. Punctuality, a positive attitude and personality, and good communication skills were also emphasized. At the end of the course, women were given a housekeeper's certificate.

Mfila and May said about 20 women succeeded in getting jobs as housekeepers. However, during the training they discovered that most of the women were illiterate. Training the women became difficult because



*Rosie Mochekoane hopes to develop a market for the wall hangings she weaves by hand.*

they could not read and write. This is why Mfila and May decided that the squatter settlement needed an adult-literacy program.

May is a retired nurse and Mfila has experience as a field worker for nongovernmental organizations involved in community development. The two of them successfully applied for a private grant that allowed them to contract with the University of the Orange Free State to train 10 educators to cope with the special needs of adult learners whose first language is not English. The grant also covers the salaries of teachers, who earn \$102.12 a month for teaching two hours a night, four days a week. Mfila and May are the administrators of the program, yet they earn nothing. The grant does not cover administrative costs.

If the two women harbor any resentment over the fact that they receive no financial reward for their efforts, it does not show. In fact, they might not have mentioned this if I had not asked. Instead, they filled my ears with stories about their student's small yet extraordinary successes. Here's one story:

For years, a mother depended on her children to cash and deposit checks for her. But the woman long suspected that the children were dipping into her bank account. She could not prove her theory because she was illiterate. Now that the woman knows how to read, and write her name and address, she does her own banking. "She completes her own deposit slips," May said, with motherly delight. "She is so happy."

### BLACK EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MICRO-ENTERPRISES

With new home construction on its way, the Freedom Square Upgrade Community Trust is focusing its attention on job creation. "What's the use of having a house and you don't (have money to) eat?" Masilo said.

One of the projects that the Trust is trying to get off the ground involves the establishment of a Multi-Purpose Production Center. The center, as envisioned by the Trust, will serve as incubator for job development. A site for construction of a building has been identified, but a start date has not been set.

In the meantime, the Trust uses 16 containers donated by shipping giant Safmarine as working space for micro-enterprises. The containers are valued at \$42,553. Elisa Mhlahlo, 39, and Rosa Matekane, 25, operate a no-name restaurant in one of the containers. They opened the take-away six months ago. A typical meal is chunks of stewed beef with porridge; the cost is \$1.10. About 16 meals a day are served, most during lunch time to workers at the brickyard, and the business generates between \$63.82 and \$77.65 a week. Before starting the business, neither Mhlahlo nor Matekane were employed.

The two women told me that they enjoy operating a

take-away, but need more customers to make the business profitable. The Trust charges a monthly fee for use of the donated containers. However, since the take-away has not yet generated enough income to cover rental, no payment has been demanded.

The Trust works closely with the Free State Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism to assist residents who want to start micro-enterprises. In fact, my first meeting with members of the administrative staff of the Upgrade Community Trust took place in the office of the assistant director of economic development in the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism.

The provincial office is working with people to formulate business ideas and plans, as well as develop markets for their goods and services. Rosie Mochekoane, for example, is a weaver. She learned her craft in her native Lesotho. Mochekoane, together with three



*Khatazile Masila (left), Jacob Khumalo (center) and James Masiu (right) stand in front of Masiu's house, which is almost complete. Each time I visited Freedom Square, the three reminded me to tell American donors about the settlement. "The donors are not visiting us," Masilo said. "They're visiting and eating nice in Johannesburg and Cape Town. No one visits us in Bloemfontein, Queen Elizabeth didn't come either. People must see that things are going smoothly in the Free State."*

other women, share space in one of the Safmarine containers. Mochekoane said it takes about a week to weave a poster-size wall hanging. She dyes the wool herself and does the weaving by hand.

Mochekoane lacks the training and knowledge needed to transform her talent into a business. She does not know, for example, how to determine a price for her artwork, taking into consideration the number of hours spent weaving the wall hanging, the cost of materials and the mark-up needed to generate a profit. Furthermore, she had no idea where she might sell the hanging once completed.

#### MASAKHANE - LET US BUILD TOGETHER NOW

"Go ask Mr. Mandela!" is a mean-spirited response that some whites give to Africans when they ask for help with everything from jobs to housing. This expression has been mentioned to me so many times, by so many African people under different circumstances, that I take it as indicating how entrenched racism is in the society.

One of the most damaging and lasting effects of apartheid is that many African people remain dependent on a *baas* (boss), who is usually a white person but, increasingly these days, the boss is black. The boss is not always an individual. It can also be an institution, like the government. In fact, a majority of African people expect the black-led government to supply them with land, housing, schools, safe neighborhoods and secure jobs. The problem is, the government cannot do it all.

