

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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July 22, 2014
Start: 2:13 p.m.
Recess: 2:40 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm,
14th Floor

B E F O R E: CARLOS MENCHACA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Peter Koo
Rafael Espinal
Mathieu Eugene
Daniel Dromm

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jennifer
Resident/Immigrant
New York City, NY

Dominic Tammy
Resident/Immigrant
New York City, NY

Sylvie Bello
Executive Director
Cameroon American Council

Brahim Aba
Resident/Immigrant
New York City, NY

Jeremy Mack
Representative
The Black Institute

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so
3 much and buenas tardes, everyone. My name is
4 Carlos Menchaca. I'm the chair of the City
5 Council's Immigration Committee. I'm joined here
6 by several members of the City Council, including
7 our council staff counsel, both Jennifer and Jolene
8 and we have Peter Koo here with us, Council Member
9 and Council Member Rafael Espinal from Brooklyn.
10 Thank you so much for being today.

11 The Immigration Committee will hear and
12 vote on a preconsidered resolution sponsored by
13 Council Member Debbie Rose, urging the President of
14 the United States to include comprehensive
15 immigration reform and issues of importance to
16 African immigrants and the African Diaspora on the
17 agenda for the 2014 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.
18 This is very timely because President Obama is
19 hosting a three day U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit
20 beginning August 4th in Washington, D.C. During
21 this summit, the President will welcome leaders and
22 government officials from 48 African nations.

23 According to the White House, the goal
24 and the purpose of the summit is to strengthen ties
25 between the United States and Africa. Many

1
2 advocates believe that in order to accomplish this
3 goal, comprehensive immigration reform must be
4 included in the agenda. The lack of comprehensive
5 immigration reform has deeply affected the more
6 than 1.6 million African immigrants living in the
7 United States. Many African immigrants struggle
8 with family immigrant visa backlogs, issues in
9 asylum and refugee processes, student visa issues
10 and concerns over ongoing deportation policies.
11 This summit has the potential to not only allow
12 world leaders to discuss issues of concern in
13 Africa, but also in the United States and more
14 specifically here in New York City. Additionally,
15 the summit will give President Obama yet another
16 opportunity to discuss comprehensive immigration
17 reform with world leaders.

18 This is an opportunity for us to inject
19 our voice as citizens of this incredible city and
20 I'm really proud, as chair, to be supporting this.
21 I would like to thank everyone for attending this
22 afternoon's hearing and I am looking forward to
23 hearing your testimony and before that I want to
24 read a statement from Council Member Debbie Rose.

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2 I am proud to sponsor this resolution
3 calling on President Obama to include comprehensive
4 immigration reform on the agenda for his first
5 U.S.-Africa Summit taking place on August 4th
6 through the 6th, 2014 in Washington, D.C. I wish
7 to thank the Speaker for helping to bring this
8 resolution to a vote prior to the summit dates and
9 to thank Immigration Committee Chair Carlos
10 Menchaca for adjusting his schedule to hold this
11 hearing so swiftly. I also wish to thank all the
12 people who are taking time out of their busy
13 schedules to testify at today's hearing,
14 particularly as they received very short notice.
15 Your testimony is crucial to ensuring that the
16 concerns of your communities are heard and
17 reflected in the resolution that will be voted on
18 today, Thursday, at the Council's... or sorry, will
19 be voted on Thursday at the Council's Stated
20 meeting.

21 When the White House announced the
22 summit in January, the stated purpose was to
23 enhance and refine the focus of work the United
24 States is doing on the African continent and to
25 support African people and to strengthen ties with

1 the leaders of African nations. 47 African
2 presidents are expected to attend this important
3 meeting. My district is affectionately known as
4 "Little Liberia" and has the largest Liberian
5 population of any city outside of Africa. The
6 North Shore of Staten Island is also home to many
7 immigrants of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, the
8 Ivory Coast, Guinea, to name a few of the many
9 African countries represented in my district.
10

11 Indeed, the number of African
12 immigrants in the United States has doubled since
13 2000 to more than 1.6 million and New York City is
14 home to a significant number of these immigrants.
15 They contribute significantly to our local economy
16 and to their home economies through remittances,
17 creating a vital link between our two continents.
18 Thus, when residents in my district asked me to
19 bring this resolution to the City Council, I did
20 not hesitate.

21 Our current immigration system presents
22 significant hurdles to those from the African
23 continent who wish to study and to work in the
24 United States. There are also concerns regarding
25 our refugee and asylum processes. The discussion

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2 of this agenda item shall also emphasize our
3 continent's shared interest in securing access to
4 educational and economic opportunities for women
5 and girls throughout Africa, opportunities which,
6 in many areas, have proved fraught with risk. The
7 recent kidnappings by Boko Haram are an extremely
8 disturbing example of these risks. If the
9 obstacles women in exercising their rights were
10 eliminated, it would help assure Africa's economic
11 and social development and in turn would benefit
12 the United States. This is the statement by
13 Council Member Debbie Rose.

14 And with that, I would like to call our
15 first panel to come to the dais and if we can have
16 Dominic, Sylvie (phonetic) and Jennifer to come up,
17 please sit over at the dais. We're going to give
18 you each two minutes to give testimony. If you
19 have anything that's written, we'll take it as well
20 and submit it to record. Thank you. We can start
21 with Jennifer.

22 JENNIFER: Okay, good afternoon,
23 honorable council members of New York City Council.
24 I want to take this time and extend my thanks and
25 appreciation to you on behalf of the Liberians on

1
2 Staten Island for you taking off your busy schedule
3 to be here today to hear us and our plead. I also
4 want to extend my profound gratitude to
5 Councilwoman Debbie Rose from the 49th District on
6 the North Shore. She has one of the largest
7 concentration of Liberians outside of the United
8 States on Staten Island and that number is growing.
9 If you were to get up today and say that the health
10 care workers are not going to work, we'd have a
11 complete breakdown in the health care system on
12 Staten Island because of the African immigrants.

13 What I'm going to tell you here today
14 you won't see anywhere. It's in the 2010 census,
15 (sic) the data well hidden from the public and I
16 will stand here... as I sit here today, there is no
17 number out there to tell you exactly how many
18 Africans live in New York City. The first page of
19 my data says we vote. 46 percent of African
20 immigrants in the United States of America vote out
21 of the 100 percent and 53 percent don't vote, so
22 our voting base is growing. 46 percent of Africans
23 are naturalized citizens in the United States of
24 America. Who we are: increasing number of African
25 immigrants as of 2006, 35 percent of the population

1 in New York City out of the eight million are
2 African immigrants. Jobs: 16 percent of African
3 immigrants work; they are college graduates,
4 compared to 10 percent of the American population.
5 24 percent of African immigrants are college
6 graduates compared to 17 percent [chime] of the
7 American population. 27 percent of African
8 immigrants have some college education compared to
9 28 percent of the American population. 20 percent
10 of African immigrants are high school graduates,
11 but yet today, when you go to the professional job
12 market we are... the representations are not there.
13 African immigrants are one of the most educated
14 immigrants in the United States today. 16 percent
15 of us are highly educated and we have advanced
16 degree compared to 10 percent of the American
17 population. 24 percent of the African immigrants
18 have bachelor degrees compared to 17 percent of the
19 American population, but yet understand when it
20 comes to professional jobs we are not represented.
21 Now to immigration reform: If we have these
22 demographic here, we are contributing to building
23 the American economy on health care, law,
24 businesses we are there, but most times when you
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2 hear about immigration reform, you do not see the
3 faces of Africans and African just missing on the
4 radar. Why? Why us? And we are contributing.
5 You have the data. This 2010 Census says it. As
6 of 2000 up to now it's there, but if I were to ask
7 one elected officials in New York City how many
8 Africans do we have in New York City on paper, not
9 one of them can tell me. We have all the other
10 countries, but when it comes to Africa, there is
11 nothing on paper. So that's the reason why we are
12 here today.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

14 JENNIFER: And I want to also say thank
15 you to everyone for coming to listen to us.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so
17 much. Dominic?

18 DOMINIC TAMMY: Good afternoon,
19 honorable New York City Council. Alright, my name
20 is Dominic Tammy [phonetic] and I'm with Impac
21 Corps [sic] and I work and manage RDCA in Brooklyn
22 and my studio is here in Queens.

