We are proud of the role of the Coalition for Illinois' Divestment from South Africa (CIDSA) over the past four years in the passage of national economic sanctions and state and local divestment measures against South Africa. CIDSA's campaign has been successful in keeping the issue of South Africa before the citizens of Illinois and the resolutions and ordinances which have been passed have sent a message to South Africa that the people of Illinois want no part in the profit of apartheid.

CIDSA was formed in 1983 to rally support for legislation in the Illinois House. Over the past four years, CIDSA broadened its agenda to include support for federal sanctions against South Africa, Chicago city divestment as well as support for university and organizational divestments throughout Illinois. CIDSA membership grew to include over 80 churches, unions, political and civic organizations as well as over 500 individuals. CIDSA developed active chapters in Chicago, Champaign-Urbana, Peoria, Bloomington/Normal, Carbondale and Rockford. CIDSA has functioned with multi-racial leadership throughout its history. CIDSA held monthly general membership meetings and there have been 5 working task forces within CIDSA: Education, Chicago City Action, Steel, Newsletter, and State Divestment.

In 1986, the Reagan administration failed in its attempt to thwart passage of legislation prescribing strong economic sanctions against South Africa. This legislation bans the import of some South African products such as coal and steel and restricted future investments by U.S. corporations in South Africa. CIDSA made information on federal sanctions legislation available to citizens of Illinois and encouraged them to contact their representatives on this issue. We believe that the momentum created by the state, local and organizational divestment campaigns created an atmosphere in which such sanctions could be enacted.

For many years, divestment legislation had been introduced to the Illinois State Legislature but never acted upon. In May, 1984, a bill calling for the divestment of $1.9 billion in Illinois Pension funds was passed out of committee but defeated in the Illinois House. In 1985, a similar bill was tabled because again it fell a few votes short of passage. In 1986, a more limited amendment which prohibits future pension fund investment in South Africa-related stocks was passed by House, Senate and Conference Committees and was finally passed by the full Legislature in January 1987. An additional piece of legislation prohibiting the use of South African steel in state building projects was passed out of committee but was not passed by the Legislature during this session. CIDSA's State Divestment and Steel task forces were instrumental in the preparation of and support for Illinois divestment bills. They researched and drafted legislation, organized testimony for committee hearings and encouraged letters and phone calls to legislative leaders in support of the bills.
In May 1986, the Chicago City Council adopted a divestment ordinance which prohibits the city from depositing funds in banks that make loans to either the government of South Africa or to corporations doing business there. The ordinance also prohibits the awarding of city contracts to and the investment of pension funds in corporations involved in South Africa or Namibia. CIDSA members developed basic divestment legislation for the City of Chicago. The Chicago City Action task force organized expert testimony and public support for hearings on these measures and arranged a meeting between Mayor Harold Washington and church, union and community leaders which resulted in the Mayor’s support of the legislation. They worked closely with city department heads in their study of the economic impact of divestment on city purchases and investments. The task force continued to work with city departments to monitor implementation of the ordinance.

These federal, state and local organizing efforts have been supported by a major educational campaign across the state. The Education Task Force has provided speakers and printed materials for numerous speaking engagements during the past years. The task force has assisted speakers across the state by providing them with an "Organizers Manual." This manual provided in-depth information on South Africa, divestment, and the Illinois legislative process as well as tips on making presentations and a list of media resources. CIDSA continually made a wide selection of books and pamphlets on South Africa available to the general public.

In the past four years, CIDSA has sponsored six major educational events: CIDSA’s first Organizing Conference in 1984 brought together anti-apartheid activists from across Illinois to discuss strategies for passage of divestment legislation. In April 1985, CIDSA organized a State-wide Educational Tour. The tour, co-sponsored by the American Committee on Africa, the Washington Office on Africa, and the American Friends Service Committee, brought to Illinois 12 nationally known South Africans and South Africa experts from across the U.S. Traveling with 4 local CIDSA activists, these speakers visited 35 Illinois cities and towns making numerous presentations and press interviews. In September 1985, CIDSA sponsored an all-day Downstate Conference in Champaign/Urbana. Over 75 persons from across Illinois heard speakers and participated in discussion of the situation in South Africa, the economic impacts of divestment and the development of organizational skills. In February 1986, CIDSA helped to organize One Struggle, a conference which brought together South Africa, Central America, and Caribbean activists to discuss the similarities in these regional conflicts as well as the Reagan administration’s foreign policies toward these areas. Finally, in March 1986 and again in July 1987, CIDSA co-sponsored 2 Namibia Conferences in conjunction with the United Nations Council for Namibia. These conferences featured representatives from the United Nations and SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement. Participants discussed South Africa’s continued illegal occupation of Namibia, exposing the regional significance of South Africa’s national philosophy of apartheid.

In addition to these major events, CIDSA has worked closely with other Chicago organizations in sponsoring speaking tours of South African liberation leaders and cultural events in Illinois. In 1986, we hosted Bishop Desmond Tutu, ANC General Secretary Alfred Nzo, and labor
activist Amon Msane. In December 1986, CIDSA worked with the City of Chicago and other Chicago organizations to host the tour of the Ndilimani Cultural Troupe from Namibia. During their stay in Chicago, CIDSA helped to organize an official reception at Mayor Washington's office, performances at schools, churches, Operation PUSH and the DuSable Museum as well as a well-attended public performance at Chicago State University. In the summer of 1987, CIDSA began working with a nation-wide coalition to prepare for the tour of "AMANDLA" the cultural troupe of the African National Congress to the U.S. in 1988. In September 1987, CIDSA supported this project by co-hosting a reception for Keorapete Kgotsitsile, poet and Deputy Head of the Department of Arts and Culture for the ANC from Lusaka, Zambia.

CIDSA built support for divestment through the initiation of and support for a number of anti-apartheid and local divestment efforts. CIDSA was a founding member of the Free South Africa Movement and participated actively in its demonstrations. CIDSA has been an active co-sponsor of the annual June 16th Soweto Commemorative Demonstrations. The 1987 commemoration brought together over 1000 people to a demonstration at the South African Consulate and an ecumenical prayer service at Holy Name Cathedral. CIDSA has assisted divestment campaigns at various Illinois universities by providing speakers and educational materials for meetings and rallies. CIDSA has assisted Chicago Teachers' Union members, Cook County Hospital employees, Chicago's Afro-American Firemen's League, the United Methodist Church and others in their efforts to divest their pension funds from South Africa.

CIDSA's combined educational and organizing efforts have resulted in the divestment of publicly controlled funds throughout Illinois and in public support for a negotiated end to apartheid. We measure our success by the progress made in legislative processes as well as the increase in public awareness of Southern African issues.

After months of study and careful consideration during the summer and fall of 1987, CIDSA decided to disband itself as a coalition committed solely to divestment. We believe that it is now time to develop support for the escalating struggle by expanding our educational and organizing focus to include the entire southern Africa region, by the strengthening of federal sanctions against South Africa and through the development of material aid campaigns in support of those who struggle against apartheid. Many CIDSA members have chosen to continue the fight against apartheid through the formation of the Chicago Committee in Solidarity with Southern Africa.

We are confident that the people of South Africa will win their freedom. CIDSA members are proud to have made a contribution to this end. We continue to dedicate ourselves to making the struggle toward that inevitable victory shorter and less costly through economic sanctions and public support for those fighting to set South Africa free.