

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

Statement on the Portuguese Invasion of Guinea (Conakry)
December 10, 1970

Portuguese complicity in the recent invasion of Guinea and attempted overthrow of the government of the Republic of Guinea has now been demonstrated beyond doubt and verified by a United Nations fact-finding mission. The U.N. Security Council has condemned the invasion; has labelled Portuguese colonialism a threat to the peace and security of independent African states; and has urged all nations to refrain from giving Portugal military assistance.

In response to this U.N. decision, we call upon the United States - which unfortunately abstained on the vote - to end immediately all military ties with Portugal. As American citizens, we protest in most vigorous terms the continuing assistance given by our government to Portugal, a colonial power which is attacking independent African states in a last attempt to preserve its empire.

The character of the invading force is made clear not only by eye-witness accounts, but also by the more than 100 prisoners taken by the Guinean defenders. It was led by units of Portuguese armed forces. African troops, including both dissident exiles from Guinea and Portuguese regulars, were trained by the Portuguese in neighboring Guinea-Bissau.

The invasion must be seen as a major thrust in Portugal's attempt to maintain colonial rule in Africa. African liberation movements now pin down some 150,000 Portuguese troops in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. In Guinea-Bissau, two-thirds of the country is controlled by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (the PAIGC). The party has built its own schools, hospitals, markets, and local administrative system; naturally it has the support and sympathy of neighboring African states that have themselves achieved independence from colonial rule. Portuguese days in Guinea are numbered, and independence for Guinea-Bissau would be a tremendous boost for the liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique. Conversely, the establishment of a pro-Portuguese regime in Guinea-Conakry and the destruction of the PAIGC headquarters and its leadership would have been a terrible setback for all the liberation forces.

The Portuguese-led invasion did destroy the PAIGC headquarters in Conakry, but the leadership was away. It also razed President Sekou Toure's summer home when he was thought to be there, but he escaped. Prisoners were freed, including Portuguese troops captured in Guinea-Bissau. An expected popular uprising did not materialize. Instead, Toure handed out guns for defense to a hastily organized citizen militia.

Portugal, small, weak, and underdeveloped itself, could never continue its colonial wars without the aid of the NATO countries including the United States. U.S. military assistance to Portugal now includes aid under both the Military Assistance Program and the NATO alliance; training programs for key Portuguese military personnel both in Portugal and in the United States; the loan to the Portuguese Navy of two destroyer escorts since 1953 and three new destroyer escorts in 1969; constant visits to Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau by groups of U.S. military, naval, and airforce experts (including, last May, a former director of U.S. psychological operations in Viet Nam); a U.S. Military Assistance Group in Lisbon; and a U.S. airbase in the Azores.

We join the U.N. in urging the end of every such form of military assistance to Portuguese colonialism, and we demand an immediate end to the U.S. military alliance with Portugal.

Signed: