

*Ella Baker - Nelson Mandela Center*  
*for Anti-Racist Education*  
*University of Michigan*  
*c/o 200 W. Engineering Building*  
*Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1092*

June 5, 1990

*International  
Advisory Board:*

*A. Sivanandan,  
Institute of Race Relations  
London*

*Prexy Nesbitt  
Consultant - Mozambican  
Government*

*Tanaquil Jones  
Student / Community Activist  
New York City*

*Dr. Aldon Morris  
Sociologist  
Northwestern University*

*Coordinator:*

*Pam Nadasen*

Dr. James Duderstadt, President  
University of Michigan  
Fleming Administration Building  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

Dear Dr. Duderstadt,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Free South Africa Coordinating Committee and the Advisory Board of the Ella Baker - Nelson Mandela Center for Anti-Racist Education regarding the upcoming visit of Mr. Nelson Mandela to the Detroit area on June 28. Our understanding is that the University of Michigan is attempting to present Mr. Mandela with an honorary degree either by arranging for him to visit Ann Arbor or by presenting the degree to him at his public address in Detroit.

As you know, the University's decision to confer an honorary degree upon Mr. Mandela in absentia in 1987 came about largely as a result of the effort and determination of a core of committed student activists in the Free South Africa Coordinating Committee (FSACC) and later the United Coalition Against Racism (UCAR). It was FSACC members who initially approached Prof. Thomas Holt with the idea of nominating Mr. Mandela for such an honor. These same students, the two of us included, circulated petitions, rallied, lobbied the Board of Regents, solicited letters of support from around country, and on two occasions, occupied the administration building demanding that the University of Michigan honor Nelson Mandela. In May of 1986, when the University flatly refused to honor Mandela, citing a technicality in the Regental by-laws that would not allow such a degree to be conferred in absentia, FSACC held its own honorary degree ceremony on the campus Diag. More than 250 graduates and their families attended the ceremony at which the Honorable Congressman George Crockett delivered a moving keynote address, indicting the University for its hypocrisy and short-sightedness in declining to officially honor Mandela. A plaque was then presented to Thabi Nyide Ndaba, a representative of the African National Congress, who accepted the award on behalf of Mr. Mandela and the ANC. A full year later, and after continued and escalating pressure, the University finally conceded to honor Nelson Mandela in the Spring of 1987.

At this juncture, when Mr. Mandela is being heralded the world over for his selfless defiance against Apartheid, and as the edifices of the current South African regime are on the verge of crumbling, Mr. Mandela apparently has many new-found friends. Many of the institutions and individuals who are now eager to embrace and honor Mr. Mandela were either silent about

Apartheid, or worse, were steadfastly on the wrong side of the issue, only a few short years ago. As you have rightfully acknowledged on many occasions in the past, it has been the student activists of this University and their counterparts across the country who have repeatedly forced the issues of racism and human rights into the forefront of the University's collective consciousness. We could not agree more. Thus, given the pivotal role of student anti-Apartheid activists have played in the campaign to honor Mr. Mandela, it is clearly appropriate that student activists be integrally involved in any plans to bestow these honors upon Mr. Mandela directly. For the University to do otherwise would not only be hypocritical and dishonest, but would represent a direct slap in the face to everything Mr. Mandela stands for. To have African American student activists standing outside the gates as University of Michigan officials attempt to take the credit for honoring Mandela would be an insult and an outrage.

We have discussed these sentiments with our friends in the African National Congress and members of the Detroit Mandela Reception Committee, all of whom share our concerns. We are now contacting you with the expectation that some dialogue can occur which will guarantee the full participation and input from anti-Apartheid student activists in the upcoming events. We feel Prof. Holt should be contacted for his input as well. In honoring Mr. Mandela, we hope the University will also honor and respect the democratic values Mr. Mandela, the African National Congress, and the still-embattled freedom fighters of South Africa stand for by being open and inclusive in its deliberations regarding Mr. Mandela's visit. We look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Sincerely,



Barbara Ransby  
(313) 769-8549



Pam Nadasen  
(313) 936-1809  
(313) 747-8251

cc: Mr. Larry Simmons, Detroit Mandela Reception Committee and Mayor's Office, City of Detroit  
Mr. David Ndaba, African National Congress  
Ms. Paquetta Palmer, Detroit Mandela Reception Committee  
Ms. Akua Budu Watkins, National Mandela Reception Committee  
Mr. Victor Mashabela, African National Congress United Nations Observer Mission, New York City  
Dr. Charles Moody, Vice Provost for Minority Affairs, University of Michigan  
Mr. Walter Harrison, University of Michigan Administration  
Prof. Thomas C. Holt, University of Chicago  
Mr. Hector Delgado, former chair of FSACC Mandela Committee