Not long ago, Petrus led a march from Freedom Square to a municipal pay point in a neighboring township. About 2,000 people joined him. All owe the government for municipal services, such as rent for the

houses that they lease. Masakhane is the name of a national campaign to restore a culture of rent-payment among township residents. Who participated in rent boycotts during the final years of apartheid. But so far the response has been disappointing. The mayor of a northern KwaZulu-Natal town, Newcastle, feared for his life when stones were hurled at him by angry townfolk. The protesters pelted him with their squashed-up rent slips, in which stones were wrapped. In Freedom Square, a different attitude exists among the people. "We must help our government," Petrus said, "so it will deliver. Give and you shall be given."

#### THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

The late Chief Albert Luthuli said the road to freedom is always full of difficulties. South Africa has 12 million children to educate, nine million of whom are African. With unemployment rates of around 40 percent, four out of five households cannot afford a mortgage. The government does not have enough resources, financial or otherwise, to rebuild the nation without the participation of all South Africans.

Freedom Square does not come close to any standards that either Americans or privileged South Africans can appreciate. Most of the shack dwellers are poor, jobless, unskilled and illiterate. Their living space is grossly inadequate. They worry about where their next meal will come from and whether a forecast of rain and hail will wash away their homes. One might expect people in this situation to give up, lose hope, feel completely overwhelmed by the sorrowful circumstances in which they find themselves. Or, they could pursue another route, which is to wait for the government to meet their expectations. But this is neither the attitude nor the way that people in Freedom Square conduct themselves. They possess a vision for their community and people with a vision will not perish. □



## **THE INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT TRUST**

Over the past six years, the Independent Development Trust (IDT) has helped initiate almost 9,000 development projects. These self-help projects represent a financial investment of some \$638 million. The IDT started out with a staff of five in 1990, housed in one small building in Cape Town, and now has close to 130 staff members in offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Durban and Port Elizabeth, as well as several smaller centers around South Africa. The Board of Trustees of the IDT is solely responsible for the formulation of policy and procedure and the deployment of the Trust's funds.

In the Free State, the IDT has allocated funds for the building of schools, roads and community halls throughout the province. QwaQwa, a former "homeland" that has been incorporated into the Free State, is the main beneficiary of the Trust funds in the province. One QwaQwa project involves the construction of a bridge that will link two isolated rural communities.

### **Some of the primary goals of the IDT are:**

- to break the cycle of poverty in the poorest communities
- empower poor communities to control their own affairs
- enable individuals and communities to overcome dependency and alienation caused by apartheid
- to improve the quality of life and incomes of the poor through better access to essential basic services and economic resources and skills

### **Main achievements of the IDT include:**

- The building of 2,565 classrooms. The IDT hopes to build a total of 5,000 classrooms within the next three years to reduce the present backlog of 50,000 classrooms in the country. \$64 million has been allocated to this program.
- The IDT's Capital Subsidy Scheme, which provides serviced sites, will result in 110,000 poor people, each with an average of seven dependents, owning a piece of land with toilets and taps. Funds allocated to the scheme amount to more than \$170 million.
- The IDT has given \$27.6 million towards loans to enable disadvantaged students to attend universities and technikons.

### **A few of the almost 9,000 projects in which the IDT has invested:**

- Zulu Schools Trust: For building classrooms in rural KwaZulu-Natal.
- Valley Trust, KwaZulu-Natal: Building and equipping a health center and completing five health sub-centers.
- Get Up! Lending Trust: To provide small loans to informal sector business people.
- Clinic Building Program: Major grant for building 144 clinics in Gazankulu, Venda, KaNgwane, Bophuthatswana and Transkei.
- Financial Aid Fund/SA Sugar Association: For drought relief to small cane growers
- Hambanathi, KwaZulu-Natal: Bridging finance for conversion of hostels, servicing plots and building of show village.
- Women's Development Bank South Africa: To promote micro-lending.
- National Council for the Blind: For a multi-racial factory for people of all disabilities.

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# **FREEDOM SQUARE NEWS**

THE PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE

5 August 1996  
Volume 4

## **HOW LONG?**

By Jeffrey  
Metsing

As recent as last month, Mr Kholisile, resident of Freedom Square at number 35941, was pained by the suicide of his son, now again his beloved daughter

created yet another pain to him.

