

## South Africa 2008

February 16 - March 1



This was my first trip to South Africa. I had been to Cairo, Egypt in the northern part of the country and had seen the pyramids a few years ago. The southern part of the African continent is equally rich in culture. Both countries have major problems with unemployment and poverty. This trip was partly for business but fortunately it was possible to add some holiday time. It was a tremendously educational experience.

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### Back From Africa



The trip back from Africa took twenty-nine hours. If you include the half day in Cape Town's wine country before going to the airport plus an evening event back home, the forty-five hours made for a really long "day". We left the hotel in Cape Town at 9am on Friday morning -- it was 2am in New York at the time -- and we got to JFK an hour late at 7:30 am Saturday. After waiting for two hours we were told that all the bags were off the plane. Ours remain somewhere between Cape Town, Johannesburg, and New York. We had hoped to see them the next day but South African Airways said it could take up to five days. In spite of the long trip home and missing luggage, it was a really great two weeks. There is much to share -- in words and pictures -- about the country, the people, the culture, the status of technology, and of course, the animals. The index below will be updated as the stories come to life.

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### Luggage Back Too



There is much to write about Africa and Internet technology, but I can not resist sharing about our luggage. We waited in line along with many others to provide information about the size and color of the missing bags. The agent entered the information and gave us a printout that was clearly from a decades-old system.

We were told to give a call after twenty-four hours. I called after 26 hours and was told there was no update and that it could take up to five days. The reasoning was that there may not be room in the next few flights for "extra" baggage -- the classic case of taking care of the new customers rather than upset them by helping customers who have already been disappointed. After continuing to get "there is no new information" I thought to myself that tracking luggage would be a great application for the web. I wondered if the airline had thought about it.

I visited South African Airways ([flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com)) and at the bottom of the "After your trip" page was a link for "**Lost/damaged luggage**". Could it be? I entered the file reference number from the printout and voila! Information about each of the four bags was displayed along with the status. As the day went on the status changed from "No information available" to "Arrived at airport" to "Delivery process underway". It took thirty-six hours to get the luggage but I was impressed with how South African Airways had integrated a very old application with a user-friendly web front end. Apparently the people at the airport are not aware of it. The airline could certainly take some anxiety away and offload an extremely busy call center by informing their customers about the web application and including the url on the printout. The ideal solution would be to have the application automatically generate an **SMS** text message to your mobile phone every hour with the status.

The pictures are uploaded to the **gallery** and the stories will start soon.

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South Africa 2008 - Johannesburg



The South African Airways flight to Dakar, Senegal on the northwest coast of Africa was approximately 4,000 miles and took about seven and a half hours. It was the half-way point on the journey to Johannesburg. From door to door it took just about 24 hours to get to the D'Oreale Grande at Emperors Palace at Kempton Park in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. South Africa borders the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Visiting this beautiful country is quite a geography lesson.

On the arrival night, it was a pleasure to meet Matimba Mbungela, a managing executive at Vodacom South Africa, in person after having exchanged email and phone calls during the prior week. Matimba introduced me to his colleague Chris Ross, the senior sales executive for Vodacom South Africa, who would be host of the conference taking place the next day. Vodacom is a Pan-African cellular communications company providing world class GSM services to more than 30 million customers in South Africa, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. More than 500 Vodacom business partners attended The Future of Technology conference to get an update on the various Vodacom offerings. My keynote at the end of the day offered a view of The Future of the Internet. That evening a delightful gala was held to recognize the sales achievements of the top Vodacom partners and dealers.

Like most conferences, there was an exhibition area where dozens of hardware, software, and services companies showed off their latest offerings. One of the most interesting one was the Firefly, from Grapevine Interactive. The Firefly is a parent-friendly mobile phone for young children. The tiny colorful phone has three prominent buttons on it. One to call Mom, one to call Dad, and one to place an emergency call. The phone can also store twenty parent-approved phone numbers.

Another conference took place later in the week in Midrand at Vodaworld, the company headquarters. The top 200 senior level executives of Vodacom

came together as part of their professional development and to network with one another. The first part of the morning focused on The Future of the Internet and the second half we discussed innovation and how to nurture big ideas. The latter session was based on a [class](#) I led at [MIT](#) in September.

