Press Statement -- "South Africa Week"

The main purpose of our press conference this morning is to publicize the upcoming "South Africa Week." However, this week of activities has once again attracted the attention of the South African government which is ever ready to try to counter those working for or supporting real and fundamental change in that country so beautiful, yet sick and twisted by racism and inequity.

The South African Consul from Beverly Hills is visiting our city, as he did last year, to tell us how progressive and fair his country is becoming. That leads me to talk briefly about two topics. One is the favorite topic of the government -- that of "reforms." The other is one that they do not like to talk about, but use extensively -- that is a very slick, sophisticated and well-financed public relations campaign.

A new constitution in South Africa, voted on in November by all but the 22 million black people who make up 72 per cent of the population, includes for the first time so-called Coloureds and Indians in a tricameral parliament. However, we must not be fooled by this new parliamentary system. When looked at closely and fully understood, it is clear that it is meant to further entrench the system of apartheid that separates and disenfranchises politically and economically the black population. Opposition to the new constitution, even from black moderates like Gatsha Buthelezi, chief and president of the KwaZulu "homeland," is creating a strengthened unity not only among black South Africans but among all those struggling to bring an end to the apartheid system.

One of those who is a cornerstone of this strengthened unity is Rev. Allan Boesak who will be in Portland next week. Rev. Boesak, in addition to being President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, is a founder of the recently formed United Democratic Front, which is the broadest-based antigovernment initiative South Africa has seen for years.

This increased unity in South Africa and the need to "sell" the new parliamentary system to the world and improve its international relations campaign. In 1983 its publicly reported sum paid to lobbyists in this country was $1.5 million. To support its point
of view, money is funneled through American law firms, public relations firms and politicians. People such as Mr. LeRoux who is in town this week to talk with business, academic and civic people are paid to try to convince the American public that South Africa is "reforming." Nothing could be further from the truth. When you read and listen closely and talk with representatives of the black South African majority population who would like to see the apartheid system dismantled, not reformed, you realize that there is a long struggle ahead. And that is why we are gathered here today. We hope that the city of Portland will join in supporting the struggle for justice in South Africa.

Elizabeth Ussher Groff
Co-director, Southern Africa Program

28 March 1984