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SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 565th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Tuesday, 7 May 1985, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. GARBA (Nigeria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

2. The CHAIRMAN stressed the extreme gravity of the current situation in South Africa and the imperative need for urgent action to end the violent and repressive policies of the apartheid régime. If the Pretoria régime was serious about change, it would abolish the laws banning the African National Congress of South Africa and the Pan African Congress of Azania and other organizations, and negotiate with the real leaders of the people in order to transfer power to a democratically elected government.

3. Further verbal condemnations of apartheid by the major Western countries which continued to invest in South Africa were unacceptable. He noted with satisfaction that Denmark was enacting a law prohibiting new investments in South Africa. The Nordic countries were studying ways to strengthen the Nordic programme of action against apartheid. The Government of the Netherlands was considering action to prohibit new investments in South Africa and 20 bills had been introduced in the United States Congress calling for disengagement from South Africa. To date, however, the Committee had not received any information on similar action from other Western countries. Accordingly, he suggested that the Committee should write to all Governments requesting information on action taken by them in accordance with General Assembly resolution 39/72 G on concerted international action for the elimination of apartheid and should submit a report on that question to the General Assembly and the Security Council. He also suggested that the Special Committee should urge the Western countries to take action in that regard and call on anti-apartheid groups in Western countries to monitor such action.

4. He had received a copy of the bill introduced by the Government of Sweden in Parliament in order to strengthen a law enacted in 1979 to prohibit new investments in South Africa. He suggested that the Special Committee should encourage other Western Governments to enact similar legislation and should give serious attention to the question of imposing an oil embargo against South Africa.

5. Lastly, in connection with the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the defeat of nazism in Europe, he recalled that the Special Committee had repeatedly pointed to the devastation caused by nazi racism in calling for effective action to eliminate racism in South Africa.

6. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the suggestions which he had just made.

7. It was so decided.

HEARING OF STUDENT LEADERS

8. The CHAIRMAN said that the Special Committee deeply appreciated the action taken by student groups in the United States in support of the campaign for divestment. The peaceful demonstrations on campuses and the calls for divestment of holdings in corporations engaged in business with South Africa were a concrete expression of solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa. Such action was in full accordance with United Nations principles and objectives and could constitute a dynamic force in the promotion of international peace and co-operation.

9. The activities of student groups were particularly important in view of the increasingly violent situation in South Africa. The recent brutal killing of more than 40 innocent persons on the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 demonstrated the ruthlessness of the apartheid régime. Since the beginning of 1985, more than 300 persons had died at the hands of the military and the police and thousands more had suffered injuries. Heavily armed troops were routinely deployed in the townships to attack peaceful demonstrators. Condemnations of the apartheid régime would lead nowhere if not accompanied by a decisive action. Unfortunately, in spite of their verbal opposition, certain Western Powers were still unwilling to take the necessary action in the economic and political fields. It was clear that the racist régime would continue to pursue its policies of racism and violence unless mandatory economic sanctions were imposed against it. The action taken by the youth groups sent a powerful message of solidarity to the oppressed people of South Africa in their struggle for their political rights. The campaign against apartheid was growing all over the world, particularly in the United States. People from all walks of life had united in opposition to that pernicious system. Such concerted action increasingly focused on the demand for sanctions against South Africa.

10. The Special Committee had on numerous occasions reiterated its concern at the deteriorating situation in South Africa and had recommended the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions against that country in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Such sanctions were the most effective way to bring about the elimination of apartheid by peaceful means. The Special Committee therefore felt that the current campaign for divestment was an integral part of the United Nations call for sanctions and encouraged and supported it. Such action by student groups would help to create the necessary conditions for bringing about a system based on justice and equality in South Africa.

11. Mr. NESSEN (American Committee on Africa) said that the divestment by universities of stocks in corporations linked to South Africa discouraged corporate investment in South Africa and promoted the liberation struggle there. The wave of student protests was primarily designed to achieve that goal. Protests and sit-ins had been organized on more than 100 university campuses during the spring of 1985. The struggle of the people of South Africa and Namibia to gain independence had inspired student groups to organize protests and force the mass media in the United States to give greater attention to the horrors taking place daily in South Africa.