During the second half of the first week we stayed at the [Intercontinental in Sandton](#), just a few blocks from [Nelson Mandela Square](#). The [giant statue](#) of the former President of [South Africa](#) is impressive as is the life of the man who was first to be elected in a fully representative democratic election in the country. Mandela had led the anti-[apartheid](#) movement. We could see [Robben Island](#), where Mandela spent 27 years in prison, from the waterfront the following week in Cape Town. We also visited his [former home](#) in Soweto. The respect for Nelson Mandela is universal regardless of ethnicity or political leaning. He will be 90 in July.

Nearby in [Soweto](#) is Orlando West stands the [Hector Pieterse](#) memorial square. Pieterse was killed at the age of twelve when police opened fire on protesting students in 1976. More than five-hundred were killed in the struggle. [Soweto](#), which stands for townships southwest of Johannesburg, consists of dozens of townships and represents more than a third of the population of the city. The poverty is incredible. Some progress is being made but the results of decades of repression are obvious. The sights are breathtaking and not in a positive way. Hard to imagine that a government rationalized the extreme segmentation and discrimination. After a half day touring Soweto we had lunch in the Dube section of Soweto at [Wandies Place](#). I could not identify most of the food in the [buffet](#) but it was very tasty.

Another half-day educational visit was to the [Cradle of Humankind](#). It was well worth the one hour ride north of Johannesburg into the Gauteng province to see the [Sterkfontein Caves](#) where the 2.3-million year-old fossil [Australopithecus africanus](#) (nicknamed "[Mrs. Ples](#)"), an early [hominid](#), was found in 1947. We literally had to crawl on hands and knees to get to the bottom of the enormous [limestone cave](#) hundreds of feet below ground. Although there was not much light, we could see huge [stalactites](#) and [stalagmites](#) and an underground lake that is fed from more than fifty miles away. Excavation at [the site](#) continues. In case you did not know it, we all came from Africa. The guide said "welcome back". If you are interested in finding the path taken by your ancestors to get from Africa to whatever part of the world you live in, take a look at the [human genographic project](#).

► **Thursday, March 6, 2008**

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South Africa 2008 - Infrastructure



We met **Matimba Mbungela** at **Moyo's** for dinner. It was pleasantly warm at the table outside. It was the first time I had my **face painted** and the first time I had eaten **oxtail**. At the end of the evening there was another first. Matimba insisted on picking up the tab. The server came to the table with a wireless credit card reader. After the card was swiped, Matimba's mobile phone received an **SMS** text message. South Africa has embraced mobile as a key part of their banking infrastructure. After every credit card charge your cell phone receives a message confirming the charge. In fact any debit or credit to your bank account or credit card results in an **SMS** message. Not everyone in South Africa has an Internet connection but tens of millions have a mobile phone. The security is good because most people don't share their phone. SMS has enormous potential for applications of all kinds. The New York Times, Fox News, and others are using SMS for news and election alerts but when it comes to SMS for data oriented applications, South Africa is well ahead of the United States.

Other aspects of infrastructure in South Africa were a mixed bag. Broadband Internet access was available everywhere we visited including the **MalaMala bushveld** (via satellite). Even **Zimbabwe** had dial-up access in an **Internet lounge**. It was \$4 for 15 minutes if you paid cash, or \$8 if you put it on your hotel bill. According to the **Internet World Stats**, just over 10% of the population of South Africa had Internet access as of 2006. I suspect the number is much higher now, especially if you consider Internet Cafes. We saw many of these throughout Soweto. **iBurst**, one of South Africa's largest wireless broadband providers, is planning to roll out 20 000 Internet cafes by 2010.

Availability of **electricity in Africa** is a challenge -- even in major cities in South Africa. When we checked into our hotel in Johannesburg, there was a letter under the door from the hotel general manager saying that if elevators stopped working, the emergency power generator should kick in within eight minutes. There are rolling power outages throughout the country. People say it is due to poor planning by the government. **Rolling blackouts**

are annoying but the bigger problem is total lack of electricity in many parts of Africa. Without electricity it is hard to move water. Without water it is hard to build an economy and grow food. The big potential is solar, as Africa is very well positioned geographically. The [UN](#) and non-profits such as [SELF](#) are trying to break down economic and governmental barriers to exploiting solar's potential.