23 I think Council Member Debbie Rose...
24 well, I thank Council Member Debbie Rose for
25 bringing this resolution to have President Obama

1
2 prioritize immigration reform at the U.S.-African
3 slate for August 4th through the 6th, 2014 in
4 Washington, D.C. Our organization has joined
5 forces with Cameroon American Council and
6 Congressional African Immigrant Institute to raise
7 awareness about contribution and challenges that
8 African people face in New York and the United
9 States as well.

10 We need immigration reform because
11 immigration reform will affect us positively and
12 negatively if we are left out. As a Diversity Visa
13 Lottery recipient, I have contributed so much in
14 this country. I'm a math teacher, an entrepreneur,
15 an employee, resident of New York City in Brooklyn,
16 as well as Queens. For the sake of this country,
17 our people have stuck their necks out and they
18 don't deserve to be left out. We have lawyers,
19 doctors, teachers, nurses who came here through
20 Diversity Visa Lottery and if this is taken out, it
21 definitely will affect us as people. And this
22 message is for you guys; you know that the African
23 community needs us. To take away hope for our
24 future it would be robbery you know so we're asking
25 for this to be reinstated; the DV Lottery to be

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2 reinstated, as well as the President to prioritize
3 the immigration for African Summit, which is in
4 August.

5 This is very passionate to me. You
6 know, I mean I've been here for a long time. I met
7 Sylvie a while back and he explained to me about DV
8 Lottery. I know as a green card; explained that I
9 was being taken out of the bill. I was a little
10 bit disturbed because when I found out green card
11 and DV Lottery means the same thing, the question I
12 asked was why, so what I'm saying is that we're
13 looking for this to be reinstated because a lot of
14 us are recipients to this you know and by myself, I
15 benefitted from this so much that I've helped out
16 with you giving out jobs. I've utilized my own
17 resources back and forth to the White House to do a
18 lot of things for myself and I can't do it alone,
19 so I'm asking for your help today; the City Council
20 to help us out to make sure that this is addressed
21 you know.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

23 [crosstalk]

24 DOMINIC TAMMY: And it's addressed
25 within the resolution and thank you for giving me

1 the opportunity to actually speak here today.

2 Thank you.

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4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I
5 just wanted to mention that we've been joined by
6 Council Member Mathieu Eugene of Brooklyn. Thank
7 you.

8 SYLVIE BELLO: Bonjour, my name is
9 Sylvie Bello and I'm with the Cameroon American
10 Council and also a representative of the
11 Congressional African Immigrant Institute.

12 We just want to really thank the City
13 of New York; the Council for bringing forth this
14 resolution. New York City is home to 500 African
15 immigrants. This is the largest concentration of
16 African immigrants anywhere in the nation and to
17 have the City Council bring this forth we're so
18 excited and we really thank Council Member Debbie
19 Rose out of "Little Liberia."

20 The Cameroon American Council put out a
21 change.org, which is if you'll look at on page two.
22 The first page talks about our work here in New
23 York City. The second page talks about this
24 change.org, our petition. Over 500 Africans and
25 allies signed a petition telling President Obama

1 that having a summit where our tax dollars are
2 paying for this summit when we send money back home
3 through remittances who are paying for this summit,
4 so as African immigrants who are paying for this
5 summit twice, it is unbelievable that the President
6 and his staff do not see a reason to include
7 immigration reform, the very people who are paying
8 this summit twice. It is not unusual for the
9 President to talk about immigration reform with
10 foreign leaders. When the President was in Mexico
11 in 2013, in between talking about the drug cartels
12 and NAFTA, the President talked about the Mexican
13 immigrants who are making significant changes here
14 in the United States. In May, when the President
15 was in South Korea, in between talking about our
16 great relationship with South Korea, the President
17 talked about immigration reform. Every single
18 March when the President meets with the Prime
19 Minister of Ireland, as you're drinking Guinness
20 and talking about our wonderful relationship
21 between Ireland and the United States, they talk
22 about the 50,000 Irish immigrants who work in Irish
23 pubs who are [chime] undocumented. President
24 Obama, if he's going to meet with nearly 50 African
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2 presidents, it behooves him to talk about immigrant
3 reform for the people who are paying for this trip
4 twice through our tax dollars here in New York City
5 and when we send money back home through
6 remittances and it should be noted that every
7 agency has stated that when we send money back
8 home, it's more than all of foreign aid combined
9 and we're really hoping that each and every council
10 member will join Council Member Debbie Rose in
11 passing this resolution because we can show that
12 the face of immigration is both Asian, is European,
13 is Latin American, as well as Black immigrants.
14 And there are other New Yorkers who have supported
15 this. Congressman Jose Serrano and Congresswoman
16 Yvette Clarke and Congressman Charlie Rangel
17 galvanized 35 members of Congress to send a letter,
18 so with the City Council passing this resolution
19 and voting on a yes on this, what you will do,
20 you'll be joining other elected officials and we
21 really thank you and we're calling on you not to
22 forget the Africans in your districts who are
23 rebuilding and strengthening our district, but yet,
24 our challenges are not known, just like how... what

