

## FINAL SESSION ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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OVERVIEW: When the group reconvened, it was clear that all participants were eager to utilize a pre-existing or develop a new umbrella organization since networking between associations was a theme that had been repeatedly raised. The participants discussed the pros and cons of forming an umbrella organization or joining a pre-existing one. After a long discussion in which many salient points were raised, the participants agreed to have the leaders of the associations meet in five weeks to discuss plans for the future. They agreed that any individual Africans who are interested might also attend. Professor [Linda Beck](#), who facilitated the discussion, offered to send a final mailing regarding the decision by the assembly to hold a follow-up meeting to discuss the possibility of forming or joining an umbrella organization. She also promised to put together a website that would include minutes from the Forum.

### Summary of Discussion

The participants were all eager to develop an umbrella organization. It was pointed out that an umbrella organization could be an assistance group that would help individual associations with fund-raising and could provide technical assistance as well when necessary.

Many participants were unaware that an umbrella organization already existed, although a few participants pointed out that the United Africa Congress (UAC) was one such organization. One participant suggested this was a good place to start, since they have an established record and connections to political leaders and other communities (e.g., African American). At this, the participants debated whether they should join the UAC or form a new organization. Prof. Beck suggested that undertaking the establishment of an umbrella organization was a large undertaking, and another participant suggested that they get in touch with UAC and decide whether or not it suits their needs, and whether or not the UAC is representative of all Africa. A suggestion was made for a group of 5 or 7 people to go to the UAC to find out more about the organization, what they are doing, and whether or not they could work with them.

The issue of an umbrella organization sparked many debates. One person built on Prof. Beck's earlier suggestion by pointing out that it might be better to start with a small organization with small attainable goals, because problems and frustrations could arise if the agenda or platform was too broad. Another person noted that it might be better to start a new organization than join the UAC because that way they could start with their own new ideas rather than adhere to the structure and goals of a pre-existing organization. It was noted that participants might be more committed to the group if they were involved from the inception. At this, a suggestion was made to put together a small follow-up group that would meet in the near future to discuss the forum's ideas. Another suggestion was made that this was unlikely to succeed, so instead the community should just agree to meet once or twice a year to discuss various issues (i.e., keep it as a forum rather than an umbrella organization).

At this point, a member of the UAC who happened to be present for media coverage of the Forum mentioned that Africans in the US do not have a collective agenda, like African-Americans or Caribbeans. Another asked about the connection between Africans and African-Americans and suggested that African-Americans lobby for African immigrants. The importance of unity among Africans was stressed by many.

Next, a suggestion was made that the group select five individuals who would meet the following week and proceed from there. Prof. Beck proposed that the assembly vote on the various propositions that had been made:

- A small group would go to the UAC to investigate the organization
- A small committee would be formed to determine how to proceed
- A follow-up meeting would be scheduled to determine how to proceed
- The Community would meet occasionally to discuss issues (once or twice a year)

A consensus emerged around a follow-up meeting and was nearly unanimously accepted when a vote was taken. The group decided that the leaders of each NGO would get together on April 26, 2003 to discuss how they would proceed in the future. Although the leaders of the various associations would be expected to attend, any individual who was interested could also attend. All agreed that the next meeting would be held midday to insure that the discussion would be short and focused. The agenda would be limited to discussing the possibility of working with or forming an umbrella organization with the hopes that the leaders of the UAC would be in attendance. Prof. Beck volunteered to be a resource person, but not an organizer. She suggested she could help by finding a site for the meetings, and promised to send notification of the meeting to all of the groups in attendance as well as others on the data base developed for the Forum.