

## Making History

UL Lafayette graduate represents President Bush in Africa

**W**HEN DR. CINDY COURVILLE WAS sworn in last fall as the first U.S. ambassador to the African Union, former classmate Condoleezza Rice presided. Courville and the nation's secretary of state attended the University of Denver together more than 20 years ago. Today,



Prior to being named ambassador to the African Union, Dr. Cindy Courville served as a special assistant to President George W. Bush and senior director for African Affairs at the National Security Council.

they have key supportive roles in Africa's struggle to improve its economy, conquer malaria and HIV/AIDS pandemics, and develop a united democracy.

At the November swearing-in ceremony at the State Department in Washington, D.C., Rice said President George W. Bush's appointment of Courville as ambassador was a "natural turn" in the evolution of the relationship between the United States and the African Union.

Courville was nominated for the post in July; her nomination was approved by the U.S. Senate in late September.

Courville has more than 20 years of expertise in African issues. After growing up in Opelousas, La., she received bachelor's and master's degrees in political science from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She earned a second master's degree and a doctorate in comparative politics and international relations from the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies.

Prior to being named envoy to the AU, Courville was special assistant to the president and senior director for African Affairs at the National Security Council. She had served as senior intelligence officer in the Office of the Chief of Staff at the Defense Intelligence Agency and had taught at several universities.

The United States is the first non-African country to appoint an ambassador to the AU.

Courville is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where the AU has headquarters.

It is a high profile appointment. As a U.S. ambassador, she represents Bush and acts as a communication channel between the United States and Africa.

The Bush administration has strongly supported the AU and the United States is the leader in providing humanitarian aid to African countries.

In testimony before the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee in August, Courville echoed the United States' stance that Africa needs "partnership, not paternalism."

She also quoted Bush's National Security Statement:

"Africa holds growing geostrategic importance and is a high priority of this administration. It is a place of promise and opportunity, linked to the United States by history, culture, commerce and strategic significance. Our goal is an African continent that knows liberty, peace, stability and increasing prosperity."

The AU is a five-year-old organization of 53 of 54 African countries. (Maurina was suspended in 2005.) Its goals include:

- greater democratization;
- a single currency;
- political stability in the continent, while preserving each country's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- an improved economy and subsequent standard of living;
- intervention where there is genocide or war crimes; and
- a national defense.

The AU was created to replace the 38-year old Organization of African Unity. "Nobody is mourning the end of the OAU," summarized BBC correspondent Paul Reynolds in 2002 in a report. By the time the AU was formed, Africa's problems were immense. Some progress has been made, but the challenges it faces are daunting.

• Many of its countries are drowning in debt repayments to other nations. Their economies are crippled by a lack of educated workforces and civil strife.

• The continent is grappling with an HIV/AIDS pandemic. "Africa is ground zero of the crisis, home to nearly two-thirds of those living with HIV/AIDS worldwide," reported African Action in 2006. Sub-Saharan Africa has been hardest hit. An estimated 25 percent of South Africa's population has been infected.

• Africans are battling an old scourge,



Dr. Cindy Courville, left, newly appointed U.S. ambassador to the African Union, meets with African Union Chairperson Alpha O. Konare in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

malaria. It's estimated that one child in Africa dies every 30 seconds from the mosquito borne disease.

• Parts of Africa are paralyzed by civil wars and subsequent famine. Americans are probably most familiar with the crisis in Darfur, a region of Sudan. Videographers and photographers have documented starving men, women and children. According to the Associated Press, civil war has resulted in about 200,000 deaths and displaced more than 2.5 million people.

But political violence is not limited to Sudan. There are also conflicts in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Somalia and the Congo, for instance.

The Bush administration has committed significant resources to help Africa meet its challenges.

In June 2006, Rice spoke at the African Growth and Opportunity Forum in Washington, D.C. She gave examples of that aid.

"In the past five years, with strong support from our Congress, President Bush has tripled foreign assistance to the countries of Africa and we are on pace to double that by 2010," she said.

Thanks to the Multilateral Debt Relief

Initiative, "which the United States worked tirelessly to secure, 14 African countries are now receiving over \$30 billion of debt relief. Our ultimate goal is to extend this initiative to 19 other African countries, forgiving more than \$10 billion of additional debt," she said.

Rice also noted the United States' five-year, \$15 billion commitment for prevention, treatment and care related to AIDS/HIV.

A year earlier, President Bush had announced the President's Malaria Initiative. The five-year, \$1.2 billion program challenges private industry to join the U.S. government in

combating malaria in 15 of the hardest-hit African countries. The goal is to reduce malaria's mortality rate by 50 percent in those target countries.

At the African Growth and Opportunity Forum, Rice spoke of Africa's importance to the United States: "It was the stolen sons and daughters of Africa who lifted up the body of America, brick by



African Union flag

brick, field by field, city by city. More than anyone, it was the quiet righteousness of African Americans, men and women like my parents and my grandparents, sons and daughters of the American South, who helped to redeem America at last from its original sin of slavery." ■