(Mr. Nessen)

12. Since 1978, anti-apartheid rallies had been held on hundreds of university campuses in the United States. More than 40 colleges and universities had divested themselves of a total of \$175 million in stock holdings in South Africa. The American Committee on Africa (ACOA) had played a major role in co-ordinating regional and national student action programmes and providing data on corporate investment in South Africa. It had organized numerous national student conferences and weeks of action in recent years to draw attention to the evils of apartheid.

13. A national day of protest had been organized by ACOA to encourage forms of direct action and civil disobedience in order to heighten public and media awareness of problems in South Africa. The establishment by the Columbia Coalition for a Free South Africa of a blockade at the entrance of a university building had provided the initial impetus for similar activities on campuses throughout the country. Student protest movements were further encouraged by the success of local legislative movements which had brought about the divestment of \$1.3 billion in holdings linked to South Africa by five States and over 15 cities.

14. It was hoped that the momentum of the student protest could be maintained. To that end, ACOA was calling for a national day of protest on 11 October 1985 and was planning to organize in November 1985 a national conference on divestment.

15. Mr. NOGUERA (Steve Biko Sit-in Committee, University of California at Berkeley) said that the student movement of solidarity with the people of South Africa had been steadily growing at Berkeley since 1974. The increased repression by the South African Government and the intensification of the struggle of the oppressed people in South Africa had sparked further activity by students on the campus. Films and lectures had been organized to educate students concerning the nature of apartheid. Protests had been organized to force the university to divest itself of more than \$2.4 billion in holdings in corporations doing business with South Africa. Numerous student protests organized in 1985 had forced the University Board of Regents to reconsider their policy of investing in such corporations.

16. A number of protests and strikes organized in mid-April had received wide student and faculty support. On 29 April, a group of students had gone to the California State Assembly to urge support for a bill calling for the total divestment by the State of California of holdings in corporations dealing with South Africa. Although that bill had not been passed, a resolution had been adopted in the State Assembly prohibiting further investment in such corporations. Subsequently, the speaker of the Assembly had frozen \$160 million in capital improvement funds earmarked for the university in order to put pressure on it to divest. To date over 400 people had been arrested in conjunction with activities organized by the student anti-apartheid movement. As a result of those activities, the University Board of Regents had agreed to discuss its investment policy at its meeting in May. There were plans to mobilize several thousand students at that time to express support for total divestment.

17. Mr. NGUBENI (University of California at Los Angeles) said that the University of California at Los Angeles had investments amounting to \$1.7 billion in corporations doing business with South Africa. As an initial step, students had closed their own banking and credit card accounts linked to such corporations. In March 1985, student protests had forced the University Board of Regents to consider the question of investments in South Africa. The Chancellor of the University had indicated that the Board of Regents would consider the possibility of selective divestment. A number of protests had subsequently been organized to stress the need for total divestment. As a result of student protests and activities, the Mayor of Los Angeles was considering the possibility of withdrawing all city funds invested in companies doing business in South Africa.

18. On 23 April 1985, a rally attended by 4,000 students and community members had been held and a university hall had been occupied for five days in order to focus attention on the need for divestment by the University. The corporations doing business with South Africa did not in any way benefit the overwhelming majority of the black population and served only to ensure the continued existence of the apartheid régime. The Special Committee should broaden its contacts with student leaders and consider the possibility of addressing student groups in order to educate them about the evils of apartheid and increase support for the student anti-apartheid movement throughout the country.

19. Mr. SWIFT (University of Wisconsin Students' Association), recalling that the University of Wisconsin had a long tradition of political activism, said that divestment bills had been submitted several times in the Wisconsin legislature but had not been passed. The lobbying against the most recent - and promising - bill had been proving successful until the massacre in Uitenhage had spurred Wisconsin students to escalate their anti-apartheid activities and ultimately to march on the State capital in an attempt to generate support for the divestment bill. The bill had thus been brought back into the headlines and the Governor had promised to support it. Five public hearings were planned in various parts of the State. He was confident that, once the people learnt how investing in South Africa perpetuated slavery, support for the bill would grow.

