January 20, 1981

"Well, frankly, I would provide them [UNITA] with weapons... I don’t see anything wrong with someone who wants to free themselves from the rule of an outside power, which is the Cubans and East Germans."

Ronald Reagan
Wall Street Journal, May 6, 1980

"UNITA elements are still going strong and are functioning. I was one who, several years ago, felt that we could have done something to prevent the outcome that we were faced with there."

Alexander Haig
Confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 10, 1981

Dear Friends,

Will the United States intervene in southern Africa in 1981? Judging from the above statements by President Reagan and Secretary of State-designate Haig, there is a real possibility that it will. The new administration’s dominant emphasis on countering Soviet expansion could well lead to a dangerous insensitivity to the consequences of such a policy in southern Africa. Angola will almost certainly present the first test.

The CIA’s previous intervention in Angola in 1975 was an unmitigated disaster for U.S. policy. The South African army invasion, carried out in co-operation with the CIA, precipitated the introduction of large numbers of Cuban troops about which Reagan and Haig are today complaining. The CIA’s client UNITA lost its credibility as a nationalist movement by allying itself with racist South Africa. U.S. relations with Africa plunged to a low point from which U.S. policy-makers are still trying to recover.

In 1975 the Washington Office on Africa kept a steady flow of information going out to our network providing the latest leaks about CIA involvement, exactly what Congress was up to and how people could influence its decision on this issue. Because of public pressure and the fear that the United States might be getting into another Vietnam, the Congress overwhelmingly adopted the Clark Amendment, prohibiting CIA activity in Angola without explicit Congressional approval. This amendment still stands, though in a slightly different form.

This year, conservatives in the Congress are set to launch an attack against this legislation, clearing the way for renewed CIA covert operations...
in Angola. This legislative battle could be the "Rhodesian sanctions" issue of 1981 -- the symbol of what direction U.S. policy towards Africa will take.

The consequences of intervention in Angola could be even more damaging in 1981 than they were in 1975. It could dash the hopes of a Namibian settlement. It could delay the removal of Cuban troops promised by the Angolan government when South Africa ceases its attacks on Angolan territory -- exactly the opposite effect than what the U.S. desires. And it could bring strenuous opposition from independent Africa, as Nigeria, which has become our second largest oil supplier, warned only last week.

Fighting to prevent a reversal of U.S. Africa policy under President Reagan won't be easy, but it can be done ... if we have your support. We ask you to begin this work right away, by writing to your Senators and Congressional representative urging them to keep intact the Congressional restriction on CIA intervention in Angola. We promise to keep you fully informed as this issue develops.

It is important that we stay alert to Reagan's foreign policy initiatives and their implications for southern Africa. But that is only the first part of the task; the second and more critical part is to keep you informed about what is going on and how you can influence that process in the most productive way. Therefore, we are intensifying our efforts to provide information which can serve as a basis for community mobilization.

We will be getting in touch with you about the closer ties that we expect to see develop between the U.S. and South Africa under the Reagan administration. We anticipate efforts aimed at changing investment and trade policy, loosening export controls, and possibly renewing nuclear fuel exports. We will also keep you up-to-date about developments in the Namibia negotiations, which will be another early test of Reagan's policy.

In exchange, we ask for your financial support. We hope that each of you will give at least $5.00 to cover the skyrocketing costs of printing and postage. If you can afford more, please give as generously as you can. If you become a Sustaining Contributor of the Washington Office on Africa for 1981, we will be pleased to send you one of two premiums: Poets of the People, a collection of works by ten South African poets, or Apartheid's Refugees: Mass Removals in South Africa, an excellent information packet prepared for the Mennonite Central Committee in 1980.

On this Inauguration Day, we think of all the battles on U.S. policy towards southern Africa that the Washington Office on Africa and our supporters have waged under President Nixon, President Ford, President Carter. Today we are faced with President Reagan, who may lead our country into a new and dangerous period of U.S.- African relations. Can we afford to give up now, after the gains we have made? We are determined not to. Please help us by sending as large a contribution as you can afford.

Sincerely,

Jean Sindab
Executive Director

Christine Root
Associate Director