

The UAO's activities and programs are all consistent with the agenda to raise awareness about the community. They include public education activities, relationship development with media outlets, and raising awareness about various African issues by speaking in classrooms and on forum panels. The UAO also organizes an annual Summit on African Immigrants and Refugees as a forum to discuss public policy issues and raise awareness about the state of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. The summit brings together a diverse multi-ethnic audience, including African American, Caribbean, Arab, Asian, Latino, Jewish and Muslim allies, to exchange views and develop a common understanding of community and policy issues. **The theme of the third annual summit is “From Hope to Empowerment: Perspectives on Africa & the African Experience in the US” and it will be held on May 30, 2009 from 8:00am to 5:00pm at Malcolm X College, located at 1900 West Van Buren in Chicago.**

Public policy advocacy efforts are also a central part of UAO activities. These take place at the local, state, and national levels. At the state level, the organization works closely with African American legislators in garnering support for immigrant-friendly bills and advocating for better access to state services, including citizenship and English programs in immigrant communities. The UAO and allies recently discussed federal immigration issues with Illinois' Congressional delegation, including Congressman Danny Davis, Jesse Jackson, Jr., Luis Gutierrez, as well as staff in the office of Senators Dick Durbin and Roland Burris.

The UAO also connects African immigrants and refugees to needed services and resources, and promotes the skills and resources of community members. It formalized its commitment to this goal by launching the Outreach and Interpretation (O&I) program in June, 2008. O&I staff member, Oumou Wagué, conducts outreach activities that inform African immigrants about the availability of public benefits and other services. Wagué also provides information and referrals, including interpretation and translation services, to help African community members gain access to necessary resources.

Finally, UAO greatly enhanced its role as a resource clearinghouse and information hub for the community by launching the *African Advocate*, a free multi-lingual community paper that serves as a credible medium for the dissemination of relevant information and as a forum for constructive dialogue and exchange of views; additionally, UAO released the first annual *Illinois African Community Resource Guide*. The comprehensive guide contains content for a wide variety of categories including African restaurants, hair braiding salons, taxi companies, retail stores, African medical professionals, academics, lawyers and artists, and contacts for national community associations and religious organizations. It serves as a tool to connect Africans to one another and to raise awareness about the important contributions being made by members of the African community in all sectors. It is also meant to increase visibility for African-owned businesses and professionals and encourage those outside of the African community to learn about the unique cultures of this diverse, vibrant, and rapidly growing community.

By working together through the structures of a strong advocacy organization like the UAO, the community is well on its way to achieving a smoother transition and making a unique contribution to the development of this society.

For more information about the UAO, visit the website at www.uniteafricans.org or e-mail info@uniteafricans.org.