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Sister Cities International and the U.S. Department of State host discussion on "Leveraging Sister City Relationships as a Driver of Economic Development"

WASHINGTON, DC -- On March 13, 2012, *Sister Cities International* in conjunction with the Office of the Special Representative for Global Intergovernmental Affairs (S/SRGIA) and the Bureau of African Affairs hosted a delegation of South African sub-national officials, local U.S. elected representatives, and members of the business community at the U.S. Department of State. The standing-room only event on "Leveraging Sister City Relationships as a Driver of Economic Development" was part of the S/SRGIA's Smart Partnership Dialogue: Global Engagement Series.

Special Representative Reta Jo Lewis, S/SRGIA, U.S. Department of State welcomed the attendees and expressed her delight at having Mary Kane, president and CEO, *Sister Cities International*. Ambassador Scott Nolan, director of Southern African Affairs, U.S. Department of State gave the opening remarks. He emphasized that the challenges and problems faced by many cities across borders are similar. Partnerships, he said, such as those between *Sister Cities International* and the U.S. Department of State are important in elevating the dialogue on furthering relations between cities. He hoped that the South African delegation would be successful in finding partners in the United States.

Panelist Alicia Robinson-Morgan, deputy director for the Office of Africa, U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration pointed to the encouraging 23 percent growth in exports to Sub-Saharan Africa last year. South Africa, in particular, was a favored U.S. export destination. She listed the top 10 U.S. states trading with South Africa and encouraged using these already established ties as a platform to form sister city relationships and furthering business.

Scott Eisner, executive director, International Division and Africa Business Initiative, U.S. Chamber of Commerce was the second panelist. He suggested that *Sister Cities International* could be a key lynchpin to get the Chamber's small business members engaged in building relationships with South African cities. Mr. Nolan also encouraged the South African mayors to use sister cities to find life-long business "friends" in the United States. He was optimistic that demand in both the United States and South Africa would facilitate job creation and a win-win trade relationship.

The third panelist, Wanda Felton, first president and vice chair, Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank of the United States highlighted her organizations mandate to increase their activity in Sub-Saharan Africa. She said sister cities partnerships are a great way to identify business partners. She also encouraged sister city networks to bring forth transactions that the Ex-Im Bank could assist with.

Councilor Mpho Nawa of the South African Local Government Association, in his response, said it was important to engage local governments. Sister city relationships would also help South Africa's nascent local government system in attaining maturity through assistance in human development.

Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, Embassy of the Republic of South Africa, provided the closing remarks. He urged the visiting mayors to provide a project plan within three months of their return, building on their meetings with U.S. officials and encouraged them to "give life to today's discussion."

Given the trend within the *Sister Cities International* network of looking beyond exchanges, we will continue working on furthering dialogue on leveraging sister city relationships to drive economic growth. This together with increased training and institutional access, including to federal resources, will aid the integration of local economies in international trade and business.

About *Sister Cities International*
Sister Cities International facilitates nearly 2,000 partnerships in 136 countries on six continents between 600 communities in the United States with similar municipalities abroad. *Sister Cities International* represents citizen diplomats who work tirelessly to promote the organizations' mission of creating world peace and cultural understanding through economic and sustainable development programs, youth and education projects, arts and culture, and humanitarian assistance.

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