THE U.S. STUDENT ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT:
PAST SUCCESSES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and Friends:

Today I will attempt to present an analytical overview of the student anti-apartheid movement as it has developed in the U.S. After an historical summary, I will assess the successes of the movement and then point to some promising future directions.

**Historical Summary**

U.S. student opposition to apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa has a history going back to the early 1960's. In one of its first actions, SDS sat in at the Chase Manhattan Bank (a major lender to South Africa) and in the Sixties there were anti-apartheid demonstrations at Cornell, Princeton, Harvard and other universities. In the late Sixties the anti-war movement overshadowed anti-apartheid work on and off-campus, but as the struggle against Portuguese colonialism escalated there were massive demonstrations in support of the liberation movements, notably 50,000 people at the first African Liberation Day in 1972.

The real spark for the U.S. student movement, however, was the Soweto Rebellion of 1976 in which hundreds of students faced up to the guns of the apartheid regime and the liberation struggle took a major step forward. Throughout the school year 1976-77 numerous student groups formed and began calling for divestment of their school's corporate stocks linked to South Africa. In that year, the successful occupation at Hampshire College and the massive sit-in at Stanford were catalysts to the spread of the movement to dozens of campuses throughout the country.

For the past three years the student divestment movement has had an important impact both on campuses and on the country at large. With the liberation struggle intensifying in Southern Africa, along with South African and corporate propaganda, it is important for us to clarify what our successes have been and how we can build upon them.
Successes of the Student Anti-Apartheid Movement

The "success" of the student movement must be judged on several levels. First of all, both the actual divestment of stocks and the process of struggling for divestment are not ends in themselves but means to achieve the following goals:

1) The withdrawal of US corporations from and the cessation of bank loans to South Africa.
2) Affecting the political climate in order to curtail US government intervention in Southern Africa while building support for the liberation movements.
3) More broadly, the delegitimization of corporate power both in its foreign and domestic manifestations.
4) And related to this, the activation of a student left as part of a left-wing movement in this country that combats racism and other forms of oppression perpetuated by capitalism.

Let us try to assess the extent to which we have succeeded in achieving these goals. 1) First of all to what degree have we forced corporate withdrawal from South Africa and curtailment of bank loans? Partial or total stock divestment at nearly two dozen schools plus mass student pressure at many others have had concrete effects. Certain corporations, such as Polaroid, have curtailed operations, and the student movement has helped create pressure to hamper direct bank loans to South Africa. (It is important to note that universities have found it very difficult to justify their holdings in banks that lend to the South African Government). In addition, the passage of Eximbank financing restrictions and regulations against corporate sales to the SA military are at least indirectly the result of student activism.

Of course, overall US corporate investment continues to rise in South Africa and very few schools have been willing to divest all their stocks. To see this as evidence of our "failure" is to look at the movement too narrowly. For we have made major progress:

2) In regards to our second goal of curtailing US government intervention and building support for the liberation movements, we have had an important political impact. We have been at least partially responsible for the maintenance of sanctions against Rhodesia, and numerous campus groups have raised material aid and consciousness for the liberation movements. Beyond this we have sown the seeds for mass opposition to US intervention when the struggle reaches its decisive stage in South Africa itself.
3) **Turning to our third goal, the student movement has helped delegitimize corporate power in this country and had a great effect on campuses.** The achievement of divestment as well as the process of building campus support, have undermined corporate claims of blamelessness while bringing the issue of corporate complicity in apartheid to millions of Americans. A new wave of student activists have come to share an anti-capitalist perspective as they have challenged the myth of corporate benevolence and institutional neutrality.

It is crucial that our attack has been directed at the key ideological pillar of the System, the University which is controlled by the same white male elite that runs Corporate America. The effect of demonstrations, educational forums and sit-ins has been to unmask power relations within the university, and at least on the ideological front to put its spokesmen on the defensive. A testament to the seriousness of this challenge is the immense amount of time and money university and corporate officials have devoted to dealing with our movement. These officials have held several large strategy meetings during the last six months, and thus far employed the Sullivan Code as their principal shield. This Code and national tours by corporate apologists such as South African Helen Sussman are closely linked to US foreign policy which aims to control change in Southern Africa. In this regard, what separates the student movement from university trustees and the Carter Administration is not simply tactics but goals. We support revolutionary change in Southern Africa, they do not.

4) **Besides winning individual students to an anti-capitalist outlook, the movement has been largely successful in achieving its fourth goal: the reactivation of a Student Left in this country.** The process of organizing against apartheid has helped spark renewed activism on many fronts. Our work has fed into struggles against racism in the university, and more recently student activity against the draft and nuclear power. In the process hundreds of students have gained valuable organizing skills and a commitment that extends beyond Graduation.
April 4-11 Week of Action

This past April 4-11 there was a National Week of Action which showed the extent to which the student movement has developed politically. First of all, it was a week of actions explicitly in support of the liberation struggles—and not simply in opposition to US presence in Southern Africa. Secondly, on many campuses the week’s activities linked the divestment struggle to anti-racist work at home. For example in Amherst Massachusetts there was a week-long series of educational forums culminating in a march commemorating Martin Luther King and supporting African liberation struggles. Following that week anti-apartheid activists at Amherst College helped organize support for a sit-in and occupation led by Black students seeking to retain their own orientation program.

Needless to say, the Week's numerous activities attracted major media attention, notably front page articles and editorials in the Boston Globe. It is important to note that following the Week of Action Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas presented a plan for phased stock divestment on the floor of the Senate. We are having an effect!

Future Directions

Though the student movement has had its share of success, we must constantly be creative in our strategies. This is especially so given the high turnover rate of students that necessitates rebuilding our forces at the beginning of each year. As we all know nearly an entire 4-year cycle of students has graduated since Soweto and we are feeling the effects. Looking toward the future, here are a few suggestions:

1) The student anti-apartheid movement should maintain a central focus on stock divestment. Divestment is the cutting edge of our politics which most directly hits at university links to apartheid. At the same time we must realize that divestment is only a means to our goals—educating people and attracting mass support is more important and achievable than "convincing trustees."

2) Right now we also need to broaden our political focus to deal more with the liberation struggles, and especially to educate our campuses and the American people about the struggle in Zimbabwe. Beyond educational forums, this means building material aid campaigns for the Patriotic Front and confronting Congressional Reps on the sanctions issue.
3) We also must deepen our links with community organisations, notably through participation in the Campaign To Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa (COBLSA) which has highlighted redlining of minority communities.

4) Underlying this, is the need for intense political education within campus groups to clarify goals and strategies at this critical juncture. Political clarity will be essential to combat the more sophisticated approaches of campus and corporate officials.

-Not only is it important to broaden and deepen our work on Southern Africa, but also to link this work to related issues. Anti-racist struggles on campus and off have already begun to be linked with the anti-apartheid movement. Given US importation of South African uranium and our export of nuclear technology to South Africa, there is also a concrete basis of unity with the anti-nuclear movement. In the last few months major inroads have been made on working with this growing movement. At campuses such as Princeton and Dartmouth alliances are calling for the divestment of both nuclear and apartheid linked stocks—a joint strategy we need to encourage at other campuses. In addition, on October 28-9 there will be a major anti-nuclear action at Wall Street which will highlight the apartheid-nuclear connection and feature Dumasani Kumalo (head of COBLSA).

In conclusion, the way ahead will not be easy, especially given the immense resources of our adversaries. But possibilities are opening up and with good internal political education and outreach we should be able to forge ahead. Above all, we must remember that we are supporting a liberation struggle, and that the victory of liberation in Southern Africa will help our struggle in the heartland of global capitalism.