

To: Southern Africa Staff

From: Jerry Herman

Subject: MONTREAL SEMINAR ON "WOMEN UNDER APARTHEID"

Date: May 30, 1980

The seminar opened Friday night, May 9 and closed Sunday, May 11. I judged that well over 200 people attended, mostly women. The seminar was designed for North America and the Caribbean. Each area was substantially represented. For example, Cuba and Guyana were both present and played a helpful role in the workshop on assisting women under apartheid. Other participants included representatives of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress, the South African black consciousness movement and a range of other Canadian and American organizations.

The program opened with speeches by a panel of black South African women. They included Elizabeth Sibeko, wife of assassinated PAC leader, David Sibeko and ANC's Florence Mphosho. Both took strong positions on the rightness of their struggle, divestment, the anti-bank loan campaign and the need for North American and Caribbean women to support their efforts. Their seriousness and strength set a very serious note for the conference. Other speakers included representatives of the organizations of African Unity and the Lignes des femmes du Quebec.

A yet unreleased and unfinished film titled "Women Under Apartheid" was shown on Friday and Saturday evening. The highlight of the film was an interview with Winnie Mandela who discussed the need for women under a repressive system to struggle against that system.

On Saturday morning, the four commissions/workshops began their task. All were task oriented and proceeded relatively smoothly. The workshops were:

- A. The effects of apartheid on the status of southern African women in the rural areas
- B. The effects of apartheid on the status of southern Africa women in the urban area
- C. The role of women in the struggle for liberation in Namibia and South Africa
- D. Measures of assistance for women in southern Africa

I attended workshop D and also aided in drafting that workshop's resolutions. I was heartened and excited by the degree of conscientiousness shown by all the delegates who were a part of my commission. The mood of the conference as a whole was positive and a warm sense of unity seemed to prevail.

The government of Montreal was peripherally involved in that Mayor Drapeau held a reception for the conferees upon their arrival. Then on Saturday, the Minister of State on the Status of Women, Mrs. Lise Payette, hosted a lunch for all delegates.

The workshops convened all day Saturday and again Sunday morning from 9:30 to 12:00. The plenary session began at 2:00 p.m. Each workshop chairperson reported to the plenary the resolutions their commission adopted. The resolutions approved by Workshop D are attached to this memo.

I came away from the conference with a heightened awareness of the condition of women who live under apartheid. The conference included a number of women that were demonstrably political and, of course, there were women who were not. Regardless of political orientation and sophistication, there seemed an attempt by most of the participants, political or not, to promote a sincerely felt unity of purpose.

Note: I have requested from the conference staff, copies of resolutions from the other three workshops and when they arrive, I will send them along to you. I have also talked with them about the possibility of getting the video tapes of the proceedings, especially of the major speakers, if and when I do, I will make some arrangement to route them through our network.

JH/jc

Enc:

I.

1. The Seminar reiterates the principles proclaimed by the United Nations in a number of conventions, resolutions and declarations that discrimination on grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin or sex is an offence to human dignity, a violation of the rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a threat to international peace and security.

2. The Seminar declares its abhorrence of apartheid, the most extreme manifestation of racism and racial discrimination, and reaffirms its support and solidarity for the oppressed people of South Africa and Namibia and their national liberation movements. It pledges itself to promote the widest possible awareness and action to secure the total elimination of apartheid and the liberation of South Africa and Namibia.

3. The Seminar urges all governments, organizations and individuals to provide all necessary assistance, both moral and material to the oppressed people of South Africa and Namibia and their national liberation movements in their just struggle for freedom and human equality.

4. The Seminar condemns the continuing acts of aggression by the racist régime of South Africa against independent African frontline States and its illegal occupation of Namibia and the application of apartheid

in that international territory.

5. The Seminar further condemns the assistance provided by these States in this hemisphere to South Africa which maintain military, political and economic links as well as sports and cultural contacts with South Africa, hence perpetuating the régime and the system of apartheid. It calls upon these States to immediately cease any assistance to or cooperation with the South African régime and to prevent companies or institutions within their jurisdiction from any such assistance or cooperation.

6. The Seminar hails the overwhelming victory of the people of Zimbabwe under the leadership of the Patriotic Front Alliance.

II.

7. The Seminar recognizes the critical phase of the struggle in Namibia and expressed its full support for SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people in their fight for national liberation and self-determination.

8. The Seminar expresses the gravest concern over the oppression of millions of black women in South Africa, who suffer triple discrimination on grounds of class, race and sex. The Seminar also expresses the gravest concern over the plight of children in South Africa. The Seminar recognizes that this is a heinous crime against humanity.

9. The Seminar recognizes the critical need to effectively assist women in South Africa and Namibia in both the struggle for national liberation and to enable them to make their full contribution to the reconstruction and development of the country after liberation.