20. By acting together with students from other States, Wisconsin students could hasten the day when the people of South Africa would be freed from oppression.

21. Ms. GCABASHA (Anti-Apartheid Coalition) said that a number of speaking tours had been conducted on the issue of apartheid and it was only a matter of time before students in the south engaged in activities similar to those taking place on the west coast.

22. Since there was no South African consulate or embassy in Atlanta, the anti-apartheid struggle was directed against corporations which had ties with South Africa. Demonstrators had picketed outside the Coca Cola company but the company had succeeded in prevailing on the black leadership to desist by claiming that Coca Cola's presence in South Africa could help to bring about reforms. It was essential to explode the myth that companies which adhered to the Sullivan Principles could be instrumental in bringing about reform.

(Ms. Gcabasha)

23. At Georgia State University, the students had held a referendum on two questions: whether information regarding the University's investments should be disclosed and whether divestment measures should be taken once that information had been made available. The answer in both cases had been in the affirmative. Support for the anti-apartheid movement was beginning to be felt also in several institutions in the State of Florida.

24. She suggested that, since the south was still lagging behind other parts of the country in anti-apartheid activities, the Special Committee might like to encourage such activities by holding a public hearing in the city of Atlanta.

25. Ms. KRAUSS (Progressive Students League) said that, although the trustees of the University of Louisville had initially ignored the fledgling anti-apartheid movement and the calls for divestment from the faculty and student body, once the students had occupied one of the university buildings the trustees had quickly decided to call on the University to divest itself of investments in companies that did not adhere to the Sullivan principles. The students had quickly realized that the Government and University were not naively supporting a corrupt Government but that they held money more important than justice or life itself. They had therefore realized the need to support the black majority in South Africa and to fight to end the policy of constructive engagement.

26. Mr. WALLACE (University of Texas, Steve Biko Committee) said that the issue in Texas was the \$600 million (about 27 per cent of the public University's funds) invested in South Africa. The Steve Biko Committee had submitted a resolution calling for divestment to the Board of Regents, one of whose members was the head of Citgo, a company which did not adhere to the Sullivan Principles. The Board had eventually decided against divestment, saying that it would not be an effective way of bringing about change and that the Board was not a political party and should not involve itself in international politics. The student body had then decided to bring the matter before the Texas legislature. Starting in August, the students would attempt to raise the question of divestment of the funds of the city of Austin - they had already received a pledge of support from the Mayor of that city.

27. Mr. IOSBAKER (University of Iowa, Progressive Student Network) recalled that the resurgence of student activism dated from October 1983, when the United States had invaded Grenada. The students had been in the forefront of those opposing the invasion. Although the media generally depicted the mood on campuses as being very conservative and pro-Reagan, that was not so. The current generation of students was very issue-oriented and liberal. The explosive nature of the upsurge was undoubtedly a reaction against the past calmness.

28. Ms. EVENS (Congress for Divestment, Cornell University) said that she was outraged at her University's support of the brutal system of apartheid. She noted that several of the buildings on the campus of Cornell University had been named after trustees whose connections with international corporations doing business with South Africa were well known. For example, the building which housed the

(Ms. Evens)

library had been donated by an executive of a corporation which had been convicted in 1978 of selling arms illegally to South Africa. She noted that the divestment movement was 17 years old at Cornell, yet the university administration refused to insist that the companies in which the University had invested should adhere to the Sullivan Principles. She felt that no university which profited from aggression and murder could be a great university.

29. The students of Cornell University had constructed a village out of cardboard and other discarded materials in order to demonstrate the horrible conditions in which most South Africans were forced to live. Some students were now living in that village in order to show their solidarity with the struggle of the South African people against apartheid. Civil disobedience on the campus had begun on 18 April and still continued, with a hunger strike now in its eighteenth day. The goal of such demonstrations was to obtain total and immediate divestment by the university.

