Statement Before the United Nations
Special Committee on Decolonization

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In spite of recent diplomatic developments in southern Africa, nothing has yet changed for the people of Namibia. Dr. Zephaniah Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of SWA/Namibia recently described life under South African rule. "I would like to say," he said, "that we are not struggling for human rights in southern Africa. Human rights is almost a luxury for us. We are struggling for human lives. People are dying, people are being tortured to death. People are being humiliated every day. That's what people call apartheid. Apartheid is violence. When people react on that they're judged as violent, but the policy of apartheid itself is a policy of violence. It's a matter of life and death."

For many years the American Committee on Africa and its associate The Africa Fund have been deeply involved in supporting the struggle of the Namibian people against the violence of apartheid and for independence and liberation.

Our organizations have done this through an interrelated program of 1) educational work, including speaking tours and publications; 2) support for grass-roots organizing efforts to aid the Namibian and South African people; 3) collection and shipment of materials directly to Namibian refugee projects and 4) visits by ACOA and Africa Fund staff to Namibian refugee camps in southern Africa.

Selma Ashipala Tour

In the fall of 1983 the major Namibian project of the American Committee on Africa was the organization of a speaking tour by
Selma Ashipala—a member of the SWAPO Youth League Central Committee and assistant secretary of the SWAPO Pioneers. This tour received significant publicity and sparked a fundraising drive for Namibian refugees held in conjunction with Two Weeks of National Anti-Apartheid Action coordinated by ACOA in the U.S. and Canada this spring.

Selma Ashipala came to New York City at the invitation of the American Committee on Africa to first participate in a National Student Anti-Apartheid Conference October 7-9 organized by ACOA with the sponsorship of the U.N. Council for Namibia and the U.N. Special Committee Against Apartheid. She was joined at the conference by African National Congress representative, Klaus Mophepha. They addressed the 300 participants from 24 states and Canada giving first hand analysis of SWAPO and ANC youth programs.

Following the conference, the American Committee on Africa organized speaking tours for Ashipala and Mophepha. Ashipala's tour took her to states in all sections of the country. It gave many Americans a rare opportunity to hear directly from a SWAPO activist who is involved in the educational programs of a young generation of Namibians deeply committed to achieving independence for their country. Selma Ashipala comes from a family which was active in Namibia's labor struggles in the 1970s, and she was able to provide a vivid picture of the struggle for Namibian independence by drawing on her own experiences and those of people close to her.

The first stop on the tour was Michigan where Ashipala spoke at a Baptist Church in the black community and on a radio talk show in Detroit, and at Michigan State University which has a very active African Studies program. She spent four days in the Minneapolis area working with groups which had hosted the very successful visit of a delegation of international Namibia activists in December 1982.

While in Minnesota she spoke at several Lutheran affiliated colleges, St. Olaf, St. Cloud, and met with the Minneapolis Council of Churches. She also appeared on TV and radio shows, and attended a Women's Conference on National Security and a city-wide rally organized by the National Black Independent Political Party.

In Iowa she was hosted by the Namibia Concerns group which has had an ongoing program of political and material aid for SWAPO. In depth discussions with activists enabled her to lay out the material aid needs of the young Namibian refugees she works with as well as analyzing the implications of U.S. policy in Namibia at Wartburg Seminary and Grinnell College.
In Chicago Ms. Ashipala gave presentations on SWAPO's struggle to classes and to public forums at the Lutheran School of Theology and Northwestern University. She also met with representatives of Rev. Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH and addressed a city-wide forum on the Namibian liberation struggle and U.S. policy held at Desalba Museum, in Chicago's black community.

At Harvard University she spoke to a forum of several hundred people along with African National Congress representative Klaus Mophepha. Her talk about the role of women in the liberation struggle, drawn from her own experiences, generated an enthusiastic response. Ashipala and Mophepha also addressed a meeting at Yale University, where a student group opposing university investments linked to South Africa and Namibia has been very active. Students were particularly interested in the role of U.S. investments in Namibia and Ashipala's analysis of U.N. Decree Number 1 and its importance to the Namibian struggle was most helpful to activists.

In Philadelphia, Ms. Ashipala held discussions with a grass-roots community group long active in Namibian support work, CAPSAN, and addressed a day-long symposium on southern Africa involving state legislators and Joan Specter, the city-councilwoman responsible for the passage of a city ordinance forbidding the investment of public monies in companies doing business in South Africa and Namibia. At Stockton State College in New Jersey, Ms. Ashipala spoke to classes and spent time strategizing with a community-student alliance that has been working on divestment, opposition to South African owned casinos in Atlantic City and political prisoner work. As a former detainee in Namibia, Ms. Ashipala was able to give a first-hand account of the type of support that aids prisoners of the apartheid regime. Back in New York Ashipala spoke to a large audience at Nassau Community College in Long Island with David Ndaba, assistant U.N. representative of the African National Congress.

