To: ACOA Executive Board

From: George M. Houser

Re: A National Action Conference on Southern Africa

The Proposal

For some months discussions have been taking place among a number of organizations about the holding of a national conference which hopefully would lead to more concerted and united action on the issues of southern Africa. Although a great deal of thinking has been done and proposals have been put on paper, the plans have faltered because no organization with the strength to do so has committed itself to the task of making a national conference a priority. The proposal for us to consider is for the ACOA to take the lead in calling such a conference sometime in early 1978.

Rationale for a National Conference

Since our beginning, ACOA has planned and executed a number of significant conferences. We have also cooperated with others in organizing conferences for specific purposes. The last really sizeable conference we were mainly responsible for was held in Washington in 1965 with some 25 organizations co-sponsoring it.

There are two main factors which would make a national conference important now:

1. The timing is right

   a. Southern Africa is now in the mainstream of U.S. policy for the first time. The Zimbabwe and Namibian struggles are coming to a head. The Soweto uprising in 1976 and the continued activities against apartheid in the ghettos of South Africa have focused attention in a more urgent way than ever before. Southern African issues are of international import.

   b. The Carter administration has given almost unprecedented attention to southern Africa issues. The President has spoken more frequently on the issue than have any of his predecessors. The Vice President has played a prominent role particularly by his discussions with the South African Prime Minister. The Ambassador to the United Nations and his staff have played prominent and visible roles in relation to both the Zimbabwe and the Namibian situations. But the policy which the Carter administration is following needs to be analyzed and criticized. Many Americans feel that a brand new policy has been inaugurated and the deficiencies of the past have been overcome. This is not so.

   c. U.S. economic involvement in South Africa is on the increase. This is looked upon by the administration and some others as a progressive sign which may help lead towards change. Our perspective is that this involvement is retrogressive leading to U.S. support for white minority regimes. It helps to lay the foundation for an international conflict which will threaten the peace of the world.

   d. National and local organizations in the U.S. have had to give more attention to the southern African issues than ever before. This has been particularly the case in the black community and among radical organizations. Actions on the part
of church groups, trade unions, and students has also increased.

2. The conference can achieve some important ends. Its main purpose would be to mould a new measure of unity for action among a broad section of the American people.

Four purposes would be in mind:

a. An awareness of and support for the liberation struggle in southern Africa.

b. A call to halt continuing add expanding United States economic collaboration with the white minority regimes.

c. Outline and implement action programs, that can be both nationally and locally applied, to achieve the above ends.

d. Point out the links between racism at home and apartheid and racism in Africa.

Conditions Which Must be Met

If the conference is to be held and is to be a success within the terms we have outlined above then the following conditions must be realized:

1. Broad Sponsorship

To achieve what we have in mind and to justify the staff time and funds involved it will be important to involve larger groupings on the American scene than have so far committed themselves to definite action programs. Generally speaking this must include the black community, churches, trade unions, students, and of course Africa-centered organizations.

More specifically:

**Labor** - UAW, District 65, District 1199, AFSCME, Steel Workers, Meat Cutters, Furriers, Longshoremen, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.

**The Black Community** - The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, NAACP, SCLC, PUSH, possibly the Urban League, Black Theology Project, Association of Black Social Workers.

**Churches** - Denominational and other groups that have had some kind of a program include the Methodists, United Church of Christ, the National Council of Churches, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians, Catholics, American Friends Service Committee, Clergy & Laity Concerned, commissions on racial justice, social action committees, women's divisions of various denominations, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility.


2. Funds

A rough estimate of funds needed is about $10,000 including telephone, travel, postage, printing, special staff, and conference expense such as for speakers, rental of conference space, etc.

3. Sufficient lead time must be allowed in order to put the conference successfully together. It should involve at least four months. The conference probably could not
be held until sometime in late January.

4. **Additional staff will be necessary.** The ACOA should be prepared to give major time and attention to the effort and agree to have its office as the headquarters. The additional staff will work out of ACOA office.

**Some Specific Ideas for the Conference**

1. **Suggested date** - No sooner than the 3rd week of January (20th to 22nd).

2. **Place** - the Midwest is suggested. If it is possible to get UAW cooperation, Detroit might make an appropriate locale.

3. **Program** - Obviously any suggestion of a detailed program is premature. But the following elements should be present.
   
   a. Opening statements and analysis of the African situation probably by African leadership.
   
   b. A keynote address by an American analyzing the Carter administration and American policy. In this connection it would be important to make clear that racism here in the U.S. has its links with racism in Africa.
   
   c. Workshop sessions could be devoted to action programs in such areas as the bank campaign, opposition to corporate investments in southern Africa, the legislative issues, material assistance to the liberation movements, protests against apartheid in sports. If the attendance at the conference is as broad as it should be, there should also be workshops focusing on action which can be taken in trade unions, churches, among students, etc.
   
   d. An implementation structure hopefully would be agreed on. This does not suggest the formation of a new organization but only ways in which action programs discussed and agreed upon at the conference can be implemented.

4. **Who could Participate?** - Although the conference would be open, the call to it would make clear that it was an action conference and although there are plenty of grounds for differences, the conferees would be agreed on the necessity of supporting the liberation struggle and with the general purposes of the conference.

5. **Next Steps** - If we think that the ACOA should take the lead in organizing such a conference the following steps should be taken:
   
   a. A sub-committee of the board should be formed to work with the staff during the initial periods of getting the conference organized.
   
   b. Immediate work should be done to see if initial funds can be found to make the conference a practical reality.
   
   c. Immediate work should be done to seek initial sponsorship.
   
   d. A steering committee should be formed from representatives of those organizations prepared to contribute to the conference both financially and organizationally.