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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL CONSIDERS ACTION AGAINST CORPORATIONS INVOLVED IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A delegation of Special Committee against Apartheid, led by its Chairman, H. E. Mr. Edwin Ogebe Ogbu (Nigeria), was received by the Mayor and the City Council of the District of Columbia on 24 June 1975. The delegation was informed of a proposal in the City Council to cease business with four United States corporations - Control Data, IBM, ITT and Motorola - because of their involvement in South Africa. At a press conference on that occasion, the Chairman of the Special Committee commended members of the City Council for their action.

The statement of the Chairman of the Special Committee and some particulars concerning the proposal in the City Council are published by the Unit at the request of the Special Committee.]

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NOTE ON ACTION IN THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

On 3 June 1975, Councilman James Coates introduced a City Council resolution to have the District of Columbia City Government boycott four United States corporations doing business with the Government of South Africa, i.e. Control Data, International Business Machines (IBM), International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), and Motorola.

In a 30-page detailed study on the South African operation of the four corporations, issued by the Anti-Apartheid committee for Selective Purchasing, a support group for the resolution, the motivations and objectives of the proposed City Council action are stated as follows:

What is the role of Washington, D.C. in the struggle to end U.S. support of apartheid? How can our community press the U.S. corporations and the government to end their complicity in apartheid, so Africans can attain their human rights and self-determination?

As individuals we can play a role in raising the consciousness of the country on the issue. But as residents of a major U.S. city, we have a potentially even more powerful and meaningful role. United as a community we have an economic power that, if utilized, cannot well be ignored. With a sizable portion of the city budget going to private businesses for goods and services, we have a voice that can be heard in the Board rooms of large U.S. corporations. It is our duty to use that vote.

Many U.S. companies have located subsidiaries in South Africa to take advantage of the high profits. Protest against these firms is taking many forms, but nothing attracts the ear of the corporation like the threat of lost revenue. And these same companies seek something from us - our city's business, including lucrative local government contracts.

Our efforts are aimed at this opportunity to utilize our community dollars spent by the city government in a way that is congruent with basic human rights considerations for peoples caught in the abhorrent apartheid system.

There are four particular U.S. corporations in South Africa - CDC, IBM, ITT, & Motorola - which for reasons outlined in this report, form a small target group which can be feasibly addressed through selective purchasing efforts by our city. Already, the Council of Churches of Greater Washington has ended its business with these corporations, and is calling on others to join the effort.

"As the Washington, D. C. community we have a great responsibility to bear. Washington is a major Afro-American center in this country, a city with a high degree of international visibility, and host to the national government. Thus, our actions and our community values have effect far beyond the local area.

It is with these concerns that there is a growing citizen demand in Washington for a local government consideration of its role in relation to U.S. corporate supporters of apartheid. That is why we seek a city government selective purchase policy that end purchases with the four corporations whose supportive roles in the apartheid system are documented in the report.

The apartheid government's desire for continued authoritarian control over the African majority has necessitated the direct and indirect use of modern technological aids - computers, sophisticated communications, and electronic systems. While realizing the strategic importance of developing internal sources for these products, South Africa still remains quite technologically dependent on nations such as the U.S.

If Africans are to have opportunity to gain a non-discriminatory majority rule in South Africa, this flow of technology for apartheid must be ended."

The Council of Churches of Greater Washington, acting on the basis of research by its Social Justice Task Force, had decided to end purchases from these four corporations as of 1 January 1975, and called on other community organizations to do likewise.

A Community Hearing on United States Corporations in South Africa was held on 23 April under the sponsorship of the Council of Churches and 42 other organizations. The hearing panel, composed of various church, labour and community leaders, considered oral and written testimony from African affairs experts, the corporations and others. At the conclusion of the hearing, the members of the panel adopted a resolution calling on "the City Government, and every one of its agencies, commissions, boards, bureaus and offices, severally, to cease, stop, halt any and all dealings with each of the following corporations: Control Data,

IBM, ITT, Motorola and other subsequent companies that might be determined to fall in this category until such time as these corporations have terminated all operations, direct and indirect, with or in South Africa."