In addition to her speaking engagements Ms. Ashipala did extensive media work in New York, including interviews with community radio stations, Big Red (the country's largest black newspaper), U.N. Radio, and progressive journalists.

Aftermath of Selma Ashipala Tour and Weeks of Action

As a result of the Selma Ashipala tour, groups across the country have initiated material aid projects for Namibian refugees. In their efforts, these groups have worked closely with ACOA and The Africa Fund, particularly during the March 21-April 4 Weeks of
National Anti-Apartheid Action. The ACOA and Africa Fund have assisted groups on their Namibia projects by providing 2000 pamphlets on the needs of Namibian refugees and background information on organizing fundraising jog-a-thons and fasts.

Following ACOA suggestions, activists at Stockton State College in southern New Jersey organized "Two Runs for Freedom" on behalf of Namibian refugees. The first was held on campus on April 4 (to mark the anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.) and 50 students ran through the rain that day and a larger number of people participated in the second run held on the Atlantic City Boardwalk this past weekend (April 7). At Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania the Africa Fund provided 400 pamphlets on refugee support projects and activists there organized a Run For Freedom on campus to raise funds to ship urgently needed medicines to Namibian refugees in Angola.

The Africa Fund also worked closely with the Concordia University Anti-Apartheid Committee in Montreal, Canada. With the help of Africa Fund materials the Committee held a two week long drive for Namibian support projects which is expected to net over $1000. In the aftermath of the Selma Ashipala tour students at St. Olaf College in Minnesota have organized an ongoing clothing drive and worked with the Africa Fund to arrange for shipping the material overseas. The Williams College Anti-Apartheid Committee is currently organizing a fast using educational materials of The Africa Fund with the accumulated funds going to support educational projects for Namibian refugees in Angola and Zambia.

To further these efforts, The Africa Fund plans to prepare a material aid drive organizing guide and encourage fundraising "Runs for Freedom" and fasts on a regular basis. The initial groundwork has been successfully laid this spring.

Publications

Back up and complementing its work on Namibia the ACOA and Africa Fund have had an ongoing program of research. In December 1982 ACOA organized with the support of the U.N. Council for Namibia a major international conference on the role of Western Transnationals in Namibia. Participants from 12 countries prepared research papers in connection with the conference, some of which were reprinted in the October 1983 issue of Africa Today. As its contribution to the conference The Africa Fund prepared a major study of U.S. investment in Namibia written by our Research Director Gail Hovey, which is being reprinted by the U.N. in 3 languages. Several thousand of these pamphlets were distributed in the U.S. in 1983.
Carrying on our publications program we are now planning an activists' guide to Human Rights Violations in Namibia. This will be a companion to the four page review of Human Rights Violations in South Africa published in 1984 which has been extensively used by churches, community groups and trade unions.

Visits to Namibian Refugee Camps

As part of its work in support of Namibian independence The Africa Fund and ACOA staff make regular visits to southern Africa refugee centers. In 1981 Executive Director, Jennifer Davis visited the Namibian refugee camp in Kwanza Sul, and The Fund followed up this visit by issuing a report on refugee needs which reached over 60,000 people.

In February of this year, Research Director Gail Hovey attended the SADCC sponsored NGO conference in Zambia. During her stay she visited a Namibian refugee camp in Zambia and met with SWAPO officials concerned with projects for children. As a result of her meetings, The Africa Fund is launching a new appeal for educational materials and toys.

The Divestment Campaign

Last year Jennifer Davis, our Executive Director described to you progress being made in the campaign to break the economic links between the U.S. and the apartheid regime. We continue to invest major energy in this campaign. The divestment movement has generated the broadest debate of U.S. involvement in South Africa and Namibia in American history. Over the past three years twenty five states and numerous cities have considered legislation related to South Africa. This debate has also gone on at dozens of universities and churches.

Considerable success has been achieved. Most recently, the nation's capital, Washington D.C. passed a full pension divestment bill involving $65 to $70 million. In 1984 17 states are considering such legislation.

ACOA staff members have traveled all across the country addressing state legislatures, city councils, and local and regional coalitions working for this legislation. Because of the divestment campaign more and more Americans are aware of the support that is given to the apartheid regime by current U.S. political and economic policy. More and more Americans are calling for an end to that support. By building this kind of national backing for a new U.S. policy vis-vis South African and Namibia, the divestment campaign is making its contribution to the struggle of the the people of Namibia and of South Africa who are demanding full independence and full citizenship in the land of their birth.