December 14, 1959

Dear Friend:

Enclosed is a brief memorandum which perhaps will give you a little further information about the violence against the African people in South West Africa within the last few days. Obviously in such a short write-up it is impossible to give too much detail. We will be glad to supply further information.

I hope that you may find it possible to act upon some of the suggestions for action mentioned in the memorandum. We will be grateful for anything you can do.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
George M. Houser
MEMORANDUM ON THE SOUTH WEST AFRICA EMERGENCY

A shameful act of violence against the African people in the capital city of Windhoek, South West Africa, took place last Friday, December 11. South West Africa is an "international" territory governed by the Union of South Africa. The information contained in this memorandum comes primarily from cables from South West Africa and from a telephone conversation which Mrs. Jane Kerina, wife of one of the petitioners from South West Africa, held with three African leaders in Windhoek. Two brief dispatches about the incident have appeared in the New York Times.

On December 11 fifty armed police fired on several thousand Africans who had gathered peacefully in the African Location in Windhoek. More than 300 rounds were fired and the shooting lasted for forty-five minutes. Twelve Africans were killed and more than thirty seriously wounded. One of those killed was a brother of Mburumba Kerina, a student from South West Africa who is presently studying for his Ph.D. in the United States and who for the last three years has appeared as a petitioner on behalf of his people at the United Nations.

The background of the incident: Approximately 20,000 Africans live in the Location for Africans in Windhoek. Under the policy of apartheid pursued by the South African government not only in South Africa itself but also in South West Africa, the government of the territory has declared this area for white occupancy only. Some months ago the government declared its intention of removing all the Africans to a place some miles from the city. The reason the government gives for the removal is slum clearance. But the deeper reason is that as the town has grown, the area of white occupancy has encroached upon the areas where Africans live. Africans have announced their intention to refuse the removal because they protest against apartheid and also because their cost of living will rise considerably. They will have to pay more rent, and furthermore they will have to pay bus transportation costs to get to their places of work, whereas from their present homes they can walk.

As a means of expressing their protest the Africans began a boycott of certain municipal facilities under government control such as the cinema, the recreation hall, and the beer hall.

Last Friday a small group began to picket these municipal facilities. The police arrived and arrested two of the group. A crowd of the curious and of sympathizers, several thousand strong, collected. The police demanded that the crowd disperse, and when the people did not move rapidly enough the shooting began.

Members of the crowd threw some stones in retaliation after the shots were fired, but no Europeans were even wounded.

A state of emergency has been declared by the government. No meetings of any kind except church and burial services can be held. Any violator of this is subject to three to six months' imprisonment. Armored cars with machine guns patrol the streets. Curfew is effective at sundown. Africans from outside Windhoek who have requested passes to go to the Location even for burial of relatives have been told to come and go by daylight. A cable which has just
arrived says that all of the Europeans in the city have been armed and that the stock of weapons in the local stores has been completely exhausted by the distribution to the European community.

South West Africa -- A UN responsibility: South West Africa is a former mandate of the League of Nations, which South Africa, alone of all mandatory powers, refused to place under the trusteeship system when the United Nations was established. The International Court of Justice has ruled that South Africa has obligations to the United Nations in regard to the territory, but South Africa as of this moment has refused to carry them out. The African 90 percent of the population are ruled virtually as slave labor for the benefit of the white minority.

Additional facts about the situation in South West Africa can be obtained from the publication of the American Committee on Africa entitled "South West Africa: The UN's Stepchild," available from the office of the Committee.

What you can do: This tragic occurrence is an outgrowth of the shameful apartheid policy followed by the government of South Africa and extended to South West Africa. You can do the following things:

1. Write to Ambassador Wenzel C. du Plessis, Embassy of the Union of South Africa, 3101 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington 8, D. C., expressing your opinion and urging that South West Africa be placed under the trusteeship system of the United Nations as a step toward self-government.

2. Write to the Chairman of the United Nations Committee on South West Africa, H.E. Professor Enrique Rodriguez Fabregat, P.M. of Uruguay, 220 East 42nd Street, Room 1511, New York 17, urging an immediate investigation of the facts and a protest against the brutality of the South African police.

3. Write to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Mission to the U.N., 2 Park Avenue, New York 16, urging United States support for taking the case against South Africa to the International Court of Justice for compulsory jurisdiction.

4. Contributions to the Africa Defense and Aid Fund of the American Committee on Africa will be used, if earmarked for South West Africa, to be of assistance in this emergency to the families of those who have suffered the loss of a loved one in this tragedy.

American Committee on Africa
801 Second Avenue
New York 17, New York

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