Dear Friend:

Until my recent arrival in the United States I was for many years defense attorney for South African political prisoners, both black and white. I was made acutely aware of security police torture and the terrible effect of long periods of solitary confinement on all those men and women subjected to it. Punishment was without trial. Political detainees were held incommunicado and indefinitely. They were locked up in small cells eight foot by five and a light was kept constantly burning in their empty cell. Some were held 90 days, others for a year and longer.

Whether in or out of prison, South Africa has tried to seal off the 18 million who are not of the ruling white elite so that they cannot communicate the reality of their situation to the outside world. A facade of normality has been constructed by an expensive world-wide public relations effort, aided by the sympathetic voices of major foreign investors who enjoy high profits from cheap black labor; a few black puppets are used for window dressing while tight controls silence dissenters and laws outlaw all political economic and social change that might upset white supremacist rule. Few visitors are determined or perceptive enough to see through the facade or tear away the mask and view the real horrors. If they did they would see the hundreds arrested every hour of every day or night, men, women, old and young, arrested under Pass Laws, imprisoned, subjected to forced labor and released only to suffer the same fate again and again. They would witness the breaking up of families and the destruction of homes - the resettlement of over a million people - the starvation and deaths from malnutrition and other preventable disease, the migrant labor system strictly enforced for Africans, enforcing their poverty. It is all part of an evil system. South Africans bold enough to speak and act against this terror often became my clients in the courts, and the government turned on me as it does against any voice for justice.

Thousands of men and women have been tried and convicted (and many penalized without trial) as "agitators" and "terrorists" for daring to oppose this system, but their courageous voices often went unheard: trials were deliberately held in isolated country courts away from the glare of publicity; newspapers were often blind to the nature of the conflict and by neglect or design often helped to disguise the true nature and extent of the struggle for human rights. I acted as defense attorney for 37 Namibians for whom the awful Terrorism Act was specially passed in 1967 in order to deal with their just political struggle for self-determination. (The South African racist regime holds what it calls South West Africa against the authority of the United Nations and the World Court. It is an illegal regime
in Namibia). Knowing their suffering and sensing the terrible punishment to be imposed on them under a law making no real defense possible, I traveled to the United States to bring them aid and help save their lives.

I had occasion then and again many times since then to visit the offices of the American Committee on Africa. On every occasion I found a sincere and deep interest and concern about what was happening in my own country. I found sympathy and help and understanding of the true position there. More than that, I found that the staff of the ACOA was more well-informed, more well-versed in the facts about South Africa than in any other place I visited in America or England. This support and well-informed opinion is most necessary and important to all in South Africa who struggle against the system of apartheid.

ACOA is doing essential work in the United States in:

stripping away the facade and exposing the true nature of South African society;

focusing attention on the extensive support given South Africa by the western powers, especially the U.S., even though they verbally condemn apartheid;

providing a channel for the real voice of the South African people to be heard despite detentions, bannings, imprisonment and censorship, and supporting the liberation movements in many ways.

All those desiring real change have inevitably been driven underground and the underground in South Africa is active and increasing in numbers every day. There is no doubt in my mind that the regime will eventually be overthrown - but its life is only being lengthened by outside support. To answer the well-oiled propaganda machine of the South African government and the bribery of unusually heavy profits for U.S. investors, ACOA, its staff and all its supporters will have to increase their efforts. I knew the urgency of that support when I was in South Africa, and we were grateful for it. That urgency is, if anything, greater now. The tempo of the struggle has increased - and so has the willingness of the western world to compromise with apartheid. ACOA's work is needed. I am honored to be associated with them and with you the members who support their work. I am therefore asking you to make every effort to renew your gift in the greatest amount possible. It will be wisely used.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Joel Carlson