

American Committee On Africa

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NEWS

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NATIONWIDE PROTESTS TO TARGET U.S. INVESTMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

New York, N.Y. March 15...This spring student and community groups in every region of the country will hold protest and educational events calling for an end to all U.S. investment in South Africa and Namibia. The activities are focused around two weeks of coordinated national anti-apartheid action that will take place from March 21 (the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa) to April 4 (the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King). Activities throughout the period are being coordinated by the American Committee on Africa which has been working with organizers in 25 states to build support for the continuing campaign to end U.S. investment in South Africa and Namibia.

In Washington DC--where a city ordinance prohibiting public money from being invested in U.S. firms involved in South Africa and Namibia became law in February 1984--student groups at Georgetown, Howard, UDC, American and George Mason universities are spearheading a city-wide march to the South African embassy on April 4 to condemn apartheid and the Reagan Administration's policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa. The April 4th marchers will be wearing black armbands as part of a National Armband Day commemorating victims of apartheid and racism in the United States. As a build-up to the march the Georgetown Committee Against Apartheid and Racism is holding ten events on southern Africa, beginning with a commemoration of the Sharpeville Massacre on March 21. At Howard University a series of programs will deal with apartheid and domestic racism, culminating in a rally for divestment on April 4 that will feed into the city-wide march.

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The April 4 National Armband Day will also be a major target date for organizers in Los Angeles. The divestment coalition at UCLA plans to use local television to urge people to wear armbands, and is organizing a joint rally for divestment with students at the University of Southern California. That same week a representative of the People for South African Freedom based in Oregon will be speaking for divestment at churches throughout the state and on April 5 there will be a panel discussion on U.S. policy at Oregon State University.

In the east the Weeks of Action will spark coordinated actions by student and community groups for divestment and southern African refugee support. On April 1 at Yale University--where the class of 1984 voted to keep its class fund out of South Africa related companies--the Coalition Against Apartheid will be holding a "Run For Freedom" to raise money for educational projects of the African National Congress. This event is being cosponsored by the Connecticut Anti-Apartheid Committee which has spearheaded passage of divestment legislation in that state. The Yale Coalition will culminate its activities on April 6 with a commemoration of Solomon Mahlangu, an executed ANC freedom fighter, at which featured speakers are poet Dennis Brutus, Reverend Sipo Mzimela, and Tandi Gcabashe (all exiled South Africans).

Stockton State College in southern New Jersey will also organize runs for freedom to aid southern African refugees on April 4 and April 7 on the Atlantic City boardwalk. At Rutgers University in Newark a community-student alliance will host an event on March 22 featuring Gil Noble and Themba Mtinga of the African National Congress as the first in a series of events leading to a jog-a-thon to raise refugee relief funds. At Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania a similar fund-raising event will be held during the Weeks of Action and follow a March 21 commemoration of the Sharpeville Massacre.

Dartmouth College activists will organize a program on the April 4 National Armband Day, featuring former Massachusetts State Representative Mel King who cosponsored the successful Massachusetts divestment bill. This will initiate ten days of activities leading to a protest for divestment on Friday April 13 targeting the Dartmouth Trustee Board meeting. On that same day the Williams College Anti-Apartheid Coalition is planning a divestment rally which will follow an April 4 fast to raise funds for South African and Namibian refugees. The Harvard Committee on Divestment will be holding a series of forums from April 2-6 to mobilize for a demonstration outside President Bok's office. Harvard and Dartmouth students are also organizing "Endowments for Divestment"--alternative escrow funds to which alumni are encouraged to contribute until the school divests its South Africa-linked stock. The Black Students Association at MIT is organizing a South Africa Awareness Week which will include a panel on April 4 with representatives of Amnesty International and SWAPO of Namibia to be followed by a performance by SECHABA, the ANC singing group on April 6--Solomon Mahlangu Day.

On that same day in New York City a candlelight vigil for South African political prisoners will be held outside the South African consulate for which community groups and students from City and Hunter Colleges will be mobilizing following events at their schools. Upstate, the American South Africa People's Friendship Association (ASAPFA) based in the Albany area and students at Hobart and William College will hold events marking Sharpeville and the April 4 National Armband Day. A school-wide referendum for divestment is also scheduled for March 21 at Cornell University and at Princeton University there will be a divestment demonstration on April 4. In Philadelphia students at the University of Pennsylvania are organizing a forum on March 25 with community groups to commemorate Sharpeville and support university and state-wide divestment efforts.

Groups in the South will also be active during the Weeks of Action. In Atlanta students on six campuses will kick off with a rally March 21, and on Sunday April 1 programs at local churches will focus on apartheid and Martin Luther King's call for economic sanctions against South Africa. At Xavier, Grambling, and Southern universities in New Orleans March 21 Sharpeville programs will be followed by a memorial for Martin Luther King focusing on southern Africa. In Austin, the Steven Biko Committee at the University of Texas is sponsoring a rally for divestiture on March 28 and St Edwards College will hold a March 21st event.

The Duke University South Africa Committee in Durham, North Carolina is marking the Sharpeville anniversary with a presentation by poet Dennis Brutus and will continue with a teach-in and a South Africa letter writing campaign on March 26. At Virginia Tech student groups will hold a symposium on Namibia in early April, and at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville the National Lawyers Guild and Black American Law Students Assoc. will hold a forum on divestment of university funds linked to South Africa. At Florida State University in Tallahassee a petition drive for divestment will be highlighted by three days of activities centered around the April 4 National Armband Day, and in Kentucky anti-apartheid events will be held involving churches and linking up to Central American support work.

Illinois will be at the center of activity in the Midwest during the Weeks of Action. In Chicago, the Coalition for Illinois Divestment from South Africa (CIDSAs) will be hosting a March 28 event with Theo Kotze, formerly of the Christian Institute of South Africa. On April 4 the Coalition is organizing with AFSCME to bring 400-500 people down to the state capitol to lobby for a divestment bill involving billions in state pension fund money. The lobbying effort will be joined by students from the University of Illinois at Champaign who are also holding a divestment rally on March 21 to be addressed by South African Dumisani Kumalo, ACOA projects director. Following the rally Kumalo will speak at Illinois State University and on several state-wide radio and television shows.

Activists at Western Michigan University (WMU) in Kalamazoo will be holding educational events from March 21-April 4 building up to an April 4 march from the WMU campus to Kalamazoo College where a commemorative service honoring victims of apartheid and U.S. racism will be held. At the University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire a forum featuring the Lutheran Coalition Against Apartheid will be held on March 26 and the April 4 Armband Day will be marked there and at St Olaf College in Minnesota where a debate on divestment is scheduled as well as fundraising events for Namibian refugees.

These midwestern activities will be reinforced by the ongoing work of Namibia Concerns, a group based in Iowa. During the weeks of action this organization is arranging for film showings on Namibia in Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Iowa and Oregon and during April will have speakers at four midwest conferences focusing on human rights. An important center of activity will be Oberlin College in Ohio where activists will hold events pushing for divestment during the weeks of action, following the unanimous decision by the College Shareholder Responsibility Committee to back their plan for five-year phased divestment of all South Africa-linked stock.

Canadian students at the University of Concordia in Montreal are also mobilizing for the Weeks of Action. Beginning with a Sharpeville commemoration on March 21 the student divestment committee will be raising funds to aid southern African refugees. This will be followed by South Africa awareness days from April 2-4 featuring a representative of the African National Congress and Warren Allmand, former Solicitor General of Canada and current member of Parliament.