

Testimony of Sister Janice McLaughlin, M.M.

Washington Office on Africa

before the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

on

RHODESIA

March 5, 1979

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to present my views on the situation in Rhodesia. I have a special concern for the subject because I worked there in 1977 as the Press Secretary for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia. This is an internationally known and respected ecumenical body which since 1972 has been one of the few independent sources of information about conditions within the country. From May through August 1977 I helped to investigate the conduct of the war and to compile reports documenting the use of torture, repression and propaganda by the Smith regime as well as the killing of missionaries. On August 30, 1977 I was arrested with three other members of the Commission who were subsequently charged with publishing subversive literature. I was detained for three weeks in Chikurubi Prison and deported on September 21.

Before going to Rhodesia I had worked for seven years as the Communications Coordinator for the Catholic Church in Kenya .

In September 1978 I returned to Africa as a member of a delegation of twelve Americans visiting Mozambique. Here we saw firsthand the conditions in the refugee camps and the destructiveness of Rhodesian attacks on civilian targets. We also had lengthy discussions with leaders of the Patriotic Front.

I am presently on the staff of the Washington Office on Africa, a private non-profit organization which specializes in issues of U.S. policy toward southern Africa. Its sponsors include nine national religious bodies, the American Committee on Africa and the United Automobile, Aerospace and

Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW).

For the past 18 years I have been a member of the Maryknoll Sisters, an American missionary community with Sisters working in twenty-two countries throughout the world.

Since I left Rhodesia I have maintained regular contact with persons inside the country and continue to receive reports describing the deteriorating conditions there. Much of my evidence will be based on these eye-witness accounts, and I ask that some of them be included in the record.

I'm sure that all of us want to see an end to the suffering and destruction in Rhodesia, and the creation of a just society where all have equal rights and responsibilities. I believe that neither of the Resolutions being considered today will help to achieve these goals.

#### THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT

The internal settlement cannot end the war and must be rejected if peace is to be attained. It cannot bring peace because (1) it ignores the Patriotic Front, and (2) it fails to eliminate the causes of the war. Far from abolishing minority privilege, economic inequality and unjust structures of power and control, the new Constitution guarantees that they will be preserved -- indeed, it entrenches them for the next ten years.

As the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) in London pointed out in November 1978:

To state that the (Salisbury) Agreement does not transfer power from the white minority to the black majority is indeed too mild; the Agreement ensures that no such transfer shall take place... What Smith has imposed by this Agreement is a face-lift whereby white power will continue to be exercised behind a cosmetic facade of black rule.

-- "Rhodesia after the Internal Settlement"

Because of its inherent defects, the internal settlement has been rejected by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the front-line states and various other bodies which have all prepared detailed analyses of its weaknesses. The Washington Office on Africa also published an analysis of the settlement which was printed in the Congressional Record last year. The reasons why the internal settlement cannot work may be briefly summarized as follows:

(1) No Constitution setting aside 28 percent of parliamentary seats for four percent of the population solely on the basis of race can be characterized as democratic and non-discriminatory.

(2) A settlement which does not have the consent of the people to be governed cannot possibly be internationally acceptable. This fundamental point was recognized from the beginning by the British government when it agreed that any settlement must be acceptable to the people of Rhodesia as a whole. The Constitution under which the April elections will be held has been approved by only one percent of the population in a whites-only referendum. When Africans tried to express their views they were arrested. Some were killed such as Rev. Arthur Kanodereka who expressed his opposition and was expelled from the United African National Council (Muzorewa) and was found murdered in December. Many, such as Rev. Max Chigwida and Mr. William Chimpaka, M.P., have fled the country in fear for their lives. It is in this atmosphere of fear and reprisals that elections will be held on a Constitution which the African population has not approved. It is up to the people of Rhodesia, not the U.S. Congress, to decide what government is acceptable.

(3) Under the new Constitution the minority will continue to control the civil service, police, armed forces, the economy, the courts and prisons -- all those institutions which have been used to dominate, exploit and repress the

African people.

(4) Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front party has forced even more concessions from the black leaders who signed the March 3rd agreement to ensure continued white domination. A Senate has been designed in which one-third of the 30 seats are reserved for whites and another third for African chiefs, who have traditionally supported white interests and been on the payroll of the racist regime. Also the white minority has been assured nearly one-third of the Cabinet posts.