Finally is mobile communications. I took my [iPhone](#) because that is where all my calendar and contact details are, but when it comes to phone calls and the mobile Internet, the [Apple](#) - [AT&T](#) team does not make it easy. Apple locks the iPhone so you can not put a [Vodacom South Africa](#) SIM card in it -- Apple wants to be sure to get their commission from AT&T. In South Africa, AT&T charges \$2.49 per minute for inbound or outbound calls, fifty cents for a text message, and \$20 per megabyte for data service. (Some modest discounts are available if you sign up for a monthly international plan). Some unwary travelers have forgotten to turn off automatic email retrieval in their iPhone and ended up with thousands of dollars in charges from AT&T.

[Maxroam](#) is an innovative [VoIP](#) company in [Ireland](#). For a little more than \$40 they send you a [SIM card](#) which you can put into any unlocked [GSM](#) phone -- such as the [Treo](#) which I held onto after getting the iPhone for use during international travel. [Maxroam](#) gives you a U.S. mobile phone number. If someone calls my iPhone while I am out of the country it will automatically forward to the Treo. If I want to make a call I dial from the Treo using whatever local [GSM](#) operator is available. The cost for [Maxroam](#) varies by country -- in South Africa it is 39 cents per minute for inbound calls and 49 cents per minute for local or outbound calls. The [Maxroam](#) proposition was very appealing but unfortunately it did not work. I called and emailed the company with no response. If not [Maxroam](#), someone will figure out how to use VoIP to get around the outrageous international mobile roaming rates. Fortunately, I was able to get a Vodacom prepaid card for the Treo. It worked very well for local and international calls. Most international calls were made from the hotel room with my [ThinkPad](#) using [Skype](#) at two cents per minute.

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South Africa 2008 - MalaMala



The most interesting part of **MalaMala** is seeing the animals but I was also interested in the aviation aspects of the trip. We headed to MalaMala from Johannesburg aboard a 29 passenger **Jetstream 41** regional turboprop airliner which is made by British Aerospace. There were two pilots, a flight attendant, and six passengers. I don't think **South African Airways** made much money on the flight. I was impressed with the Jetstream. It has two 1,650 horsepower **Honeywell** turboprop engines with **McCauley** five-bladed propellers. The pilots have a digital radio communications system and a fully digital automatic flight control system. The MalaMala Airport is a different story. The "airport" is actually a mile-long **paved strip** in the middle of the **bushveld**. There are no buildings and the emergency ground resources consist of one fire truck sitting in the weeds. I don't believe there are any navigation aids on the ground. Nevertheless, I am quite confident that the daily flight into and out of MalaMala is as safe as any flights anywhere.

The MalaMala Game Reserve has been in existence since 1927 and claims to be the largest private "Big Five" (lion, leopard, buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant) game reserve in South Africa. MalaMala has 40,000 acres of land with a 12 mile unfenced border with the world-renowned **Kruger National Park**. There are several different "camps" where one could stay -- we were fortunate to be at **Rattray's**. Not only does MalaMala provide an **exciting wildlife experience** but it also is very focused on **preserving and protecting** the animals and the ecosystem. This became evident from the outset when Rob, our ranger, briefed us on the protocol to be followed while out in the bush. No getting out of or standing in the **Land Rover**, no waving of arms, and no making of noises to try to attract the animals' attention.

Each day started at 5:30 AM with a wake-up call from Rob. After a cup of coffee we headed out in the Land Rover with our new friends, Gerhard and Hiltrud, from Germany. In total we made five trips into the bush. Rob and Culver, our tracker, had an uncanny sense of when various kinds of animals



would be in certain places. The reserve has more than 1,000 miles of "roads" and frequently the Land Rover would suddenly pull off into the grass to see one of the big five or other animals. Rob would shut off the engine and we would just sit and watch. The rangers are in constant radio communication with one another to keep each other informed about the location of the game. The animals at MalaMala have grown up with engines as part of the ambient noise of the bush. They were not intimidated or seem to notice us whispering to each other as we were in awe of these great animals. We were typically twenty to fifty feet or so away and sometimes less than ten feet. (see [photo gallery](#)).

