Statement to the Finance Committee of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees

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By

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The C-U Coalition Against Apartheid has asked me to speak to you today. Immense frustration is felt by all of us who have opposed the support which our university gives to apartheid. I would like to review its causes and its consequences.

I. Causes

Over the past two years the Finance Committee, the full Board and the university administration have been presented with a wealth of information relevant to the question of university ties with the apartheid system in South Africa which are maintained through its investment portfolio. The general arguments have been made, factual supporting material has been submitted and an array of actions that the Board might take to reduce its implied support for apartheid have been suggested. Students and faculty, Africans and Black Americans, workers and community representatives have appeared before you asking that a policy be adopted which would end our supportive links with apartheid. But, none of these attempts to convince by rational argument and evidence appears to have had any effect.

The most recent policy adopted by the Board is indicative of our continuing inability to grasp basic facts and to show sensitivity to the Black people of South Africa. It claims to be the result of thorough study, yet it identifies South Africa by a name it abandoned 10 years ago! And, it claims to be concerned with the racism which characterizes South Africa, yet it refers to Black South Africans by the derogatory term "non-whites" which today is a South African equivalent of the American expression "nigger." But, these are only indicators of a perspective rational argument has failed to change.

A close look at the new policy - and I mean by "policy" the decisions of the Board as they have been implemented by its administration - indicates the entirely negative consequences of that perspective:

a. The suggestion that the university divest itself of stocks in corporations operating in South Africa has been rejected, i.e., the university has given up none of its stocks as a consequence of the policy.

b. The suggestion that the university vote for all stockholder proposals calling for corporate/bank withdrawal from South Africa has been rejected, i.e., the university has voted its stock to
stay in South Africa.

The latter position is a retreat from the Board's September 1977 policy. As the Board was made aware, the retreat is precisely that requested by the apartheid regime and precisely opposite that requested by opponents of apartheid. Black South Africans from Luthuli to Biko, Black South African organizations from the ANC to the BPC, virtually every Black African state, the CAU and the UN, the NAACP and the AFL-CIO have all called for withdrawal. The perspective is reflected also in the rejection of a variety of additional suggestions made to the Board:

c. The suggestion that corporations/banks be urged to stop selling goods to the South African government or its agencies that are critical to the maintenance of the apartheid system has been rejected.

d. The suggestion that corporations/banks be urged to stop paying salaries to white employees when they are on duty with the South African armed forces has been rejected.

e. The suggestion that corporations/banks be urged to stop contributing to propaganda organizations seeking to maintain the apartheid system has been rejected.

f. The suggestion that corporations/banks be urged to establish committees to look into their role in sustaining apartheid has been rejected.

g. The suggestion that the university co-sponsor shareholder proposals calling for any of the points raised in "c" to "f" has been rejected.

h. The suggestion that the Finance Committee no longer use a bank with a vested interest in maintaining the apartheid regime as its principal portfolio advisor has been rejected.

i. The suggestion that inordinate profits resulting from corporate activities in South Africa be put to use for educational activities related to the South African situation has been rejected.

j. The suggestion that a committee of concerned students, faculty and administrators be established with power to determine the validity of charges concerning other supportive links the university may have with the apartheid system has been rejected.

The frustration of those opposed to the link between the university and the apartheid system is a consequence of their inability to alter through rational argument the Board's view that Black South Africans are "non-whites" and the Board's belief that the university's corporations are helping those "non-whites." The preponderance of evidence supports neither the view nor the belief.
II. Consequences

The consequences of what has happened are not good for this institution or its charge. The message sent to students is that there is no point in seeking to persuade through the presentation of rational argument and evidence because they will be ignored. This is fundamentally at odds with the objectives of an institution of higher education. Some of those students associated with the Coalition Against Apartheid still believe that if only the Board or its administration would present their arguments and evidence for public scrutiny, rational argument would triumph. But, their efforts to get public debates or public question and answer sessions have all been rebuffed. As a result, there is a growing number concluding that rational argument has no place in our university. The message sent to faculty is similar. Working within the framework of the university becomes increasingly more difficult. Recently, when presenting papers at national conferences on topics related to Africa, some of us have been forced to publically dissociate ourselves from a policy we view as supportive of apartheid. And, the message sent to more and more people both inside and outside the university is that they must oppose this institution in order to oppose apartheid. None of these consequences benefits us as individuals or as an institution.

In summary, those who have sought to use rational argument to sever this university's links with apartheid have been faced with a new policy which does the opposite; and those who have sought to make us aware that the university's actions may harm people abroad have been faced with a new policy which refers to Black South Africans in a derogatory way. For those who believe deeply that the University of Illinois should not maintain its supportive links with South Africa, what must they do?