(5) The internal settlement fails to deliver any fundamental change in a thoroughly unjust economic system. The recently enacted removal of racial discrimination is an example of the hypocrisy of the regime which has merely replaced racial discrimination with economic discrimination -- the results are the same in the lives of the people. As the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia commented in an October 20, 1978 press statement:

Making circumstances a little easier for a handful of Africans is monumentally irrelevant... The rich/poor division in Rhodesian society almost entirely coincides with the white/black division. The statement is completely silent on the question of wage structures which weigh so heavily against the labourers and unskilled workers -- in practice all Africans.

In a country where the average white wage is ten times that of an Africa, this is a significant omission. (The average annual income for urban blacks is \$840 compared to \$8,800 for whites. Agricultural and farm workers are even more exploited with 75 percent making less than \$30 a month.)

The Bill of Rights protects only the property rights of whites, thus locking into place a structure that has denied Africans equal access to land. It fails to deliver justice because it will do nothing to reverse the enormous inequalities of income, services and opportunities which are one of the causes of the present war.

Because the internal settlement is no more than a continuation of the

Smith regime, with the addition of some black members, it has been widely rejected and has not stopped the war. It must be abandoned if peace is to be achieved. This point was stressed by a group of white businessmen meeting in Bulawayo on December 1st, 1978:

It is almost incredible that these people (the four members of the interim Executive Council) are naive enough to believe that the black nationalists, to say nothing of the rest of the world, would meekly stand aside while they attempt to consolidate this negation of what the whole conflict has been fought to achieve. In their naivete they imagine the conflict will conveniently melt away. On the contrary, the conflict will be intensified and the outcome can only emerge from the ashes of ruin and disaster... There can be a solution ... if only the perpetrators of the existing intransigence can be removed.

#### The Repressive Atmosphere for Elections

It is impossible to hold free and fair elections under the present regime and as long as the war continues. The illegal Rhodesian "government" cannot conduct its own elections under its own supervision and have them accepted as free and impartially undertaken.

From my own experience and from a wide range of reports I have compiled a picture of the overall environment in Rhodesia which demonstrates that elections can only be a sham and a source of greater suffering for the people.

The Election Process. The election process in April is designed to deliver an African endorsement of the internal settlement parties, not democracy. There will be no registration of African voters. Those who want to vote will simply shown their situpa (identity card), birth certificate, or -- in the case of women -- their marriage certificate. The possibilities for fraud in such a system are endless. African voters will vote only for a party, not for the person they want to represent them. The 72 African seats are to be allocated in proportion to the "potential voters" in each of either provinces, drawn to match and emphasize tribal divisions. Within each province, the seats will be

allocated in proportion to the votes each party gets. A group of Bulawayo businessmen recently assessed the effect of this system as follows:

(The black internal leaders) are determined ... not to face an election wherein the people can make their own choice of leaders. This is why they now wish to adopt the "party list system" whereby their own names can top the party lists and they can retain the offices to which they have never been elected, nor would ever be elected by the votes of the people. This is ... a total negation of ... one man, one vote and the choice of leaders by the people themselves.

The government personnel who are to administer and supervise the elections are the same people who have been responsible for authorizing the torture, murder and imprisonment of large numbers of Africans over the past seven years. The police and security forces who are to ensure that elections are not disrupted by guerilla forces have themselves been disrupting the daily lives of the African population. They are both feared and detested, and are viewed not as protectors but as the real terrorists.

As a recent article by Peter Taylor in the New Statesman (Jan. 19, 1979) observed:

... the priests I spoke to insisted that atrocities by the security forces far outweighed those by the guerillas, so that even uncommitted Africans viewed the soldiers as their main enemies.

In these circumstances, the very presence of large contingents of armed soldiers at polling places is itself a grave form of intimidation.

Detention and Censorship: All political parties will not be free to participate in the April election as required by the Case-Javits amendment. The oldest and most well-known African parties, ZANU and ZAPU, have been banned for years, with the exception of a few weeks during the summer of 1978, and the press has been forbidden to mention their names or the names of their officials.

During the third week of September more than three hundred leaders of the

Patriotic Front were rounded up and detained and Smith declared he would "liquidate the workings" of the two parties. Police sources say that at least two of the Patriotic Front's supporters have recently been hung as a result of convictions by military courts set up under martial law. (The Guardian, Feb. 9, '79)

In addition, between 2000 and 3000 convicted political prisoners were neither amnestied nor had their sentences reviewed, as promised in Section C of the March internal settlement agreement.

