Statement on the Assassination of Amilcar Cabral

The assassination of Amilcar Cabral, Secretary General of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) removes a man of almost unparalleled ability from the African scene. His death on Saturday, January 20, took place just ten years after the beginning of the armed struggle in January 1963. His leadership of the PAIGC welded the people of Guinea-Bissau into a tremendous fighting force. His death recalls the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane of Mozambique, by the Portuguese, four years ago. Just as Mondlane's death did not lead to the demise of FRELIMO and the struggle for liberation in Mozambique, so Cabral's assassination cannot stop the victory over Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau. Amilcar Cabral laid a base not only for a victory in the struggle for freedom from the Portuguese, but for the new future of the people of Guinea-Bissau, in guiding the building of institutions for a soon to be independent country.

Amilcar Cabral was the prime mover with five other men in the formation of the PAIGC in September 1956. At this time he was one of only four university graduates from the whole of Guinea-Bissau. He had used his position as an agronomist during 1952-1954 to travel around his country and acquire intimate knowledge of the life of his people in the villages. Thus he combined, in a most unusual way, theory and practice. Fortunately many of his ideas have been put in written form in collections of his lectures and statements, as well as in books about him and the PAIGC.

These writings reflect the clarity of his thinking and planning. Thus in 1959, after the massacre by the Portuguese of striking dockworkers in Bissau, Cabral recognised clearly that a new stage of political action had been reached in which, in order to save and strengthen the people's struggle, it was necessary to organize "underground". In a brilliant statement given in May 1964 at the Frantz Fanon Center in Italy, he outlined the basic analysis on which he and his fellow fighters had based their organizational tactics, recognizing that "the peasants would be the mainstay in our struggle" but that it would be necessary to "struggle fiercely for peasant support"... and indeed in the years between 1959 and 1963, when the PAIGC was ready to embark on armed struggle Cabral made a fundamental contribution to the future of his country by carefully building a widening base of political education, creating consciousness amongst the peasantry, so that they could become the engine of the revolt. He recognized that nothing could be achieved by a small group of "leaders", however dedicated. Without the political preparation that would mobilize the mass of the people "nothing of lasting value can be done. This political preparation is the toughest, most daunting but also most important aspect of the whole campaign for national liberation." Thus he made a fundamental contribution to the development of a revolutionary theory of change for his country in insisting that fighting against the Portuguese should not start until there had been
An excellently executed educational campaign in the countryside to win mass support for the independence movement.

No leader of a liberation movement in Africa has spelled out the essential theory of political organization more clearly than has Cabral. Actual fighting against the Portuguese began in 1963, and now, ten years later, three-quarters of the country is under PAIGC control. This was to be the year in which the PAIGC declared independence for their country— it will probably still be. In 1972 Cabral had initiated elections to a National Assembly representing the people throughout the country. This will be the body which, speaking for the people of Guinea Bissau, will have the power to announce the freedom of the people.

This was only the most recent of the many practical creative measures of the PAIGC under Cabral's leadership. In 1960 training schools for political leadership were organized in Conakry, capital of the then newly independent ex-French colony Guinea; these were designed to develop a cadre of organizers to work inside their country for its liberation. Later, as areas were liberated from the Portuguese, people's stores, schools and hospitals were organized inside Guinea Bissau. And always, as soon as possible, the people were involved in running and controlling their own lives, men and women, through the establishment of democratic village committees.

Now, in January 1973, Guinea Bissau is virtually independent. The ten years of armed struggle have been a success. The assassination of a great leader, however tragic, cannot reverse this, whatever the perpetrators of the deed may think.

It is a measure of Cabral that he always hoped the killing and the fighting could stop. He once said: "we are ready at any time to cease hostilities in order to find a political solution to the conflict which oppresses our people to the Government of Portugal. Our only condition is official recognition by that Government of our inalienable right to rule."

Portugal, a poor country, could not carry on this fight against the liberation forces of Guinea Bissau, Angola or Mozambique, which now drains almost 50% of its annual budget, were it not for the strong support it receives from its NATO allies and the United States in particular. American support for Portuguese colonialism must be ended. Inspired by Amilcar Cabral's example, all those who love freedom will renew their pledge to support the struggle against Portuguese colonialism and give unstinting assistance to the PAIGC and other liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies until independence is won.