

African Think Tank Media Release 12 February 2008

AFRICAN COMMUNITIES ARE READY TO HELP THE VICTIMS OF VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

The African communities in Australia wish to express their sorrow and condolences to the victims of the bushfires in Victoria and the flood in Queensland. This has been the worst week in Australia's history. We feel for the worries of those who have not been able to contact friends or relatives and who fear the worst. There are many members of the African communities also living in rural Australia, who have no experience or training in what to do when a bushfire or flood hits. Almost every Australian will have relatives or close friends who are affected, and we are all praying for the lives and safety of people we know. Let us hope that the fires are brought under control as swiftly as possible.

The lives lost are only one indication of the injuries, the loss of property, the heroism but also the exhaustion and injuries of the volunteers who are risking their lives and safety to help others. Now, as always in Australia's history, all of us are dependent on the efforts of those brave volunteers. If it was not for them, the devastation would have been much greater. If not for the efforts of volunteers in rural areas, the fires would have been at our doors in the cities, or would have left us without power and services. This is a lesson and reminder to us all on the importance of acting together for the common good. We must always remember our common identity as Australians and do everything that we can to help one another.

This week, there was to be a fundraising dinner for the African Think Tank. However the communities involved have unanimously decided that all funds raised will go to the relief fund for bushfire victims. I urge citizens and communities to do everything possible to help, by raising money, donating food, blood, or helping in any way that they can.

Australians welcomed us to their country at a time when we were in need. Let us now honour the people, the land, the spirit of this nation, and extend our helping hands to assist the victims of the bushfires. Would it be possible, for us to send a busload of our young people to help fight the fires? Our young people may not know about fires, but they do know about clearing bush and about having to make do with makeshift accommodation. If there is any way in which we can help like this, I hope the organisers of the relief effort will contact the African Think tank so that we can work on organising help, support and assistance from African communities in Victoria and throughout Australia.

Africans all over Australia are asking to participate in helping the victims of bushfire in Victoria and floods in Queensland. We know how it feels to lose your loved ones and all your belongings in such disasters.