I can personally vouch that there is no freedom of speech and publication in Rhodesia. In August 1977 I was arrested with three other members of the by Justice and Peace Commission because the government alleged that we had published material likely to cause "alarm and despondency," a crime punishable a fine of \$600 or six months in jail. The publication, Rhodesia -- The Propaganda War, which documented war atrocities by the security forces, was banned. Such incidents are the rule rather than the exception in Rhodesia.

In October 1978, the Zimbabwe Times, the only African newspaper left in the country, was closed down. Moto and Umbowo, church newspapers, had previously met the same fate. Only persons approved by the government have access to radio and television. Analyzing the effect of these actions, a group of white businessmen in Bulawayo commented:

The realists have been driven almost to utter despair, prevented as they are from publicly expressing their views by using the media to disseminate and propagate their case. D-notices to the press; government control of broadcasting; emergency powers to suppress meetings; all these combine to silence them.

Martial Law: One of the clearest signs of the regime's loss of control of the country has been the imposition of martial law, which now extends to more than 85 percent of the country. The meaning of martial law was made starkly clear in a paper issued by the Ministry of Information and Tourism, dated December 1978.

Written on one side in English and in Shona and Ndebele on the other, it warns:

In martial law areas, the security forces can make their own laws to help them find and kill terrorists. They will not have to follow ordinary laws, because that can take too much time... Those people who help the terrorists will find lots of trouble... Here are some of the things the army can do in martial law areas:

1. They can arrest and detain people.
  2. They can confiscate or destroy property such as huts and cattle.
  3. They can make people work for them.
- The security forces can now hold their own courts. These courts will have power to sentence people to gaol and death.

-- New Statesman, Jan. 19, 1979

It is certainly difficult to imagine how legitimate campaigning can take place under such conditions!

Destruction of Civilian Life and Property: While the media have consistently highlighted the killing of whites, the war has taken a much heavier toll on African civilian lives and property, mostly at the hands of the Rhodesian government. According to the Smith regime's own figures, Rhodesian security forces had killed 1,533 unarmed African civilians in the six years up to July 1978. By contrast, only 207 white civilians had been killed by what the Rhodesians call "terrorists". Rhodesian raids into Zambia and Mozambique have cost another 3000 lives, most of them civilians. More than 50,000 now live in makeshift squatter areas outside Salisbury and Bulawayo, and more than 175,000 are refugees in neighboring countries.

Shortly after martial law was first proclaimed on September 23rd, the security forces began systematically burning villages in reprisal for alleged support of the nationalist guerillas. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia and Christian Care, a voluntary aid organization, documented that 718 families had their homes burned down by security forces between September and December in areas of Salisbury, Gwelo and Umtali. On January 13th another four villages were burned. In all cases, the soldiers ordered people from their homes without even giving them time to collect their belongings before their

homes were set alight. (The Observer, Jan. 28, 1979)

Starvation Tactics: The government is denying food to the people so as to deny food to the guerillas, and deaths by starvation are already being reported. An estimated one to three million people face starvation in the northeast and southeast of the country. Two hundred thousand of these people were released from protected villages in September. They had no homes to go back to, no grass for their roofs, no seed for planting and no cattle for ploughing. Voluntary relief agencies have been prevented from operating in at least six districts. The International Commission for the Red Cross, which recently received \$1 million in funds out of a possible \$5 million appropriated by the US Congress to spend inside Rhodesia, confirmed that military authorities in the Mtoko and Mrewa districts have ordered a halt to the distribution of Red Cross food and medical supplies. The Rev. David Gibbs, a Rhodesian Roman Catholic priest in the northeast, said that the clampdown has virtually stopped the activities of the Rural Ecumenical Action Committee on Hunger. (International Herald Tribune, Jan.16, 1979)

The government intends to get ballot boxes into areas where it refuses to allow food to be distributed!

Private Armies: "Private armies" formed by Rev. Sithole and Bishop Muzorewa have set the stage for political intimidation on an unprecedented scale before the April elections. A recent article in Illustrated Life Rhodesia quoted UANC (Muzorewa) militia recruits as saying that they were to be used "to teach people how to vote."

A special report published by the Commission for Justice and Peace describes the kind of "teaching" taking place:

Nembudzia - The Sithole guerillas demand food from the people on a roster basis and failure to produce it means certain death. They

demand meat and meat only and the people have now run out of chicken and goats and very soon will be forced to slaughter their cattle. Many people are being tortured and killed especially men. Most of the girls in the area are pregnant as a result of being raped... Anyone suspected of supporting any other party is killed or tortured.

