

Statement by Ambassador Dumisani S. Kumalo on Death of Paul Irish, a Leader of the US Anti-Apartheid Movement

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United Nations, New York, 01 April 2004: The Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations has learnt with sadness of the death of Paul Irish, a leader of the US anti-apartheid movement, who died on Monday in New York.

The Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Ambassador Dumisani S. Kumalo Ambassador, said “Paul Irish was one of the unknown contributors to our Ten Years of Democracy. It is important that we remember all those that played a role in the global struggle against apartheid. I am certain that friends of Paul, particularly those in the Government of South Africa, will miss him”.

Paul Irish was Associate Director of the African Committee on Africa and its associate, The African Fund, both major US national organisations supporting African struggles against colonialism and apartheid from the early 1970s through the early 1980s. He worked closely with the African National Congress, SWAPO and the other African liberation movements throughout the continent.

In 1977 he played a key role in the campaign against the sale of the South African gold coin, the Krugerrand, which resulted in the department store Abraham and Straus stopping sales of the coin. That same year he released a document proving that Polaroid products were being sold to the South African government’s Bantu Reference Bureau, responsible for African passes, despite the company’s claim that no sales were made to the government. This resulted in Polaroid ending all sales in the country which marked the beginning of disinvestment from South Africa as many US companies followed suit.

Paul Irish also played a key role in the campaign to get US colleges, churches, states and cities to divest from companies doing business in apartheid South Africa. He arranged for material support for refugee camps for exiles from South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

After democracy came to South Africa in 1994, Paul Irish went back to teaching kindergarten kids which was always his first love.

Issued by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations