



**Contact: Melody M. McDowell
Chief Information Officer
773-660-2001 – Office
312-371-8917 – Cell
melodyaka@aol.com**

ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA TO ARTICULATE 100-YEAR RECORD OF ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS AT UNITED NATIONS CONFAB

Chicago, Illinois - August 15, 2008 - Alpha Kappa Alpha's international president Barbara A. McKinzie will articulate the Sorority's 100-year record of advancing human rights when she journeys to Paris from September 3-5 to join other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) affiliated with the United Nations' Department of Public Information. They will meet during their 61st Annual Conference on the theme: "Reaffirming Human Rights for All: The Universal Declaration at 60." She is attending this historic confab at the invitation of the co-hosts: the DPI/NGO Executive Committee, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Office of the High Commission for Human Rights and the Government of France.

More than 2,000 NGO representatives from some 90 countries are expected to participate in the premier international NGO event of the year.

The gathering is being convened at UNESCO's Headquarters on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the adoption and signing in Paris of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration is the first universal statement on the basic principles of the human rights to which peoples of all nations are entitled. "The Magna Carta of our time" has also set the common standard of achievement to which people all over the world should aspire.

Eleanor Roosevelt, an Honorary Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, chaired the United Nations Human Rights Commission that wrote the Universal Declaration in 1948. Her leadership was a major factor in ensuring its passage.

Representing the 225,000 members in 975 chapters worldwide, and in support of Eleanor Roosevelt's human rights legacy, McKinzie will dialogue with conferees on the Sorority's dual missions to speak out against human rights violations worldwide and to act through initiatives that have contributed to the overarching effort to make the world a better place on the local, national and international levels. These efforts, which are inspired by AKA's commitment to provide "service to all mankind," parallel the UN's efforts to advance human rights and mirror the programs and concerns that will be addressed during the Conference.

She will also dramatize why AKA's human rights efforts so inspired Eleanor Roosevelt that the First Lady invited members of the Sorority to the White House to salute them for their human rights strides. It was during this visit that a bond was forged between Alpha Kappa Alpha and the former first lady. The connection was so strong that Mrs. Roosevelt was invited and accepted Honorary Membership into Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's human rights roots run deep. AKA was one of the early champions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. AKA co-founder and co-incorporator Norma E. Boyd was passionate about human rights and led the Sorority in creating the National Non-Partisan Lobby for Economic and Democratic Rights in 1938. Later renamed AKA National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs (NPC), it was charged with building awareness of the broader social needs of all minority groups and helping these groups participate fully in employment, education and public services. This body became the first full-time congressional lobby for minority group civil rights. Through the NPC, in October 1946, Alpha Kappa Alpha became the first sorority to obtain observer status at the UN Economic and Social Council and was represented by Norma Boyd.

Boyd's landmark efforts catapulted her—and Alpha Kappa Alpha—to international recognition, while her resolve to promote human rights propelled her onto the international arena. She was tapped to join an impressive group of thought leaders who provided early input to U.S. government preparatory meetings convened for further consideration and study of the Covenant and Declaration of Human Rights before it was ready for adoption. In 1948, the year the Declaration was passed, AKA was present at the 2nd General Conference of UNESCO. In its September 1948 edition of its official publication, *The Ivy Leaf*, AKA's president, Edna Over Gray, wrote an open letter to the membership, where she embraced the concept of human rights and challenged chapters to incorporate it into their social action agendas.

Gray served as the president of the Board of Directors of the American Council on Human Rights whose members included Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Zeta Phi Beta Sororities, Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternities. In her purpose statement, Gray said that limited resources forced the Council to focus on civil rights enforcement within the United States. However, she acknowledged awareness of “responsibilities in regard to international problems.”

Alpha Kappa Alpha has since expanded its programmatic focus to include human rights internationally and has amassed an impressive record of activism. McKinzie will share the Sorority's human rights triumphs by chronicling the host of programs that have been launched during its century of life. These crusades represent the foundation of AKA and the core reason why the Sorority has emerged as an international force.

Accompanied by first vice president Carolyn House Stewart, former international treasurer Berna Greer, and AKA representative to the DPI/NGO and member of the 61st Conference Planning Committee Ambassador Alice Dear, McKinzie and team will attend roundtables whose broad themes focus on restoring human rights, dignity and justice for all, stressing the importance of human security and human rights, realizing human dignity for all, ensuring freedom from fear, providing access to educational opportunities and promoting justice, protection, empowerment and peace.

Each of these themes has been incorporated into McKinzie’s ESP program of Economics, Service and Partnerships.

During the Conference, McKinzie and the AKA team will interface in breakout sessions and workshops with other global leaders where they will exchange ideas and best practices, as well as explore ways that Alpha Kappa Alpha can intensify its already-strong commitment to human rights.

“Everyone is entitled to basic equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms,” said McKinzie. “The right to life, liberty, security, equal protection under the law, freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to work and to get an education represent the primary liberties to which every person is entitled. Unfortunately, the scourge of oppression continues to be a blot on the global landscape. Through our participation and with our presence, we are affirming our commitment to the lofty ideal of human rights. On behalf of our more than 225,000 members the world over, we vow to be vigilant, to continue to speak out and to mobilize against abuse wherever we see it. Our activism will be our legacy and the ultimate way we live up to our credo: ‘to serve ALL mankind.’”

- ##### -

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority is America's first Greek-letter organization founded in 1908 by, and for, African-American college women. Headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, it is one of the world's leading service organizations. The sorority serves all mankind through a nucleus of more than 225,000 women in over 975 chapters in the United States, the Caribbean, Canada, Germany, Korea, Japan and in the continent of Africa. Barbara A. McKinzie is the 27th International President. The Sorority is celebrating its 100-year anniversary this year and recently hosted its Centennial Conference in Washington, D.C., that was attended by over 25,000 members. McKinzie’s administration is marked by the theme: ESP, which stands for Economics, Service and Partnerships. For more information, log on to www.aka1908.com.