Gokwe - The first priority is to build up Sithole's party: Spend all night with singing and slogans "Down with Muzorewa" "Down with Smith" as well, of course, as with Patriotic Front leaders. People are forced to have membership cards (50¢), of the Sithole party. Have to pay (each house) a weekly contribution of 25¢ for upkeep of party. If people refuse, ... they are tortured and shot.

The whole morality of the area has been destroyed, not a girl has been left unmolested. Husbands are powerless to protect their wives. If they defend them they are shot by Sithole's people.

Gandachibuwa-Njanja - These Sithole people beat up many people for small things like coming late to meetings, preparing food badly, etc. and killed many.

As the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London noted:

Having failed to impress the guerillas, and having failed to deliver to Smith any diminution of the fighting, let alone a ceasefire, the UANC and Sithole's "ZANU" (as it now calls itself) seem intent on preparing for future power struggles by creating private armies of their own. Recruitment is not difficult among the desperate, uprooted young men now living without work or hope in the swelling shanty towns which protrude from the clean white cities of Salisbury and Bulawayo. Internal training camps ... could not be organized without the connivance and support of Smith... Devoid of popular support, the internal leaders are trying to build up military strength to gain bargaining power.

-- "Rhodesia after the Internal Settlement"

Forced Labor and Conscription: Teen-agers have become the latest targets of the government's repressive actions. Since the beginning of the year, large numbers of young people from 13 years of age have been detained or forced to labor on white-owned farms. These children were removed from their schools or detained after meetings held to explain the implications of martial law. Their numbers are in the thousands, according to reports received by the Justice and Peace Commission.

Older African students between the ages of 18 and 25 now face compulsory conscription under the National Service Act. More than 700 have been brought

before the courts for demonstrating against the call-up and only 20 percent of those conscripted have reported for duty. There were other signs of resistance. For example, on November 23rd the Rhodesian Herald reported that 17 black employees of a Salisbury firm had been fired for refusing to fill out national service forms. A representative of the group said that 102 out of 107 people refused to fill them out and that only the five who signed had been paid their week's wages. The same kind of economic pressures can be used to force people to vote.

Comments on Resolutions concerning Rhodesia

S. Con. Res. submitted by Senator McGovern and Hayakawa.

While I share the concern that facts about the April 20th election be available, I believe that sending an official observer team will be counterproductive as well as unnecessary.

As I have already pointed out, the question is not whether elections will be free and fair, but whether the Constitution on which they are based is democratic and fair. That determination requires no team of observers -- just as there was never any need to monitor elections in Hitler's Germany to know that his government was unacceptable. To send official observers implies that we are going along with Smith's plan and that we accept that there is a possibility that the elections might be free and fair. It focuses attention on the mechanics rather than on the substance of democracy in Zimbabwe.

I also believe that observers would in fact see very little. If they are protected by Rhodesian security forces, no African will speak freely to them. I know, for instance, that the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace is only able to operate through a network of people in the countryside who are trusted and respected. No-one coming in from outside would ever be told any information which could endanger the lives of people. In an environment where private armies

kill people for merely refusing to buy a party card or to provide food, one can imagine the penalties they and their families would face if they reported to an American observer team that they had been harrassed or intimidated.

Obviously the internal government will be on its best behavior during the time of the elections and will place the blame for any disruptions on the Patriotic Front. Without an awareness of what has been taking place in the preceding months the observers could very well come away with a false picture. So the observers will have to rely on reputable groups within the country for an overall assessment of the situation. The findings of these same groups could as well be used by President Carter and the Senate, eliminating the need for a separate American team.

Movement in Rhodesia is severely restricted by martial law, curfew orders and the provisions of the Law and Order Maintenance Act and the Emergency Powers Regulations. In addition many of the roads cannot be travelled except in military convoys and some areas are entirely off-limits. In such circumstances, what observers are prevented from seeing may be much more significant than what they actually are able and allowed to observe.

Sending observers will not be perceived as a neutral act. It gives the transitional government the benefit of the doubt and flies in the face of African opinion. As the African Group at the United Nations as stated:

To send observers to such an election is in fact to give encouragement to the manoeuvres of the Smith regime calculated to defeat a genuine settlement of the conflict in Zimbabwe. Such a move can only comfort Mr. Smith and his collaborators, provide them with a false sense of hope... It would only lead to the escalation of the conflict and prolongation of the suffering and bloodshed of Zimbabweans."

14 February 1979

In addition, the acceptance of transport and security arrangements from the Rhodesian government is a very obvious taking of sides.

