The American Committee on Africa today urged the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to reject the nomination of Nathaniel P. Davis to the top post on Africa at the State Department. Mr. Davis was U.S. ambassador to Chile from 1971-3 when the CIA was active in the overthrow of the government of President Salvador Allende.

Peter Weiss, an international lawyer, stated in testimony on behalf of the Committee before the Senate panel: "We believe that, like a judge, the conduct of an ambassador should be free not only from impropriety, but the appearance of impropriety." "In Mr. Davis' case" he said, "the appearance if not the strict proof of impropriety, is simply overwhelming." Mr. Davis background inevitably raises serious concerns about future United States policy toward Africa.

The Reverend Edgar Lockwood, director of the Washington Office on Africa, also testified against the nomination. He noted CIA director William Colby's recently revealed testimony "that U.S. diplomatic personnel were kept informed of all CIA activities" in Chile. Mr. Lockwood also noted that "three days before the Chile coup... Mr. Davis flew to Washington for a meeting with Secretary Kissinger."

"It is a fair presumption" he said, "that Mr. Davis had inside knowledge of the forthcoming coup and briefed Secretary Kissinger on it."

Mr. Weiss cited Ambassador Davis for poor conduct after the Chile coup as well. He charged that the U.S. embassy in Santiago "turned a deaf ear to all pleas for humanitarian assistance" while "several Latin American and European ambassadors and their staff acquitted themselves heroically in providing shelter and assistance to thousands of victims of the Junta's terror."

Prior to Chile, Mr. Davis served as Ambassador to Guatemala from 1968-71 when U.S. policy supported efforts to "eliminate insurgency" there. Mr. Weiss noted that with U.S. aid and advisors that government's "pacification" program pacified 20,000 Guatemalans to their graves.

Mr. Lockwood called Mr. Davis "a skillful and intelligent diplomat who has well served a misguided and dangerous policy in Latin America."
Mr. Lockwood termed Mr. Davis' nomination only part of "an emerging pattern of appointing diplomats with counter-insurgency backgrounds to key Africa posts."

Last June Dean Hinton was appointed ambassador to Zaire. Mr. Hinton served as AID chief in Guatemala 1974-79 then as AID chief in Chile until his new post. "He is widely believed to have been a CIA agent using AID as a cover" Mr. Lockwood said.

Recently William G. Bowdler was nominated to be ambassador to the white minority government of South Africa. Mr. Bowdler served in Cuba from 1956-61 when Castro came to power and as officer in charge of "special political problems" in the State Department's Latin America bureau. He also served on the senior staff of the National Security Council, along with Mr. Davis, until he followed Davis as Ambassador to Guatemala in 1971.

Mr. Weiss charged that Mr. Davis will thus "head up a team steeped in the CIA's dirty tricks operations, imbued with the National Security Council's pre-detente philosophy, and designed to Latin-Americanize our African policy."

"These appointments bode ill for the future of our African policy" Mr. Weiss continued. "They suggest that Mr. Kissinger, after years of neglect, has finally discovered Africa and plans to turn his attentions to its problems with the aid of a team of trusted advisors experienced in his peculiar brand of interventionist diplomacy. He termed Mr. Kissinger's 'policy of 'peace through stability'...a major disaster area for the third world." Mr. Davis' nomination follows the sudden dismissal of Donald Kasum, the previous Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who assumed the post only last March. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Davis has virtually no previous history of experience on African issues.

Mr. Davis' appointment "will be taken as a calculated insult by many important leaders of Black Africa" Mr. Weiss said. Mr. Lockwood noted that Mr. Davis "will commence his tenure in the shadow of African distrust." He suggested that the Davis nomination should not be confirmed until the Senate conducts an examination of U.S. policy towards Africa to determine that the methods used in Latin America to support military dictatorships will not be used in southern Africa to support continued white minority rule.

Mr. Lockwood noted that U.S. corporate interests, notably Gulf Oil, exist as they do in Chile, and can be expected to press for the United States to "fish in troubled waters as it did in Chile."

Mr. Weiss stated that the American Committee on Africa is "a national, non-partisan organization, which for the past twenty-one years, has supported the struggles of the African people for liberation from colonialism and racial oppression, and has interpreted African developments to the American people." Mr. Weiss is a member of the executive board and past president (1962-72) of the Committee.

Rev. Lockwood stated that the Washington Office on Africa is sponsored by major Protestant Denominations (United Methodist, United Presbyterian, Episcopal, Christian(Disciples), United Church of Christ) and the American Committee on Africa "in order to provide timely information to a growing network of citizens and citizen groups who wish to express their concerns about U.S.-Africa policy to government decision makers."

Full copies of these testimonies are available from ACOA.