DATE: February 15, 1962

TO: National Committee Members

FROM: George M. Houser

SUBJ.: Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs

I hope that you will pardon the form nature of this communication. I have just returned from spending several weeks in Africa, principally in an area of northern Angola held by nationalists of the Union of the Populations of Angola. I am enclosing my report of this trip.

Upon my return there were several communications on my desk from members of our National Committee, communications related to the letter and material which apparently each of you had received from an organization called the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs. I gather that each member of the National Committee has received this material and has been told that our Committee backs "communist goals in Africa" and is some kind of a pernicious front with which none of you should be associated. To my knowledge, no one has resigned from our National Committee on the basis of this information. Nevertheless, I feel that it is important to make at least brief comments on this attack. I think that you may be interested in the letter which Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr sent to the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs on his receipt of this material.

Just for the record, we have recently learned a little bit more about the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs through a report filed with the Department of Justice by Selvage and Lee, a public relations firm. Selvage and Lee is under contract to a consortium of Portuguese business enterprises called the Overseas Companies of Portugal. According to the Selvage and Lee report their program "involves disseminating and publicizing the accomplishments of Portugal in its overseas provinces and the distribution through all available media of facts to combat false and misleading information relating to current strife in Angola." In their report, Selvage
and Lee indicate that one of their employees is Dr. Martin T. Camacho. They also indicate that they pay a retainer fee weekly to Mr. Camacho and that furthermore, they pay the organization's expenses in maintaining an office and distributing material.

I point this out, not because there is anything wrong with a public relations firm making a contract with any group with which they wish to do business, but it does help in making a judgment about the credibility of material issued by such a public relations firm if one knows who is paying the bill. The American Committee on Africa receives absolutely none of its funds from any source other than its members and contributors in the United States.

One thing distressing about the attack of the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs is that nothing substantive is stated. The American Committee on Africa is attacked because it "backs communist goals in Africa." But there is no examination of what the issues in Africa or in African-American relations are, no analysis of what the Soviet position is, no comment on any statements or on any literature which our Committee has issued, and nothing at all is said about statements by American State Department representatives or our Mission to the UN on the question of Angola, and especially no reference is made to the report of the U.N. Sub-commission on Angola with whose findings our Committee has generally agreed. Our Committee has published pamphlets, written by scholars in the field of African affairs including some on Mozambique and Angola. Our position is backed up by almost all serious students of African affairs -- that Portuguese rule in Africa has laid the seeds for its own destruction through its political repression of the great mass of people, its economic exploitation, its forced labor system, and its particular form of racism which does differ from the apartheid pattern of South Africa, for instance, but is nevertheless racist. We have taken the position that the way should be paved for Portuguese colonies in Africa to become independent, although we have never tried to put a timetable on the achievement of this objective. The Portuguese-American Committee along with Selvage and Lee has undoubtedly distributed millions of copies of atrocity pictures of what happened on March 15th, but with no analysis of events leading up to that date. Our Committee has never made any excuse for the atrocities which were committed by the Africans, other than explaining the bitterness which the Africans do feel towards the Portuguese. The Portuguese-American Committee, however, has never made any comment on the wave of mass terror against the Africans by the well-armed Portuguese both on land and in the air.

We should feel highly honored that the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs practically gives us credit for molding American policy towards Africa. Naturally, any organization hopes that it can have some influence from time to time. I trust that our activities and our statements have not been entirely unnoticed by those who do form government policy. The Portuguese-American Committee makes
it seem almost pernicious to have engaged in discussions with G. Mennen Williams, for example. We carry on activities no different from thousands of other groups that are interested in public policy in the United States.

The Portuguese-American Committee, undoubtedly taking its information from elsewhere, says some rather unfortunate things in order to make it seem that the communists have had a role in the revolt in Angola. As the report on my trip indicates, and I think I can speak with some authority since I was just in Angola, I saw no evidence of any communist influence on the revolt. The U.N. Subcommission concurs in this observation. The letter which the Portuguese-American Committee enclosed with the material sent out, supposedly written by Holden Roberto, the President of the U.P.A., is an obvious forgery. It doesn’t even have his correct signature on it. Roberto has never visited Moscow. The first time he was even in any part of Eastern Europe was when he attended the Belgrade Conference last September. He travels regularly on a Tunisian passport, and persistently has refused to do business with the Eastern bloc countries. I have personally known him ever since 1954 when he called on me at the Union Mission House in Leopoldville. He himself is a product of British Baptist missionary work in northern Angola and in the Congo.

Frequently the final refuge of someone holding an untenable position is to attack the opposition as "communistic." The A.C.O.A. cannot take this attack by innuendo seriously, and therefore I shall make no effort to answer the smears against some of our Board members. Suffice it to say that any examination of the positions of A.C.O.A. would find them at wide variance with the Communist position on key questions such as the Congo, for example. We certainly have had no Communists on our staff or Board.

If the Portuguese-American Committee on Foreign Affairs had taken the trouble to get in touch with our Committee some of their small factual errors could have been cleared up quite easily. They call our publication "Africa Speaks" instead of AFRICA TODAY. They call Mr. Hope Stevens an Associate Executive Director of the Committee and Homer Jack a former Executive Director, both of which are wrong, although the mistake is not important. They say that Frank Montero recently visited Mozambique, which he has never done.

Ordinarily we would ignore irresponsible attacks made by committees such as Camacho's. But I thought it important that some comments should be made to various members of our National Committee since a number had written in to us. If there are still questions which you would like to have answered of a more specific nature, please let me know. Obviously, I have not dealt with every point the Portuguese-American Committee has tried to make, because this did not seem necessary. But I would be glad to make comment on any question that members of the National Committee would like to raise after reading the report on my recent trip.