The panel was composed of: Mr. Kwame Afoh, Founder, IBM Black Workers Alliance; Ms. Goler Butcher, Former counsel to House Subcommittee on Africa; Mr. James Coates, District of Columbia City Council; Mr. Charles Cobb, Jr., radio station WHUR-FM; Rev. David Eaton, All Souls Unitarian Church; Sr. Charlotte Hannon, Office of Social Development; Mr. Roy Johnson, Chairman, GUARD (Government Employees United Against Racial Discrimination); Mr. John Kinnard, Director, Anacostia Neighborhood Museum; Rev. Robert Pruitt, Board of Directors, Council of Churches of Greater Washington; Mr. William Simons, President, Washington Teachers Union; Dr. Ronald Walters, Chairman, Political Science Dept., Howard University;

According to an article published in The Washington Post of 4 June 1975, the proposed selective purchasing resolution, unprecedented among large American cities, could cause the District of Columbia Government to replace millions of dollars worth of leased and purchased IBM computers, remove scores of Motorola radios from police vehicles and terminate IBM repair Service contracts from uncounted numbers of electric typewriters in government offices..... "The resolution however "would have no legally binding effect on the city, but its backers said they hope its political and moral force would nudge city purchasing agents to curtail business with the corporations."

According to the same press report, City procurement officials in Washington, D. C. said the District currently does more than \$4 million of business a year with IBM but has no contracts or other business dealings with ITT or Control Data.

On 2 June 1975, Councilman Reverend James E. Coates, introduced the following resolution in the City Council:

"Resolved, by the Council of the District of Columbia, That this resolution may be cited as the "Community Hearing on Apartheid Resolution."

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia finds and has carefully considered and accepted research done through the Council of Churches of Greater Washington by its Social Justice Task Force on conditions in South Africa.

Sec. 3. The research done by the Social Justice Task Force surfaced specific data which singled out Control Data, IBM, ITT, and Motorola, using the criteria of companies having:

- (1) a substantial investment in a wholly owned South African subsidiary;
- (2) a low level of African employment; and
- (3) a high number of South African government contracts.

Sec. 4. The Council of the District of Columbia accepts and approves the unanimous vote by the Council of Churches to invoke a selective purchasing policy against Control Data, IBM, ITT, and Motorola, and called upon all other morally and socially responsible persons and agencies to do likewise.

Sec. 5. Be it therefore resolved that this Council deplore the presence of Control Data, IBM, ITT, and Motorola, and every U.S., European and Japanese corporation doing business in South Africa; their investment and technology support, and entrench the minority regime and enable the minority to maintain its repressive control over the majority and facilitates its enforcement of apartheid, and is therefore condemned.

Sec. 6. Be it further resolved that the Council of the District of Columbia calls upon the D. C. Government, and every one of its agencies, commissions, boards, bureaus and offices, severally, to cease, stop, halt any and all dealings with each of the following corporations: Control Data, IBM, ITT, Motorola and other subsequent companies that we might determine to fall in this category until such time as these corporations have terminated all operations, direct and indirect, with or in (1) South Africa, and (2) Namibia, so long as South Africa continues to occupy Namibia; and that the Council of the District of Columbia calls upon the D.C. Government to advise each of those corporations at least ninety-days from the acceptance of this resolution that it will no longer do business with them and that it is terminating all contracts of whatever kind with such corporations.

ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. EDWIN OGEBE OGBU (NIGERIA), CHAIRMAN
OF THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID,
AT PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL
ON 24 JUNE 1975

I regard it a great privilege and a distinct honour to be accorded this opportunity to meet with the City Council of the District of Columbia.

On behalf of my colleagues on this mission - H. E. Mr. Abdirizak Haji Hussein of the Somali Democratic Republic and Mr. Nicasio G. Valderrama of the Philippines - and myself, I would like to express my gratitude to the Council for inviting us to meet with you.

We have come here as the representatives of the United Nations Committee which has been charged with promoting support to the struggle of the people of South Africa for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Let me say, first of all, that this is not merely a matter of sympathy with the just aspirations of the people in a distant and strange land. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa is as close to every city in the world as its own main street - and not only because of freedom in our present-day world is indivisible.

It was a great American who said that the main problem in the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line. Apartheid in South Africa is, above all, the problem of the colour line in its most vicious form. So long as oppression on the basis of the colour of one's skin exists in South Africa, or anywhere else, none of us can and should remain unconcerned.

Apartheid is also a major hindrance to the refashioning of the relationships between the continent of Africa and the Western world.

I need hardly remind you that only a little over a century ago people of African origin were being sold on the auction block near here. Mankind has abolished the scourge of slavery which caused so much grievous harm to humanity. Africa has now stood up and has committed itself to the total emancipation of the African continent and to securing the human dignity of all people of African origin - because no African State is free or can consider itself free and no African is free so long as anyone is humiliated because of the colour of his skin.

