

It was a day that we had planned for months. The National Black Chamber of Commerce® felt that the time to get very serious about Africa had come. There have been ups and downs in our visits and progress over the last decade but the “stars” are now aligned. All of Africa is on our radar but the priority right now is Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and South Sudan (the 54th nation of the continent). We are putting together a formal Strategic Plan as to how we will integrate our willing business owners with the talent and opportunities of these nations.

We had sounded the call to our fellow entrepreneurs to come and hear about the opportunities and join in our plan to act. Last week, at our 19th Annual Conference in Miami, FL over 270 African American business owners sat down to hear formal presentations from the ambassadors of Kenya and Botswana, the Honorable Alkaneh Odembo and Tebelelo Mazile Seretse respectively. When they finished everyone was asking themselves why didn't I know this? Kenya and Botswana are ready for us!

The opportunities lie in every industry you can think of. Africa per se is increasing its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 8 percent annually. No other continent can say that. Kenya is in double digits. Botswana has one of the most transparent governments in the world. All children receive free education from K through college. There is no need for special immunization when you travel and you don't even have to obtain a visa. The last trips we made to Nairobi, capital of Kenya, we did not have to receive shots for malaria – they have dealt with it. Both nations have some of the greatest national parks and the vast majority of safaris in the world occur in these two nations.

Botswana is totally democratic and prides itself in sending contestants to worldwide beauty pageants and often winning the grand prize. The Ambassador stated “We have the prettiest women”. Stability is there and it is surrounded by South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is very strategically located and the call for business start ups is constant. They want our expertise to come in and produce jobs and increase their GDP even further. Their currency is stable and you can bank in US dollars. A ready, educated workforce awaits you and it will take only five days to receive a business license.

Kenya is a much more heavily populated nation (40 million). Its population is over 85% literate and, like Botswana, English is the national language. Again, a well educated and trained workforce. The Vision 2030 Program is a formal scheme to turn this nation into a middle class

population within the next twenty years. The Plan is documented with milestones and that is where we can set our strategy and implement our action plans. Visiting Nairobi is like visiting any American city with a population of 6 million people. You won't find more friendly people than those of Kenya. Remember the population of Kenya matches the Black population of America. That is the market that presents itself with such amazing opportunity. The populations of the nations I have aforementioned collectively have a population of 300 million people – ten times that of the United States. The markets are enormous!

Banking challenges are beginning to lessen. The mixture of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, EXIM Bank, OPIC, Trade Development Administration, Asian Development Bank, various Middle East programs and the enormous banks of China offer many vehicles for financing of projects. It is becoming very popular for companies, large and small, to get an LLC business status from Hong Kong. This opens up the door for the Asian Development Bank and various China funds. We are engaging with the nation of Bahrain to access financing for projects we will do on the African continent.

Ambassador Odembo caught everyone's attention when he exclaimed "It has been a mistake for traditional western nations to ignore the opportunities of my continent. We look forward to the Investment Brigade coming from America and led by the National Black Chamber of Commerce." Yes indeed. We are going on a trade mission to Botswana at the end of this October. Kenya? We have now established the process. Whenever we get over 7 businesses ready to travel we will lead them via a trade mission on an ongoing basis. You should have seen the one-on-one interviews our conference participants were having with the Commercial Attaches of these two nations after their Ambassadors gave their presentations. It's on!

Our entrepreneurs are pumped up and they have a right to be. The Motherland is calling and we will now answer that calling after 400 years. It's a new day for the 54 African nations and you can take part in this economic revolution.

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