Dear Representative:

Although South Africa has faded from the attention of the world media, and many people assume that apartheid is already a problem of the past, that country is still ruled by a minority regime, while pro-democracy groups face daily threats of violence unchecked by democratic controls over the security forces. Far from being assured, the transition from white-minority rule to a non-racial democracy is at risk. The international reaction is critical to deciding whether the process continues on track.

That is why we are writing you now, to urge you to oppose any premature lifting or modification of U.S. sanctions, until the conditions are unambiguously met and the majority of South Africans themselves agree there is "substantial progress toward dismantling the system of apartheid and establishing a nonracial democracy."

The enclosed update spells out how the de Klerk regime in fact falls far short of full compliance with the provisions of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. We are aware that the Bush administration is inclined to a more lenient interpretation. But our own direct contact with anti-apartheid forces in South Africa, including not only political groups but also trade unions, churches, community organizations and human rights groups, leads us to be more skeptical.

South Africa’s apartheid rulers, de Klerk included, have a long history of doublespeak. The history of the past 16 months, since Nelson Mandela was released, provides ample evidence that the regime is not negotiating in good faith, but rather pursuing a two-track policy of taking away with one hand what is given with the other. De Klerk wants to take credit for being against apartheid, while finding loopholes to prolong the white minority's grip on power.

To cite only one recent example, a bill due to be passed this month contains a provision that "notwithstanding the repeal of the Population Registration Act of 1950 anything done in terms thereof shall for the purposes of the provisions of any Act remain in force as if the repeal had not taken place." As the Johannesburg Weekly Mail noted, this means that everyone except new-born babies and immigrants will continue to have key rights and privileges defined by their current racial classification.
Progress in South Africa cannot be judged substantial enough as long as the majority are excluded, by virtue of race alone, from the democratic right to vote. For without that right, they are unable to ensure other rights, and are therefore deprived as well of any effective check on the actions of the state’s security forces.

According to reports by independent human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Africa Watch, and others, the South African security forces are clearly implicated in fueling the political violence which has taken over 600 lives this year alone. Whether by directly provoking confrontations, or by refusal to act as impartial enforcers of law and order, the security forces bear direct responsibility for this situation. It is no accident that most of those killed are Blacks associated with the African National Congress and groups associated with it in opposing the regime. Yet President de Klerk is either unable or unwilling to impose impartiality on his security forces, and refuses to accept independent investigations into the violence.

Such an atmosphere makes free political participation impossible. It also underscores the indifference of the white rulers to deaths among Blacks to whom they are not electorally responsible.

Unless and until this situation changes, a U.S. decision to lift sanctions would be seen, in South Africa and among anti-apartheid forces around the world, as endorsement of the apartheid regime’s continued equivocation and a slap in the face to advocates of a non-racial democracy.

This would be a sad aftermath to the genuine contribution made by the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. We hope Congress and the Administration will instead decide to keep the pressure on.

Sincerely,

Imani Countess
Acting Director