

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release,
June 18, 2010
Contact: Gedlu Metaferia
(314)732-3350, (314)766-8885

AMAAM and Allies Observe World Refugee Day

AMAAM, African Communities, faith based organizations with their inter faith presence, service providers, refugees and immigrants observed World Refugee Day at St. John's Episcopal Church, 3664 Arsenal Street, St. Louis, MO 63116.

The celebration contained two sessions, the first one was a tribute to Professor Gladys Thandiwe Jabulani Mabunda, an SIUE Nursing Professor who was given a celebratory tribute by African community leaders, African faith leaders and her colleagues from SIUE because of her special work among refugee and immigrant communities in health promotion and education. Vincent Mukaza, President of the Congolese Community and a long time friend eulogized Gladys, "As a person of good heart, a friend of all and a person of humble origin". Julius Lahai-Pamagoi said that, "Gladys was like a family member to a stranger, a confidant and a true helper". Gedlu Metaferia of AMAAM stated that as an immigrant and refugee from the Apartheid era she was a tolerant, patient person who has the passion to connect her students to African refugees and immigrants to weave class room learning to universal values of humanity. As building physical buildings in universities is unsustainable to accommodate number of students Gladys envisioned a 21st pedagogy that that sharpens students by reaching out to cultures and communities". Her colleagues from academia at SIUE celebrated her passion for her unyielding spirit and courage in telling her students not to give up. With sobbing and choking by emotions and tears her colleagues managed to express her indomitable spirit of compassion, love and friendship. Her memorial was conducted by Pastor Paul Macharia of Christ Covenant Church where our Kenyan brothers and sisters attend. Pastor Paul told us that, "It was ok to cry at her loss, but it is even more important to follow her legacy and be like her".

As an extension of the opening remark by Anna Crosslin, Executive Director and President of the International Institute that resettles refugees in our region the second part of the festivities included exchanging information on refugees and the meaning of the day during lunch. The program was abridged due to extreme heat warning in St. Louis.

AMAAM and the African Communities would like to thank representatives of our public elected officials who took their time to be available in this extreme weather. We are very proud of them in celebrating World Refugee Day with their constituents who are attended by community leaders whose membership and connections reach up to 25,000 in St. Louis and 35,000 in the State of Missouri. As the oldest refugee / immigrant institution of 27 years, AMAAM calls for sincere reflections on domestic resettlement, addressing funding disparities by both foundations and government funders regarding community based organizations that do not have political clout nationally. AMAAM believes that there are crucial and different roles played by community based organizations that are unique, culturally and linguistically enriching for problem solving. As we celebrate World Refugee Day and one of its exemplary daughters Gladys Mabunda, we call on all Americans and our Government who gave us a chance to be here to reach out to suffering people more, refugees and IDPS in Africa (internally displaced people), as most conflicts are in Africa, to find durable solutions and address funding disparities by reforming domestic resettlement, foundation and government contracts for populations who serve the most vulnerable.

###