We got back to camp at 9am for breakfast. In the afternoon we would meet at 4 PM and head out until 7:30 PM and then meet for cocktails and dinner. All three meals each day were prepared by the on-site natively-dressed staff. Our ranger sat with us at each meal and the homemade food was extremely good. On the second night we dined outdoors in the boma by the crackling fire pit. After dinner it was time to return to our [khaya](#) (Zulu for 'home').

Although the facilities were more than expected, the real attraction was the animals. At departure we received a certificate validating that we had indeed seen the big five. We actually saw many more animals including jackal, hyena, baboons, water buffalo, cheetah, giraffe, zebra plus many different birds and interesting plants and trees. The lioness playing with her [four cubs](#) was a special treat. As usual, I have to apologize for my poor photographic skills but the [photo gallery](#) is worth more than whatever else I can say, except for one thing that I found truly amazing. A [leopard](#) had overtaken and killed an impala. An [impala](#) is a fast runner and weighs 150-200 pounds. They can jump a distance of thirty feet. Whatever it's abilities, it was not enough to get away from the leopard. It dragged the impala to the base of a tree and we sat thirty feet away in the Land Rover watching as it planned the next steps to protect the "kill" from being taken by other leopards or by hyenas. After devouring enough of the meat to lighten the weight a bit, the leopard picked up the impala by the neck with it's teeth and raced straight up a fifty foot tree like a rocket ship. I could barely believe it as I saw it. Leopards are said to be able to carry three times their weight up a tree. The leopard placed the impala between two limbs near the top of the tree with head and antlers and two legs hanging over one part and the other two legs hanging over the other. The leopard then [parked itself](#) spread-eagled over a lower part of the limb and rested. We went back that night and saw [hyena](#) (notice those nasty teeth) laying in the grass hoping the leopard would get sloppy and let the impala fall to the ground. We went back the next day and the leopard was still up in the tree. Too bad

I did not have a night vision zoom lens. Hopefully **this picture** conveys the story.

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### South Africa 2008 - Victoria Falls



If there is a "must see" in South Africa it would be Victoria Falls. My bottom line would be that if you go there to make it a day trip and be sure to fly directly to the Victoria Falls airport. The way we made the trip turned out to very complicated. Just like Niagara Falls are on the border between Ontario, Canada and New York State, Victoria Falls are on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. On the map it looks like you could fly to either place and they would be about the same distance to the falls. In a perfect world, yes, but in this part of the world there was a world of difference.

A bit conservative but we left Sandton at 9am and got to the airport at 9:30 for a 12:15 flight to Livingstone, Zambia. The first surprise, of many to come, was the \$135 per person visa fee to enter the country. Ground transportation had been arranged and two young gentlemen escorted us to a small van to begin the 15 mile trip to the Victoria Falls Hotel. The first stop was at the immigration center as we left Zambia. This was followed by a stop at another immigration center as we entered Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe charged \$50 per person to enter their country. Both immigration centers had long lines of people and trucks. The people are in poverty trying to survive in a country where the government leaders have done nothing for them and have bankrupted the country, but not themselves. Inflation is running at 100,000% while life expectancy has declined to 38 due to 17% of the male population having HIV infection.

We had to remove our luggage and change cars and drivers at the border so that the car service would not have to pay the visa fees. Dozens of huge tandem flatbed trucks carrying copper and industrial materials lined the shoulders of the poorly paved road. Some would have to wait a day or more to get clearance to cross the border. There were people along the road selling various food, carrying huge loads of goods balanced on their heads, and a baboon or monkey here and there. We finally arrived at the hotel after nearly seven hours. The ground transportation had to be paid in U.S. dollars -- no credit cards. After all the government fees -- which likely go to politicians, not education or road repairs -- I was out of U.S. dollars.

