

Exciting Mission

USAU represents U.S. priorities // *By Lauren Ladenson*

In April, Illinois Senator Roland Burris became the first U.S. member of Congress to visit the African Union. Later in the month, a high-level delegation traveled from AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to Washington, D.C., to discuss partnership opportunities with U.S. government officials. The U.S. Mission to the African Union helped facilitate both events.

USAU was established in 2006, making the United States the first non-African country with a dedicated ambassador to the AU. Ambassador Michael A. Battle, USAU's third chief of mission, began his assignment in September 2009. He has a small, dedicated staff that includes six Americans from the departments of State and Defense and the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as four Locally Employed Staff members.

There is also a U.S. peace and security advisor at the AU's Strategic Planning and Management Unit and a USAID-contracted democracy advisor at the AU's Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit.

Shared Compound

USAU shares a compound with the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, and both missions will move into a new embassy compound in September. The mission relies on the embassy for such services as motor pool, human resources and housing. The desk officer for the AU in the Africa Bureau's Office of Regional and Security Affairs helps USAU in its liaison role with sources in Washington, D.C.

Assignments to USAU provide the opportunity to work with a unique multilateral organization that addresses a range of transnational issues affecting U.S. national and economic security.

"USAU gives you the chance to work issues that touch every corner of the continent, and that's fascinating," said the military liaison, Navy Captain Jeff Landsman.

Founded in 1963 as the Organization of African Unity and now consisting of 53 member states, the AU focuses

on conflict prevention and resolution, setting economic and political standards for African governments and promoting African unity. U.S. priorities include strengthening democratic institutions; promoting sustained economic development and growth; improving access to health services; preventing, mitigating and resolving conflicts; and deepening cooperation on transnational challenges.

USAU manages the U.S. relationship with the AU secretariat, composed of a chairperson, deputy chairperson and eight commissioners. The AU's commissions—Peace and Security, Political Affairs, Social Affairs and five others—address issues ranging from economic integration to health care and women's empowerment.

USAU reports on these issues and on the AU-sponsored continental meetings. The mission also provides essential support to the large U.S. delegations that traditionally attend the AU's twice-yearly summits,

which draw thousands of observers and dozens of African heads of state.

Evolving Organization

"As a relatively new mission, USAU has a unique opportunity to shape its identity as it defines its engagement with the AU, which is itself an evolving organization," said Joel Maybury, USAU deputy chief of mission. Since USAU's creation, the mission has concentrated on peace and security affairs in response to crises in Somalia and Sudan, and on the unconstitutional changes of government in such nations as Guinea, Niger and Madagascar.

"We look forward to the day when we can spend less time on peace and security issues and more on areas that contribute positively to Africa's growth and development," said Ambassador Battle.

The newly elected chairperson of the AU, Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika, has made food security a top priority in the



At a AU Partners Group meeting are, from left, Ambassador Battle, AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping, newly elected AU President Bingu wa Mutharika and Denmark's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the AU Pernille Dahler-Kardel.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (LEFT) ENGEDA WASSIE; (OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP): TEKLE-GIORGIS SAHLU; LINA MOHAMMED; AND LAUREN LADENSON



Above: USAU staff members, from left, Katre Nicholson, Duke Ellington, Joel Maybury, Ambassador Michael Battle, Lauren Ladenson, Jennifer Little, Steve Smith and Jeff Landsman gather around the mission's sign. **Right:** From left, Ambassador Battle, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero, USAU Deputy Chief of Mission Joel Maybury, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Howard Wolpe discuss the coming AU summit. **Below:** Construction continues on the new AU facility.



coming year. The AU is also committed to promoting peaceful and democratic transitions of power throughout Africa.

President Barack Obama has demonstrated strong U.S. support for such African priorities. “We believe in Africa’s potential and promise,” the President said in his July 2009 speech in Ghana. “We remain committed to Africa’s future. We will be strong partners with the African people.”

As a young, dynamic mission, USAU embraces the challenges and opportunities of building a productive partnership with the AU that benefits Africa and the global community. ■

The author is the political/public diplomacy officer at USAU.