Three months ago Ms Thandiwe Paulina, the daughter of Mr Kholisile, who was born in 1974, arrived at her father's place and requested to be borrowed a car battery to go and fit it in her TV

Mr Kholisile gave her the money to go and fetch the battery where it was still being charged. Instead, Thandiwe decided to take out the acid from the battery and drank it. Fortunately, she did not die by then and she was taken to the hospital where she slept for some weeks

and was at a later stage released

Since acid is dangerous, Thandiwe never recovered from the damage caused by the acid. Finally on the 11 of July 1996, Thandiwe sadly passed away after having suffered too much pain at Pelonomi Hospital

Thandiwe had attended school at Tsoseletso Secondary school and she was a brilliant pupil, but she left school when she was doing standard eight

When asked what could have been the cause of this behaviour, Mr Kholisile said that "Even though I am deeply pained by the loss of my last born daughter, I wish to inform all the different structures in Freedom Square, more especially the youth organisation, that they must try to organise recreational occasions where youth will be taught to listen and respect their



The late Ms Thandiwe Paulina

elders. Had not been due to lack of communication, Thandiwe would have put her problems in an articu-

late manner. Thandiwe was buried on the 20 July of 1996

## **Comment**

By Jeffrey Metsing

Having realised that the African National Congress deemed it fit and proper to salute the South African Communist Party on its 75th anniversary, the community of Freedom Square must know that the South African Communist Party has been a home to the sons and daughters of our country.

Even though the tripartite alliance celebrates this anniversary together, residents of Freedom Square ought to stand up and be practically involved in the affairs of the housing project

Untold problems that are evident to their observation must be addressed and attacked without fear of being removed from the respective structures, and those who are serving within the structures must realise that, democracy and transparency work hand in gloves

It has come to the notice of the concerned residents that our local contractors are expected to build at least 80 houses per two weeks, but such has not been achieved, more so the community is not informed

Recently, members of the Freedom Square Executive Committee have had a meeting where they discussed a necessity of involving the other contractor from outside Freedom Square to come and hasten the process of reaching the scheduled target

Residents must feel free and be concerned to question the right of any structure that is involved in the housing project of Freedom Square because it is their democratic right and if transparency is not practised, then democracy will be rendered null and void

Is imperative without question that mass meetings ought to be held frequently in order



Jeffrey Metsing

to inform residents about the development with regard to the brickyard and the production centre's functions e.g. Financially and otherwise

Last but not least, the community must be informed about the pros and cons of Freedom Square phase two since rumour has it that there is a problem in connection to the allocations of phase two, whilst there is an apposing party.

The question is, why should this be the case. Everybody must now pull up his/her socks to question this because our people need accommodation and nothing else

The Freedom Square community don't need to see factions mushrooming without valid reasons where their monies are involved.

It is now the time for various structures operating in Freedom Square together with our local councillor to stand up and involve the people. At the same time, it is important for the residents to know that Freedom Square Newspaper is theirs and they must know that its inception was to and is to inform them about everything that is happening in the area

The main aim of the paper when it was established, was not only to bring in money, but to keep the community informed at all times.

**DOWN  
TOWN**  
*Ajiquor Store*  
**NOW OFFICIALLY OPENED  
WITH SPECIAL DISCOUNTS  
ON ALL LIQUOR**  
*Some One Come All  
for Reasonable Prices*  
**ICE COLD BEER IN  
ABUNDANCE**  
Next Door Chicken Licken,  
Opposite Freedom Square Main Taxi Rank

Freedom Square News began publication five months ago. It, too, is a project of the Freedom Square Upgrade Community Trust. The community newspaper comes out once a month and 5,000 copies are distributed free. Jeffrey Metsing is the writer, editor and advertising manager of the paper. He said his chief aim is to keep readers informed about the Trust, its leaders and community development.

## HOW DO SUBSIDIES WORK?

**This section will tell you what a subsidy is:** It will also tell you what to do if you qualify for a subsidy, but do not qualify for a bank loan to go with it. If you qualify for a subsidy and a bank loan together as explained in Section 5, the bank will tell you what to do to get the subsidy.

## WHAT IS A SUBSIDY?

A subsidy is a grant from the government to help you buy or build your own home. You will only qualify for one subsidy. It is not a cash payment. The government pays the subsidy for you directly to the person selling you the house, or building it for you. **You don't have to pay this money back.**

There is a computer system that knows if you have had a subsidy before, so do not apply if you have already had one.

