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198 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10038

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THE UNITED STATES SHOULD NOT LIFT SANCTIONS AGAINST RHODESIA  
(A statement by the American Committee on Africa)

With the conclusion of the highly publicized elections in Rhodesia, there is a predictable effort by some members of Congress to end sanctions and to have the United States officially recognize the new government, to be headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa. This would be a grievous error. Lifting sanctions would not be in the best interest of the United States in its relationships throughout Africa, and further may serve only to escalate the war in that divided country.

So far comment on the elections has focused primarily on the process: were the elections free and fair? The facts are: that only whites, who are less than 4 percent of the population, were allowed, through referendum, to approve the Constitution under which the election took place; that the elections took place under conditions of martial law in about 90 percent of the country; that the presence of 100,000 troops scattered around the country created an atmosphere of unmistakable pressure on the people; that the banning of the political movements which form the Patriotic Front prevented people from fully exercising their right to free choice. Moreover, elections under a Constitution which perpetuates white control over key functions of government in defense, judiciary, police, civil service, put in grave doubt the validity of a process whose stated purpose was to inaugurate majority rule. In addition the percentage of a voter turn-out is hardly the correct basis for judging freeness and fairness. If it were, why are so many Americans critical of elections in one-party states where a much higher percentage turn-out is commonplace?

The fairness of the election procedure in such a narrow context is not the critical question. More fundamentally the question is what the situation will look like in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia a few months from now. Will there be a stable government with which the U.S. should be proud to associate itself if sanctions are ended?

For one thing, the U.S. will probably be aligned with only one other country in the world in quickly endorsing the new government and ending sanctions -- the Republic of South Africa. The United States will be associated inevitably with a government that has been universally condemned for its apartheid and racist policies.

What will Britain do? One thing is certain, if a new government in Britain does lift sanctions (a conclusion which cannot be assumed now) it is doubtful if the Commonwealth, due to meet in Zambia in August, will survive the strains. Key African members of the Commonwealth - such as

Tanzania, Nigeria, Zambia - will not be able to remain in the body, and this will affect other Asian and African members.

The African states and the Organization of African Unity will overwhelmingly reject the government of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia. With this rejection, there is no way the United Nations can vote to lift sanctions.

Furthermore, the tensions within the country will not go away. The guerilla war led by ZAPU and ZANU (representing the Patriotic Front) can be expected to escalate. Bitter competition between Muzorewa and other black leaders is bound to increase. Sithole has already given an indication of this. There is little reason to expect that the white exodus from the country will decrease as the military struggle continues. It can also be expected that the African majority will find ways of protesting the continued privileged position of the white minority in positions of power in the government and the society.

It is very doubtful that this picture could be changed by the simple act of the U.S. ending its cooperation with U.N. sanctions, or recognizing the regime. The practical effect would be a close working relationship between the U.S. and South Africa. Access to Zimbabwe/Rhodesia would still have to be by aircraft, or by train or truck via South Africa. None of the other bordering countries would cooperate. The effect would be also to strengthen South Africa's possible military intervention.

Precipitous action by the U.S. in Rhodesia would be a major calamity. If the initiatives of the Carter administration have had some small effect in giving U.S. credibility in Africa, all this would go down the drain. Congress and the administration should view the developing situation with care over the next several months to see what is going to happen. Otherwise the U.S. will sink back into the old syndrome of alignment with South Africa and with regimes backed by white minorities, a policy which should have gone out with Kissinger.