The next surprise was that the hotel informed us that there would be a \$20 per person charge to enter the trail to visit the famous water falls. No credit cards. No local currencies accepted -- only **U.S. dollars**. Could the hotel advance some cash and charge to our room? No. They will accept U.S. dollars as payment but they will not give out any dollars. "Sorry for the inconvenience". How do I get some dollars to go see the falls that I have traveled all day to see? You have to go to Zambia to a bank. There are no dollars available in Zimbabwe. I was beside myself to put it mildly -- feeling like I was in a small room with two doors that both said "No Exit". Fortunately, the driver was still in the lobby and he took us to the bank, with stops at both immigration centers, a wait in line to get our passports stamped and change cars again at the border.

The bank in **Zambia** was open and dispenses **U.S. dollars** against an **American Express** card -- except that international money transfers ceased at 3:30 PM. It was 3:45 PM. Back to the car and on to a shopping center five miles down the road to an ATM. After entering my PIN I asked for 1,500,000 Zambian **kwachas**, which I estimated would be about \$400. The hourglass on the ATM screen flashed for a few minutes and then displayed a message saying "This ATM will be temporarily unavailable from 4 PM to 4:30 PM daily". It was 4:15. (The next day a charge for \$402 appeared in Quicken from my credit card account). Back to the car and down the road to another ATM. This time I requested and was able to withdraw 2,000,000 Zambian **kwachas**. Now on to a "Currency Exchange Center". Sounds fancy but it was downscale from a strip mall dry cleaning business with handwritten posters on the wall showing the exchange rate. I presented an inch thick wad of bills and walked out with \$522 plus a remainder of 900 **kwachas** because they don't handle coins. The 900 **kwachas** were worth twenty-four cents.

Back to the car, through the two immigration centers, passport lines, car change, and finally to the Victoria Falls park at 5PM. How long does it take to walk through the park and see the falls? Two hours but they close in one hour so it is too late to go. The day could have been a **Chevy Chase** vacation series movie.

The **Victoria Falls Hotel** overlooks the Victoria Falls Bridge and the gorges below. It is historic, elegant, and tranquil but not necessarily equal to the international acclaim advertised. The main thing going for it is the falls being within walking distance. The rooms are expensive and the food was the most expensive of the trip. Not sure if it was the malaria medication in preparation for MalaMala or the hotel food that made me sick the

following few days. I think it was the hotel food. The wine selection and quality was poor. The dining room was hot and humid -- no air conditioning. The service staff were all very friendly and it would not have been fair to take out the uncanny day on them.

The next morning we walked to the falls. Once off the hotel property we were met with local young men offering various souvenirs for sale. Offering would not actually be the right word -- they were hounding and begging. You have to feel sorry for them but you can't solve the problem by buying from them. One of them had something I had been looking for and when I offered \$15 the few sales people suddenly became a throng that would not leave us alone. We paid our \$20 U.S. dollar entrance fee at a gate and headed into the jungle to see the falls. As we got closer the mist in the air turned to a sprinkle and eventually pouring rain. The sky was blue but the tremendous amount of water from the falls makes the area feel like a rain forest. After an hour we returned to the hotel soaked through to the bone. The experience of the past day and a half made me feel soaked in every way. I was really happy to get back to **Johannesburg** to begin the last leg of the trip -- to Cape Town.

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South Africa 2008 - Cape Town



It was a smooth flight from [Livingstone](#) to Johannesburg from and then on to Cape Town. It was very relaxing to get to the [Cape Grace Hotel](#), and quite a contrast to the Victoria Falls Hotel. Cape Town is a beautiful city, especially on the harbor. There are more shops and restaurants than you could possibly visit in a short time. One of the major attractions of the area is [Table Mountain](#) and the view from the rotating cable car is spectacular during the five minute ride to the top. On some days the cableway does not run because of the notorious high winds for which the city is known. It is also quite a site to see the clouds rise up and cover the mountain like a tablecloth. If you are brave you can do a [Table Mountain Abseil](#) -- climbing down the 3,000+ foot mountain swinging from a rope. No thanks.