Africa seeks to build its relations with the rest of the world on the basis of a spirit of reconciliation, and the principle of human dignity. But we cannot achieve this cherished spirit of reconciliation so long as racial oppression continues in South Africa and so long as the oppressors of the African people find comfort and support in the Western world.

Apartheid is also a constant and growing threat to international peace. There may not be a bloody conflict in South Africa today, but beneath the surface calm maintained by the ruthlessness of the racist regime, there is a volcano which may erupt at any time - and a conflagration in South Africa will be a racial conflict which will have serious repercussions far beyond the borders of that country.

Apartheid is also one of the vital and long-standing concerns of the United Nations. In a sense, all our hopes for solving the major problems of humanity depend on our ability to eradicate racism which divides segments of the human race.

The problem of apartheid is thus a challenge to all those who believe in freedom, in humanity, in peace and in international co-operation.

We do not regard the struggle against apartheid as a struggle between Black and white, but as a struggle of all the people against the evil of racism, a struggle for the future against a bitter legacy of the past.

Africa has declared that, whatever the past wrongs, the white people of South Africa can stay and prosper on the continent so long as they accept that they are Africans and do not claim a right to oppress Africans or entertain special privileges because of the colour of their skin. We have patiently pressed for a peaceful solution in order to avert the grave dangers of a violent conflict. But we can contemplate no compromise with apartheid. Apartheid is not mere racial discrimination. It is a manifestation of slavery, which must be totally abolished. It is a crime which must be suppressed.

The African people of South Africa have fought for many decades to end this oppression and to regain their inalienable rights. They have been the pioneers in non-violent passive resistance. But they have not succeeded because they confront a ruthless enemy which is in control of the rich natural resources of the country and has enticed many foreign interests as its partners in oppression.

The gold that is hidden in the vaults of the treasuries and the banks, is mined with the blood and sweat of African workers who are herded into compounds and paid one-twentieth of the wages of the whites. The diamonds which shine on the wedding rings come from the labour of the underpaid Africans. The uranium which powers the nuclear reactors and bombs is derived largely from the labour of rightless South Africans.

The regime which controls these resources has used them to benefit the white minority - which has one of the highest standards of living in the world - and to acquire the weapons and other instruments of oppression to continue keeping down the Blacks in servitude.

What is more tragic is that it is able to utilize the resources to entice foreign economic interests to share in the profits of racism. Almost a thousand British companies, and over 300 American companies operate in South Africa under racist laws which deny elementary trade union rights and other human rights to the African people and which declare that no African can rise higher than a man of white skin.

While their own home countries profess opposition to racism, surveys have shown that their executives in South Africa are sold on racism. In order to preserve their enormous profits, they reinforce the system by bolstering its military power and by contributing to its external propaganda. They carry racism back to their home countries where they form powerful lobbies to oppose any action against racism.

But they will not prevail. The struggle for the freedom of Africa and of the people of African origin is irresistible.

In less than a generation, most of the African continent has obtained independence despite all the calculations and manoeuvres of the colonialists. Tomorrow we will be celebrating the independence of Mozambique - on the borders of South Africa - after a heroic struggle for liberation led by FRELIMO. The liberation of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia is not far off.

The question is not the victory of the struggle in these territories, but the role played by Governments, organizations and peoples in this crucial period of the struggle.

We, in the Special Committee against Apartheid, are heartened by the growing international solidarity with the South African people in their struggle. More and more Governments are taking action to isolate the South African regime and to support the oppressed people. More and more organizations, trade unions and churches are getting involved on the side of justice and the right of all peoples to freedom.

We believe that the pressure on corporations which collaborate with South African racism is one crucial front of the struggle. These corporations have not only exploited the African people and profited from apartheid, but have reinforced the framework of racism.

We are greatly encouraged to hear that this City Council will soon be looking into this problem with a view to taking effective action within its own sphere. We wish it success.

We believe, above all, that the education of public opinion against apartheid is crucial. When people know the facts, they will recognize that the issue is not merely one of supporting justice abroad, but one of remaining true to one's own best traditions.

We have come to you, on the eve of the bicentennial of the American Revolution, with faith that the City of Washington - named after the leader of the American liberation movement, - will remain true to the principles of the American Revolution - and that it will recognize the right of the people of South Africa to struggle for liberty and the duty of all nations to support that struggle. We have faith that truth will prevail and that freedom will triumph.