I am disturbed by the comparison between the proposed American observer team and the Pearce Commission of 1972. The Pearce Commission tested African opinion at the beginning of the process, before proposals for a settlement had been implemented -- not one year after they had been in operation. The coming April elections are not a substitute for a test of African approval of the new Constitution; they will simply ask the voters to endorse one of the parties to the agreement.

A low voter turn-out might be an indication of African rejection, but already Smith is conditioning the world to accept a 20 percent turn-out and projecting these potentially low figures as a result of war conditions rather than a demonstration of African opposition.

S. Con. Res. 7 by Senator Schweiker and Senator DeConcini.

This resolution is full of inaccuracies and false claims. The Rhodesian government has satisfied neither stipulation of the Case-Javits amendment. It has not demonstrated a commitment to negotiate in good faith at or before an all-parties conference, but only that it will attend a conference. Smith's internal settlement was basically a device to avoid accepting the terms of the Anglo-American proposals and to avoid negotiating with the Patriotic Front. Mr. Cledwyn Hughes has recently reported to Prime Minister Callaghan that Rhodesia has "given little if any attention to the updated Anglo-American proposals we gave them on 20 October in Washington." Instead he reports that Rhodesia intends to set its own course by going ahead with elections.

Smith's agreement to attend an all-parties conference "without preconditions" while he was in the U.S. last October was clearly a political move to win U.S. recognition. At the same time he was making sure that the Patriotic Front would not attend by brutally attacking refugee camps in Zambia - hardly a sign of good faith!

A delegation of the Rhodesian Bishops Conference held meetings with the leaders of the Patriotic Front in Lusaka in August and reported that they were specifically requested to persuade the leaders of the interim government to attend a conference. They tried and reported that it was the internal leaders who were opposed to negotiations and rejected invitations to an all-parties conference.

The discussions (with the Patriotic Front leaders) were very useful and constructive and helped correct the grossly unfavourable impression of the Patriotic Front created by the news media at home. Both leaders expressed a desire to end the war and were willing to attend an all party conference.... Meetings with leaders of the internal settlement followed at which the same topics were discussed. Two of the internal settlement leaders were not in favour of a conference and believed that the answer lies in the internal settlement.

-- Newsletter, Justice and Peace Commission, December 1978

The Constitution which Mr. Schweiker and DeConcini hail as being "approved overwhelmingly" was approved by one percent of "Zimbabwe Rhodesians" in a whites only referendum. The African population which constitutes 96 percent have been given no forum to express their approval or rejection.

All political and population groups will not "be allowed to participate freely" since, as I've already mentioned, both ZANU and ZAPU are banned and people who support them are subject to arrest, torture and even death.

While the two Senators submit that the Patriotic Front has vowed to disrupt the elections by intimidation, terrorism or military attack, they neglect to mention that the interim government has been using these same tactics to impose the internal settlement. If the barrel of a gun should not be used to prevent people from voting neither should it be used to force people to go to the polls.

The reasons why sanctions were first applied by the United Nations in 1968 still hold true today. There is no justification for the U.S. to unilaterally violate its treaty obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and to relinquish the only important non-violent leverage we have over the internal regime.

Naturally Mr. Smith and his partners won't be inclined to negotiate if they think they don't have to. But if the United States bails them out this time by lifting sanctions, what will it do next year when the war is still going on and when maybe the Russians and the Cubans become more involved in response to this American move? Are we prepared to risk the possibility of a major war over Rhodesia? Sooner or later the internal leaders will have to come to terms with the Patriotic Front - whether it is to surrender or to reach a negotiated compromise. A strengthening, rather than a relaxation of sanctions, might make it sooner and help to shorten the war.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I believe that both Resolutions you are considering would have disastrous consequences if passed and would create the very results which the United States wishes to prevent:

- \* an escalation of the war causing greater suffering and bloodshed
- \* increased involvement by the Russians and Cubans
- \* loss of U.S. credibility in independent Africa
- \* the end of America's role as a mediator in southern Africa
- \* a hardening of racial attitudes and a greater exodus of whites

On the other hand, a rigorous enforcement of sanctions, including a cutoff of oil, weapons and mercenaries, can shorten the war and is possibly the strongest weapon the West has to bring Smith and his partners to the negotiating table.

As the United States prepares to make a decision which will affect its future relations with all of Africa, I would like to recall the plea of President Julius Nyerere when he visited the U.S. in August 1977 to urge a greater Western commitment to majority rule in Rhodesia:

It is our hope that America will use its great influence, and a little of its power, to support those who struggle against great odds for justice - and therefore for ultimate peace - in southern Africa.

-- San Francisco, 6 August 1977