10. The Seminar declares the unequivocal support and solidarity of women and men from this hemisphere with the oppressed women and men of South Africa.

11. The Seminar calls on all organizations to demonstrate their support and solidarity with the women of South Africa and Namibia in particular to:

- a) give the widest possible dissemination of information about the situation of women in South Africa and their plight for equality and justice;

b) initiate national campaigns for the release of all political prisoners in South Africa;

c) provide legal, political, humanitarian and other assistance to women who are victims of apartheid and their families in South Africa;

d) hold sub-regional and national meetings throughout the hemisphere on the plight of women under apartheid;

e) urge Governments in the hemisphere to contribute and/or increase their contributions to the various funds established by the United Nations, and by regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that support the oppressed people of South Africa;

f) provide financial assistance to women in the national liberation movements in South Africa to enable them to attend major international conferences, seminars and speaking tours to further promote international solidarity with the oppressed women of South Africa.

g) support the projects of the national liberation movements recognized by the Organization of African Unity, particularly those for women and children.

Recommendations of Commission 4 on Measures
of Assistance

(1) Having studied and discussed the background document "Measures of Assistance for Women in Southern Africa" prepared by the United Nations, we warmly commend it to delegates to Copenhagen, to the Non-Governmental Organization Forum and to support groups in general. We strongly recommend its endorsement by the United Nations acting on behalf of the international community. We recommend further that full-time staff, especially women, with appropriate material support, be provided to monitor, coordinate and follow-up on the fullest implementation of these measures of assistance to women in South Africa and Namibia.

We endorse this comprehensive program of action prepared by the UN, which includes:

- a) International solidarity with the oppressed peoples of South Africa and Namibia. Particular pressure should be put on governments and nongovernmental organizations to refrain from political, military and economic collaboration with apartheid; to isolate the regime in the areas of sports and culture; and to ratify UN resolutions opposing Apartheid. Further, the document contains specific actions pertaining to public education and information, a specially-designated South African Women's Day, political lobbying of governments by women's groups, cultural activities, public hearings and research.
- b) Legal, humanitarian, moral and political assistance to women with special emphasis on aid to those who suffer imprisonment and deprivation inside South Africa and Namibia, and material aid for those in refugee camps outside.

- c) Training to integrate women into the fullest participation, including leadership roles, within the liberation movements. UN agencies should set up new women's task forces to forward this work.
- d) Training and assistance to enable women to play active roles in reconstruction after liberation. Present scholarship funds are inadequate and special opportunities are needed for those who have little formal education. Special attention needs to be given to agricultural training.
- e) Opportunities for women involved in the struggle to study employment and to learn how to overcome the exploitation of female labor with regard to child labor, maternity benefits, wages and employment opportunities. The ILO should be asked to push forward this program through seminars and study tours.

We recommend that these measures of assistance be reproduced as a plan of action, for wide distribution, in a form and language for popular consumption.

(2) We want to stress the importance of involving the widest possible range of individuals and organizations, particularly women and women's groups, in the struggle against apartheid. These include religious organizations, church groups, community groups, labor unions, civic and educational organizations and others. We further urge that the press be educated and enlisted to assist these efforts.

(3) We recommend that support groups and others ~~be~~ organize ~~for~~ the widest possible dissemination of information about South African and Namibian women, for example in the form of books, pamphlets, magazines, films, audio-visual and other forms of media. We welcome the initiative of the UN in promoting conferences on Women Under Apartheid and we encourage the organization of similar conferences for educational and material support purposes at the community, regional, national and international levels. We recommend the participation of women in the liberation struggle to participate in these meetings and that the Special Committee on Apartheid facilitate their participation.

(4) Non-governmental organizations are encouraged to show support through such activities as divestment, boycotts of South African goods, opposition to bank loans to South Africa and Namibia, the sponsoring of South African and Namibian refugees and other action-oriented campaigns. We also recommend the organization of vigilante groups and coalitions to ensure governmental compliance with all UN resolutions and official public positions pertaining to South Africa and Namibia.

(5) We call for renewed efforts to work for the release of political prisoners in South Africa and Namibia.

(6) We call upon all nations to grant political asylum to women and men from South Africa and Namibia who have suffered the consequences of apartheid.

(7) We call upon all nations to extend asylum to South Africans and Namibians who refuse to defend the apartheid system, by serving in the Armed Forces, for political or ~~xxx~~ moral reasons of conscience.

(8) We strongly urge that the international community call upon the International Red Cross to investigate practices of torture and mistreatment of prisoners, including atrocities directed against women as they are actively involved in the struggle in growing numbers.

(9) The international community to press for abolition of bannings, detention without trial and torture as violations of International Human Rights Laws.

(10) We condemn all countries which engage in or condone the exploitation, oppression and dehumanization of any people, be it within their own country or in any other.

Submitted by

Gayla Cook,
vice-chairperson

Micheline Laflame,
rapporteur