30. Ms. BALDWIN (Coalition against Apartheid, Yale University) said that one of the hazards of university activism was that urgent matters of life and death often became fodder for scholarly debate and never led to any concrete actions. Despite years of academic debate at Yale University, which had produced reams of documentary evidence that American-based transnational corporations had not improved the living conditions of the South African people in general, and which had developed "clean" investment portfolios to demonstrate that divestment could take place within the limits of fiduciary responsibility, the wall of opposition had not yet been penetrated. The various committees which had been established to study the criteria for deciding which investments should be withdrawn had been led to take the absurd position that a company whose operations had led to the deaths of only a few persons should be exempt from consideration for divestment. The purpose of the vigil held on 30 April and 1 May had been to inform Yale University that granting indulgence to small-scale oppressors would not be tolerated.

31. There was ample evidence that university divestment would lead to corporate withdrawal from South Africa and to the eventual downfall of the apartheid régime. If universities knowingly invested in companies which had dealings with South Africa, they were investing in murder. Therefore, the Coalition against Apartheid would not abandon its struggle until victory had been assumed.

32. Ms. PITTS (Coalition for Total Divestment, Rutgers University) said that Rutgers University had adopted a policy of partial divestment in May 1984. However, the rally held on 12 April 1985 had demonstrated the students' feeling that partial divestment was not enough. The various groups working against apartheid should aim at the consolidation and growth of the anti-apartheid movement on campuses throughout the nation. Local, State and national legislatures should be lobbied and made aware that support of apartheid was support for institutionalized murder. She noted that a bill was pending before the New Jersey State Legislature which would withdraw investments of New Jersey pension funds from corporations doing business with South Africa, and she hoped that the Special Committee would send a note to the State Legislature acknowledging that bill.

/...

(Ms. Pitts)

Lastly, she urged the campus movements not to abandon their cause with the attainment of divestment.

33. Mr. MEYERS (Endowment for Divestiture, Princeton University) said that concerted action had been taken against apartheid at Princeton University, where two divestiture groups were active. The fact that a movement was taking place at Princeton, a campus that was considered to be conservative, was proof that the struggle against apartheid was not a fringe cause but a nation-wide issue. Rallies, teach-ins and debates had been held on the campus, and a "bantustan" of shacks and tents had been set up to create awareness of the problem among the students.

34. Action was being taken on two fronts: attempts to convince the trustees and the President that the university must cease to invest in companies dealing with South Africa, and attempts to educate the university population. The goal of the Princeton movement was complete divestiture within two years. Although tactics might differ in the various universities, the activist groups on all campuses should persevere in their attempts to inform the public and to support anti-apartheid legislation, all of which should be done quickly in view of the increasing violence of the situation.

35. Mr. JENNINGS (United States Student Association) said that, although his organization was mainly an educational lobby group, the policies of the present United States Administration had led it to become involved in international issues, in particular those concerned with human rights and apartheid. The growing disillusionment with the Reagan policy of constructive engagement had led to widespread demonstrations whereby students, by picketing, sit-ins and even sleep-ins, had sent a symbolic message to their university administrations and to the national Administration. The students who participated in such demonstrations were not idealists; they were aware that only the people of South Africa and Namibia themselves could bring about their own liberation. However, the students believed that there could be no compromise with the apartheid system, and that the entire social and economic structure must be torn up by the roots.

36. Mr. HIRSCH (Coalition for a Free South Africa, Columbia University) said that the struggle against apartheid must continue; it must be organized nationally, however, and must continue into the autumn. The blockade for divestment at Columbia University had politicized students, faculty and staff and had made apartheid a political issue throughout the nation. In spite of what had been reported in the newspapers, however, the struggle had not ended with that blockade. Student groups were currently blockading the offices of the members of the Board of Trustees of Columbia University, who in many cases were also officers of corporations which had dealings with South Africa.

37. The CHAIRMAN thanked the student leaders for their valuable testimony on action taken against apartheid and asked them to keep in touch with the Centre against Apartheid so that their activities could be publicized in the Centre bulletin.