There are many things to explore outside of Cape Town, most notably the [Cape of Good Hope](#). The rocky point is called a [headland](#) which means it is an area of land adjacent to water on three sides. I always had thought that the Cape of Good Hope is the southern most tip of Africa, but that distinction actually goes to [Cape Agulhas](#), which is about 90 miles to the southeast. The Wikipedia says that the rounding of the cape in 1488 was a major milestone in the attempts by the Portuguese to establish a sea route to the [Far East](#). More than 500 ships were wrecked trying to go by the Cape and instead crashing on the rocks. You can see water bubbling around the rocks off shore but many ships in bad weather could not. Now with GPS every ship can know precisely where it is and where any obstacles are. We also visited [Cape Point](#) which is just over a mile away. Both are well worth seeing. It was quite a climb to get up to the [lighthouse](#). Unfortunately, the weather gets so bad that the lighthouse was not visible at times and therefore not effective. A few years ago we rounded Cape Horn on a cruise but the weather was so bad I was not able to get a very good picture. [Here](#) are some pictures from Cape Town and the Cape of Good Hope. At the end of the day we made a visit to the [Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden](#). I don't much about [flowers](#) but I have to admit that it was quite

impressive.

No trip to Cape Town would be complete without visiting the wine country. Just like California has Napa and Sonoma, South Africa has eleven different wine areas with nice towns and "wine farms". The region we visited is called **Paarl** and the tour and tasting was at the **Seidelberg Wine Estate**. The views were beautiful and the wines were excellent. From there we rode through **Franschhoek**, where the French first made wine in South Africa 300 years ago. We stopped at **Haute Cabrière Cellar Restaurant** for lunch. The unique restaurant was built into the side of a mountain.

We got to the Cape Town airport at 2 PM thinking we had plenty of time but it turned out to be a chaotic Friday afternoon. We got home twenty-eight hours later. Our **luggage** arrived twenty-six more hours after that. All in all a really fun and educational trip.

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### South Africa 2008 - Giving Back



The **trip** to South Africa was very rewarding from business, educational, and recreational points of view. I feel extremely fortunate to have been able to make the trip. The hotels, wine farms, and bushveld animal sightings were stunning but so too was the poverty. It was very sad to see how so many people have been repressed for decades and are living in much less than decent housing.

Of all the people who are able to fly to South Africa on business or vacation trips, surely the least among them is far more fortunate than those in the depressed areas of South Africa. For those so inclined, are there ways to give back? I have been asking myself that question. Fortunately, there are many choices and I plan to act on some of them.

Among the time-tested organizations that have long-term experience working in Africa are the following...

**Habitat for Humanity South Africa** builds on the basic The Habitat Vision -- "A world in which every person has a decent place to live". HFHSA has been actively building in South Africa since 1996 and to date over 2,000 houses have been constructed across Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

**Africare**, founded in 1971 is a self-help program to assist Africans in the broad areas of food, water, the environment, health, private-sector development, governance, and emergency humanitarian aid.

The **Africa Fund** reaches out to local religious leaders, community and labor leaders, as well as state and municipal officials and their constituencies. The Africa Fund works to support human rights, democracy, and economic development on the continent.

The **African Medical and Research Foundation**, founded in 1952, is committed to empowering the disadvantaged people of Africa. The



organization works in close partnership with local communities, government ministries of health, UN agencies, other NGOs to develop locally appropriate models for improving health, to contribute to capacity building at all levels, and to develop an enabling environment for health improvement.

The **African Services Committee** was founded in 1981 by a group of refugees and provides relief and assistance for diverse ethnic immigrant and refugee groups in need of food, shelter, clothing, medical care, legal services, housing, and employment.

**Books for Africa**, founded in 1988, Minnesota-based Books for America collects, sorts, ships, and distributes books to the children of Africa in partnership with Rotary Clubs, YMCAs, churches, schools, and various community groups.

The **Global Alliance for Africa**, is a Chicago-based group that works in concert with local and international partners to bring medical care to those regions of Africa most in need of help.

The **South Africa Development Fund**, was founded in 1985 by South African exiles living in the U.S. and it works in partnership with community-based organizations to provide financial and technical support to communities disadvantaged by decades of apartheid policies.

All of these fine organizations accept online donations.

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