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2 our... my colleagues mentioned. We thank you so
3 much, merci.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

5 Thank you so much for each of your testimony. We
6 wanted to say thank you again for bringing this to
7 our attention and working with Council Member
8 Debbie Rose to bring this resolution at a time when
9 we can really effect the larger conversation you've
10 really pointed to: the work on immigration at the
11 local level continues and you have to know that
12 this committee is standing strong with you on those
13 issues that are affecting your community,
14 specifically though the things that you kind of
15 really brought to light about the statistics on
16 education and jobs and access to health care and
17 all the things that are affecting all our
18 immigrants continue to be something that we think
19 about: how we can effect a federal conversation at
20 the local level and so you continuing to champion
21 that is part of how this is going to work and how
22 we're going to get stuff done here in the City
23 Council. So we want to say thank you. There are
24 no questions right now from the City Council, so
25 we're going to go into the vote. So I want to say

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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thank you before we call out our last panel. Thank
you so much.

SYLVIE BELLO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And so at this
point, I'm going to call an open vote for this
resolution if you'll take over.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Kevin Pin [phonetic],
Committee Clerk, roll call on the Committee on
Immigration preconsidered resolution. Council
Member Menchaca.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Eugene.

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: May I explain
my vote?

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very
much. I just wanted to thank and congratulate and
commend you know the three wonderful person who
came here to testify and to raise very important
questions regarding African immigration and it
seems that you speak French, you know. [speaking
French]

SYLVIE BELLO: [speaking French]

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: [speaking
French]

SYLVIE BELLO: [speaking French]

COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: [speaking
French] So it is very important when we are talking
about immigration and we are talking about
everybody and it is our moral responsibility to
address the issues affecting all immigrant
regardless of where they came from. That's what
makes our United States such a wonderful and
powerful country and that's what makes also New
York City such a wonderful city and I want to say
that I am supporting this resolution and I will
work with my colleagues, Debbie Rose and the chair
and I want to commend the chair also for this very
important public hearing and I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Dromm.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Aye also. I'm
very proud to vote aye and this is an issue that
has been one of concern for me; having been a
former chair of this committee; oftentimes, wanting
to get to the discussion about African Black
immigrants and sometimes succeeding, but not as
always, as much as I would like to have, so I would

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

like to vote aye in favor of this at this time.
Thank you.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Koo.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I vote aye and I want to congratulate Chairman Menchaca for... and Debbie Rose for doing this resolution. We all know that we have to support immigrants from all countries and especially from Africa. Thank you.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Espinal.

COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: I vote aye and I just want to say thank you for the powerful testimony.

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of five in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions, the item has been adopted and members, please sign the Committee Report.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much for the votes. We are again standing so proud and we want to hear the final testimony from the panels... from this final panel, Jeremy Mack and Aba Brahim [phonetic], if we can have you at the dais, please. [background voices]

BRAHIM ABA: Yeah, good afternoon. My name is Brahim Aba. I'm from West Africa Guinea.

1 [speaking French] Thank you, Miss Rose, for
2 inviting me. Thank you, Sylvie Bello.

3
4 The first thing I think immigration
5 reform I hear was when President Obama during the
6 campaign 2008 he was campaigning about immigration
7 reform. I was working the first four years for
8 Obama. I didn't hear nothing. I have like a big
9 brother that he live in this country from 1988.
10 Today he don't have no paper to going back home.
11 He don't have paper allowed to work. I'm a part of
12 immigration immigrant agency in this country. I
13 live here. I came to America April 29, 2001. I
14 still have no working paper. I travel to New York
15 this is like last month. I was with Sylvie Bello
16 with my organization Portafibanta (sic) I went to
17 see Senator... or Congressman Mr. Jose Serrano
18 about some issues about immigration reform. I work
19 in the Bronx. I work for Democrat party. I joined
20 the campaign in 2013. I worked there like in
21 Project NY (sic). I was helping for helping to
22 immigrant have allowed work. 12... 11 million
23 immigration people live in this country not allowed
24 to work. That's big, big problem of the immigrant.
25 The first thing I can't drive and I can't walk.

