



American Committee On Africa

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Statement Before
CIVIL RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Michigan State Legislature

January 26, 1982

I want to thank the Civil Rights Committee for this opportunity to speak and to commend the Michigan State Legislature for the leadership it has shown in passing legislation to prohibit the deposit of surplus funds in banks that make loans to South Africa. I speak now to encourage you to build on this foundation and strike another blow against apartheid.

I am going to focus my remarks on why this action is necessary. Action to break the economic ties between the United States and South Africa is necessary because such action reinforces the struggle of the people of South Africa to break the bonds of the racist tyranny under which they live. Such action will speed the day when all South Africa's people can share in the vast wealth of that beautiful and tragic land.

Today it is the white minority who controls the wealth. 87 percent of the land is reserved for whites and 13 percent for Africans. "Coloureds" and Indians live in segregated areas in territory reserved for whites. In that 13 percent reserved for Africans, the Bantustans or homelands, live only 9 million

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people. In 1978, 11 million Africans lived in the so-called white areas. The Bantustans simply cannot support the black population.

Apartheid, fundamentally, is a system which supplies black workers for a white owned economy. In 1976, only 13 percent of the total income earned by Africans was generated in the Bantustans. Africans have to go to the "white areas" to survive. Since there is significant unemployment it is an employers field day, and the pay received by black workers reflects this. In 1980, the estimated percentage of African households in major urban areas below the Household Subsistence Level was well over 50 percent, in Johannesburg 62 percent, in Port Elizabeth 70 percent. Africans make up 70 percent of the workforce and yet receive only 26 percent of the national income.

I want to elaborate on one recent, well documented example of South Africa's apartheid system in action because it illustrates the human cost of cold statistics. In July, 1981, the police raided the black townships of Langa and Nyanga to flush out blacks who had come to Cape Town from the impoverished rural areas without going through proper government channels for migrant workers. Proper government channels are open only to men, and thus many of those who fled the police raids in Langa and Nyanga to set up a squatter camp were the wives and children of migrant workers. Technically they were in the area illegally, although many had lived in the Cape Town area for years.

They set up a campsite which was to last a month. The government tried many tactics to get rid of them. On August 11, the police raided the camp and set fire to its flimsy shelters of plastic sheeting and tree branches. The police burned homes in the middle of winter in a climate that is cold and rainy in August. The government did this because the squatters defied orders to leave. The negotiations dragged on. Minister of Cooperation and Development Pieter Koornhof promised "a new life of hope and better things." The number of squatters increased, because, according to social workers on the scene, the government promised jobs. Then on August 19, in a dawn raid, the police arrested some two thousand men, women and children and carried them off to prison in a convoy of trucks to be removed eventually to the Transkei.

In the process of the arrests and removals, families got separated, children got lost from their parents. It is a scene reminiscent of war--refugees and displaced persons.

The removals were to the Transkei, seven or eight hundred miles away. And many of the people removed would attempt to return to Cape Town immediately because physical survival depends on getting out of the Bantustan.

The options for black people in South Africa are bleak. For many it is a choice between breaking the law and living as a united family, or obeying the law and living with the man in the city and the women and children hundreds of miles away in the rural reserves. It is a choice of living united where there is employment but always being subject to these police raids. It is a

choice of not breaking the law but living separated with women and children subjected to rural poverty.

This is the system that is supported by bank loans and foreign investment. This is the system that you will attack if you pass this legislation.

The South African government is becoming more sophisticated. You will be told that change is taking place, that reforms are being introduced, that blacks are being allowed to hold jobs previously reserved for whites, that black trade unions are being allowed to register. You will be told that these things amount to significant change, that things are getting better and better in sunny South Africa.

Don't believe it. At this moment 179 people are being detained without charge, 92 more than a year ago. In addition, there are 520 security prisoners who have been convicted and 160 people are held under banning orders. In the latest large wave of detentions on November 27, 18 leading trade unionists, labor experts, students and activists were taken in.

One of those recently arrested was Thozamile Gqweta, president of the South African Allied Workers Union. His mother and uncle died recently in a mysterious fire that destroyed their home. Diliswa Roxisa, the woman who was his colleague in the trade union movement and also his lover, was shot to death as she left the funeral of his mother and uncle.

On November 20, the mutilated body of Griffiths Mlungisi Mxenge, a prominent black lawyer and trade union supporter, was found in Durban. His funeral was attended by 15,000 people

who declared open support for the banned African National Congress, the predominant liberation movement that is fighting for the overthrow of the South African government.

I could go on and tell you about the Lutheran pastors detained and tortured in the Northern Transvaal, the mysterious death of Tshifhiwa Muofhe after being held by the police in Venda. Or I could tell you of the less violent but equally deadly side of apartheid, the 70 people who have died of cholera, a disease unknown in South Africa for nearly a century but now occurring with increased regularity. The 7,000 confirmed cases of the disease make the percapita incidence higher than that of India or Indonesia. Cholera is a disease of poverty. It has become endemic in a land where the privileged white minority enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world.

The banned and banished and exiled leaders of South Africa are calling for the total isolation of South Africa as the only way left to force change and minimize blood shed. One of these people, Winnie Mandela, has been banned and rebanned for decades. Her husband, Nelson Mandela, President of the African National Congress, is serving a life term on Robben Island and has been there since 1964. For almost twenty years their communication has been in the presence of prison guards, a glass between them, in thirty for forty five minute snatches, once a year, once a month, twice a month. Yet, Winnie Mandela says, "We consider ourselves very lucky to belong to a generation that will actually

see the liberation of our country."

Please do what you can to speed that day!

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