



The African Union Mission to the United States and Books For Africa Expand Joint Efforts in Support of African Education and the Enhancement of the Longstanding Cultural Relations Between the United States and Africa

Atlanta, Georgia, June 29, 2021 —The African Union Ambassador to the United States, Her Excellency Hilda Suka-Mafudze, served as the keynote speaker for the grand opening of the Books For Africa (BFA) Atlanta warehouse on June 26, 2021. The event took place against the backdrop of the celebration of the African Union 2021 theme of the year: *“Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”*.

Ambassador Suka-Mafudze met with BFA leadership to discuss collaborative opportunities for improving educational opportunities across Africa and praised BFA “for its noble mission and its unwavering commitment to education and a strong belief in Africa.” The Ambassador cited the late United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan who said the gift of a book is a gift of hope and “no development tool is more effective than education and literacy. When people are able to access education, they can break free from the cycle of poverty.” Ambassador Mafudze added that the African Union Commission partnership with Books For Africa is an eloquent recognition of the instrumental role that culture plays as a catalyst for the sustainable socio-economic development of the continent.

It is worth mentioning that Books For Africa is the world’s largest shipper of donated books to the African continent and has shipped over 51 million books and served all African countries, since its founding in 1988. BFA has been rated as one of the top NGO’s in the United States by Charity Navigator, generating a top rating for nine years straight and rating in the top 4% of all United States charities as measured by transparency and efficiency. Partnerships with members of the African diaspora in the US and across the world has been critical to the success of BFA, with many diaspora members serving on the BFA board, raising funds, organizing shipments, and providing linkages to various African countries.

Ambassador Suka-Mafudze underscored during the event the African Union commitment to revitalizing the progress it has achieved in recent years in education, health and poverty eradication, progress which has been halted or reversed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I am confident that with your support and commitment to this noble cause Books For Africa will continue to make a great impact in the continent,” she said. **“You are an eloquent example of an effective instrument of soft public Diplomacy that**

contributes in enhancing the longstanding historic and cultural ties between our peoples and nations.”

The Ambassador also highlighted that the African Union Commission is “pleased to partner with BFA in whatever way we can to advance literacy and education across the continent.” The two organizations have partnered in several ways including mobilizing key US stakeholders to deliver more books and securing BFA books for use at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. New initiatives are also being explored to expand education through such strategies as custom printing of books in local languages to deliver to children across the continent as well as through triangular cooperation programs.

“We welcome and appreciate this opportunity to partner together to help ensure that more children as well as adults have access to information and the latest and most up-to-date digital content,” she said. “Let’s reinforce our partnership and capitalize on the longstanding and deep historic and cultural relations between our Nations, leverage Africa’s unique advantages including its diversity and widespread Diaspora, as well as U.S thriving knowledge economy, to build together more sustainable partnerships for the best interest of our people.”

About 200 people attended the event, which also included remarks from BFA Founder Mr. Tom Warth, Board President Ms. Joni Sussman and Executive Director Mr. Patrick Plonski. The BFA Warehouse band provided entertainment.

“We were excited to celebrate the opening of our new Atlanta warehouse, which is our gateway to Africa and its millions of students,” said Mr. Patrick Plonski. “Our new warehouse will dramatically improve our efficiency and allow us to automate our operation. It will also be a more effective work area for our thousands of volunteers.”

Mr. Plonski added that “we were grateful to have the African Union Ambassador Hilda Suka-Mafudze as our keynote speaker. We welcome our continuing close relationship with the African Union, which helps us to better serve book recipients across Africa.”

BFA has had its major warehouse in Atlanta for many years. It also has its office and smaller warehouse in St. Paul, Minnesota. Millions of donated books from all over the country are sorted, packed and shipped each year from the Atlanta warehouse to the Port of Savannah, where they are sent by cargo ship to students throughout Africa. Approximately 10,000 volunteers work at the warehouse each year. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the warehouse had the second-most volunteers of any non-profit in the Atlanta metro area.

Both Ambassador Suka-Mafudze and Mr. Plonski thanked BFA event sponsors and partners including Thomson Reuters, Vector Global Logistics, MK Management Company, the UPS Foundation, and Zep. The Ambassador and Mr. Plonski also cited the critical importance of the African diaspora as well as African philanthropists living on

the continent for their generosity in raising funds to pay shipping costs to send books to every African country.

During the last fiscal year, BFA shipped 3.7 million books valued at over \$38 million, along with 167 computers and e-readers containing 300,000 digital books to 20 African countries. More than \$3.2 million was raised to ship the books.

For more information about the event and Books For Africa: <https://www.booksforafrica.org/>, please contact:

Mr. Patrick Plonski, Executive Director of Books For Africa at 651-491-3391 (mobile) or by email at patrick@booksforafrica.org

Mr. Doug Stone, Media Liaison of Books For Africa at 651-336-9907 (mobile) or by email at stone7586@gmail.com

Mr. Tarek Ben Youssef, Senior Political Officer, African Union Mission to the U.S at 202-516-4462 or by email at TarekY@africa-union.org

###



The African Union Ambassador Her Excellency Hilda Suka-Mafudze is presented with a Books For Africa (BFA) t-shirt in commemoration and appreciation of her attendance and remarks at the warehouse grand opening event in Atlanta, Georgia. Pictured above from left are BFA Executive Director Mr. Patrick Plonski, Ambassador Suka-Mafudze, BFA Board President Ms. Joni Sussman, and BFA Founder Tom Warth.