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2 Sometime I go to a building, they ask me for ID; I
3 don't have it. I have to show them my passport.
4 Everywhere I go to in America I have to carry my
5 passport. I've been to White House always with my
6 passport. I thank... thank you to inviting me
7 here. Thank you, Sylvie Bello. Thank you, Miss
8 Rose. Thank you all, our City Council. Thank you
9 all, our Congress in New York. You're doing the
10 best job and maybe there are still some people
11 still working and watching. Thank you so much.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so
13 much.

14 JEREMY MACK: And I guess I'll finish
15 it up here. Good afternoon, you guys. Good
16 afternoon, Council City of... the City Council of
17 New York. I'm here representing the Black
18 Institute. My name is Jeremy Mack. I guess most
19 of the stuff that we really need to say has been
20 said and we've had the votes, but just to put in a
21 couple words, so as representing the Black
22 Institute we agree with the statements made by
23 Council Member Rose on the inclusion of immigration
24 as a topic to be discussed at the U.S.-African
25 Leaders Summit. According to most recent census,

1 foreign born African immigrants represent over 1.6
2 million individuals residing in the United States.
3 Moreover, the U.S. is a destination for 59 percent
4 of Nigeria's high-skilled immigrants, along with 47
5 percent of those from Ghana and 29 percent from
6 Kenya. In New York State alone, there is a
7 population of 171,788 African immigrants, with
8 158,878 of those residing in New York City. These
9 exact numbers though are highly debated, which
10 actually as Jennifer mentioned earlier, with both
11 African immigrant groups and former census workers
12 claiming that in reality, the numbers are
13 significantly higher. Duly noted, African
14 immigrants are the most highly educated immigrant
15 group, with 52.8 percent possessing a college
16 degree and 16.6 percent possessing graduate or
17 professional degrees. Even with these impressive
18 statistics though, African immigrants make
19 significantly less money on average per year than
20 other immigrant groups possessing comparable
21 educational merits and are deported at alarmingly
22 high rates. Also should be noted that about half
23 of the DV Lottery tickets that have been given out
24 have been to Africans and that's besides through
25

1 family connections and refugee status, the DV
2 Lottery is just about the only way that Africans
3 can come to the United States.
4

5 So with this being said, we urge thus
6 the passing of this resolution and to help give
7 voice to those long silenced African immigrant
8 voices and to bring justice to where justice is
9 due. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so
11 much and for just the [chime] representation that
12 you bring as an organization and as a resident.
13 The work of this Immigration Committee that really
14 we're continuing with Council Dromm's leadership as
15 the previous chair and I want to thank him for
16 being here today and supporting this resolution,
17 but really just supporting the common message that
18 all immigrants in this city are our responsibility
19 to advocate for and so thank you so much for your
20 voice and we've already taken this voice, and so as
21 you know, we're in the affirmative to push this
22 resolution to the Council Stated on Thursday, so I
23 invite everybody in this room to come and watch the
24 City Council as they vote... as we vote as a whole
25 on Thursday to kind of witness that moment. And as

1 soon as that's done on Thursday, we're going to be
2 sending that letter with this resolution with the
3 voice of the people of New York to the President
4 and so we want to make sure that this is a loud
5 statement; that's it's a clear statement that we
6 want this topic to be at the summit. So thank you
7 so much for bringing this to our attention. Thank
8 you for working with our Council Member Debbie Rose
9 and making sure that we continue to do this work.
10 This is not the end of the work that we have, by
11 the way and so as we all have said, this is a
12 commitment that we've made. We need to continue to
13 work and how we can make sure that New York City is
14 advocating and creating new policies, strengthening
15 current policies for our African brothers and
16 sisters who are here in the city. So looking
17 forward to working with you in partnership as a new
18 council member and as a new immigration chair.
19 Thank you so much for being here today. And so
20 with that, I will adjourn this committee hearing.
21 Thank you.

22 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Date: 07/29/2014