December, 1978

Dear Friend:

I have just returned from several weeks in Africa and, as always, this trip has impressed on me the urgency of the work of the American Committee on Africa.

However, I have had to face at the same time a sobering fact about support for our work here at home. Many who have aided our program in the past have not done so for some years. This poses a problem for us. Support from individual Americans sympathetic to our objectives has been the base upon which ACOA has survived and grown over the past quarter-century. We have always sought to maintain our own independence from the influence of government or big corporations.

If you are one of those who has ceased to contribute because you have given priority to other concerns, I hope this letter will prompt you again to give us what you can. If you have stopped giving because you feel confused about events in southern Africa or about some of ACOA's positions, I hope this letter will reassure you regarding ACOA's continued commitment to political and social justice.

ACOA's basic purpose when we started 25 years ago was the same as it is now: to support the right of African people to self-determination and independence. This has involved, over the years, activities as diverse as finding temporary office space for Julius Nyerere, now president of Tanzania, when he was a petitioner before the UN, and testifying on US policy before a variety of Congressional committees.

Today, the situation in Africa is much more complex than it was in the '50's and early '60's. The new African independent states have not always fulfilled the expectations of outsiders. Military coups have occurred. The liberation movements in many cases have felt the necessity to engage in armed conflict to achieve their objectives. Meanwhile, the cold war and international disagreements have expanded to include the African continent.
Americans often have not understood the problems of newly independent countries. They have not fully comprehended why, given their colonial background, these new countries have felt a need to develop their own educational, political and economic systems. Some people have found themselves uncomfortable with the idea of armed struggle while others have felt concern over ties with socialist countries developed by various liberation leaders as an outgrowth of support given in the struggle for independence.

As a result, despite the fact that it is circumstances which have changed, not ACOA's basic objectives, some of our long-time ACOA friends have withdrawn their assistance.

But our task is by no means finished. I felt the urgency of this more than ever after my recent trip to Tanzania, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. Particularly the struggle in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Namibia is at the crossroads. At this point it is unclear whether armed conflict will expand or whether there will be agreements reached with the main nationalist movements allowing relatively stable and representative governments to be formed.

We have generally supported the proposal backed by the US for an all-parties conference in Zimbabwe including The Patriotic Front, since without the Patriotic Front's being included there can be no peace. We have supported in Namibia the plan for United Nations supervised elections which would allow the nationalist movement, SWAPO, to play its role without harassment from the South African government.

With regard to the situation in Rhodesia, I was shocked recently when I heard that Zimbabwe refugee camps I had visited only a month before in Zambia had been bombed by the Rhodesian air force. I can testify that one camp where there was massive destruction and loss of life was mainly for young women separated from their families in Rhodesia. There was nothing military about this camp. Through The Africa Fund, a tax-exempt affiliate of ACOA which engages in educational work and humanitarian assistance, we have been sending medical supplies to meet the urgent needs of the refugees.

Over the past 25 years, ACOA has come to be regarded as an influential voice in public discussions of African issues and as a reliable source of information and assistance to those interested in African affairs. At the same time, we have come to be known as a true friend to African people still seeking their liberation. To continue this work, we urgently need your support. We hope you will respond today.

Sincerely,

George M. Houser
Executive Director