**Trying to get a second subsidy is a criminal offence. You could go to jail if you try to do this.**

**A SUBSIDY IS A GRANT FROM THE GOVERNMENT  
YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY THIS MONEY BACK**

## WHO QUALIFIES FOR A SUBSIDY?

You will qualify for a subsidy if: ■ Your total household income is R3 500 or less per month. ■ You are a first-time home buyer. ■ You have not already been given a government housing subsidy. ■ You are single with dependants, or married, or living with a long-term partner. ■ You are a citizen of South Africa or a foreigner with a permanent residence permit. ■ You are 21 years or older or married in terms of civil law or customary union.

**EVERYBODY CAN GET A SUBSIDY**

## WHAT LEVEL OF SUBSIDY WILL I GET?

Subsidies are only available on houses costing not more than R65 000.

The subsidy you will get is linked to your total monthly household income. Look at the table to the right to see how much subsidy you will qualify for.

**YOUR TOTAL MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAX AND DEDUCTIONS:**  
R0,00 TO R800 PER MONTH  
R801 TO R1500 PER MONTH  
R1 501 TO R3 500 PER MONTH  
R3 501 TO R3 500 PER MONTH

**WHAT SUBSIDY YOU WILL GET:**  
R15 000  
R12 500  
R9 500  
R5 000

## THE CONSOLIDATION SUBSIDY

Not everyone will be eligible for, or qualify for, the amount shown in the table above. People who already have a serviced site they got as state assistance in the past will only qualify for a consolidation subsidy shown in the table to the right. It will help you build a proper structure on your site. This is less money than the full subsidy - but it is a fair system, because people who get the full subsidy still have to pay for a site with services. **Consolidation subsidies are only available on a project-linked basis.**

**YOUR TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME:**  
R0,00 TO R800 PER MONTH  
R801 TO R1 500 PER MONTH  
OVER R1 500 PER MONTH

**WHAT CONSOLIDATION SUBSIDY YOU WILL GET:**  
R7 500  
R5 000  
(Nothing) R0 000

## WHAT IS A PROJECT LINKED SUBSIDY?

This is a subsidy offered to people within a community which wishes to build a number of houses as a group with the help of a developer. The developer can be a private company, the local authority or another public sector developer. On the basis of a signed social compact with the community, the developer

makes one application to the Provincial Housing Board for subsidies for all of the people who will get houses in the project. But the subsidy will be in your name. It will make sure you get a home which belongs to you.

## WHERE CAN I APPLY FOR A SUBSIDY?

If you only qualify for a subsidy without a loan, apply for a subsidy directly to your Provincial Housing Board office. You can send your application by post. (See directory on the back cover).

The developer will help you if you choose a project-linked scheme.

If you are applying for a subsidy along with a bank home loan, the bank will help you apply.

You can get application forms for a subsidy from your local authority or branch office of the Provincial Administration.

## HOW MANY SUBSIDIES ARE AVAILABLE?

The number of subsidies available each year will depend on the housing budget from the government and parliament. Although the housing budget is much bigger than ever before, not everyone will get a subsidy straight away. It will take many years for everyone in South Africa who needs help with their housing to get it. But even so there will be many opportunities to get a subsidy:

- Housing subsidies will be given out four times a year.
- There is no waiting list.
- You can apply every three months and you will have a fresh chance each time new subsidies are allocated.

**REMEMBER, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO GIVING HOUSING HELP FOR MANY YEARS TO COME. EACH YEAR, MONEY WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR SUBSIDIES.**

## HOW DO I APPLY FOR A SUBSIDY?

If you qualify for a subsidy in terms of the government's requirements, take these simple steps:

**1** Find a house or flat or a site you want to buy and a builder to do the work for you.

**2** Make a conditional offer to the seller to buy the property (that you will be able to buy the property on the condition that you get a subsidy or a subsidy and a home loan.)

**3** Go to your Provincial Housing Board to apply for your subsidy, or send them your application, if you are not applying for a loan with your subsidy.

Remember, individual subsidies are given out on a first come first served basis.

**4** If you are buying a house in an approved project and don't want a loan, the developer will help you apply.

**5** If you want a subsidy with a loan, go to the bank. They will help you apply.

*The Good News on Housing information appeared in a special 32-page newspaper supplement titled Home Truths. Home Truths provided step-by-step information on how to qualify for a subsidy or home loan to buy or build a house.*

# The Institute of Current World Affairs

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## ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

### 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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**Executive Director:** Peter Bird Martin  
**Program Administrator:** Gary L. Hansen  
**Publications Manager:** Ellen Kozak

Phone: (603) 643-5548

Fax: (603) 643-9599

E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net

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