

REPORT ON DECLARATION OF CONSCIENCE CAMPAIGN

In hundreds of communities across the world and in church, labor, student, and other organizations in at least fifty countries, Human Rights Day (December 10, 1957) was observed as a Day of Protest against South Africa's apartheid policy. Although reports have come in from many parts of the world in overwhelming number, these represent only a small portion of the activities which took place on December 10. The aim of this special Day of Protest has been realized, at least in part, namely: "to mobilize the spiritual and moral forces of mankind on this Day of Protest to demonstrate to the Government of the Union of South Africa, that free men abhor its policies and will not tolerate the continued suppression of human freedom."

Only a sampling of the many reports and communications can be listed here to give something of the flavor of this important event:

"Protests against the apartheid policy of the South African Government were made at a meeting sponsored by the Nigerian Association for the United Nations with the Christian Council of Nigeria on Human Rights Day. . . ." -- Daily Times, Lagos.

"Best wishes for a successful December 10th. Your imaginative support most welcome." -- Liberal Party of South Africa.

"It goes without saying that our efforts should not and do not end with this Declaration and with the Day of Protest, but must continue through all possible means. . . ." - Emilio Arenales, Ambassador of Guatemala to the United Nations.

"I hope your organization succeeds in making this a truly world-wide effort." -- N. W. Manley, Chief Minister, Kingston, Jamaica.

"We endorse the Declaration of Conscience . . ." -- Olympia (Washington) Council of Churches.

"Your efforts for justice I am sure will be successful." -- Mayor Robert F. Wagner, New York City.

"We support the stand for freedom and justice for our country's citizens." -- National Union of South African Students.

"I think it right . . . that on Human Rights Day . . . attention is called to the situation in the Union of South Africa. . . ." -- Partij van de Arbeid, Amsterdam.

"I write now to reiterate the approval of the World Assembly of Youth for the Declaration. . . . When people of good will all over the world are attempting to fight discrimination and prejudice, it is all the more important to state our views clearly to the Government of South Africa." -- World Assembly of Youth, Paris.

"We will make good use of the Declaration of Conscience." -- Council of Churches of Greater Kansas City.

"We can assure you that we shall do our best in representing your ideas in our country and in joining you in this undertaking." -- Gottfried Weilenmann, President, Verband der Schweizerischen Studentenschaften, Zurich, Switzerland.

"The situation in South Africa, particularly as it concerns the university and student community, has long been of concern to us. . ." -- Coordinating Secretariat of National Unions of Students, Leiden, The Netherlands.

". . . Those Americans who protest what is happening in South Africa are not at all smug about the situation in our own country. . . But that brand of injustice which South Africa is now dealing out rightly calls for protest from men of conscience in all nations." -- Oregon Journal, Portland.

"I am happy to support the Declaration of Conscience and will issue a memorandum to all the clergy of the Diocese telling them to observe December 10th . . . as a day of prayer." -- Episcopal Bishop of West Virginia.

"We would not want the Government leaders of South Africa to feel that this protest arises from any sense of superiority; rather it springs from a sense of deep concern for the lack of Christian brotherhood wherever racial discrimination is practiced." -- Peace and Social Order Committee, Friends General Conference.

"The American Newspaper Guild, through its three top officers, has subscribed to the Declaration of Conscience. . ." -- The Guild Reporter.

"Our Council, which represents more than 600,000 Danish young people, has decided to support the Declaration of Conscience." -- Danish Youth Council.

"We are very happy to join in this world-wide Protest which has been initiated by your Committee. . ." -- Y.M.C.A. of Colombo (Ceylon).

"Deprivations of basic rights perpetrated by the Union of South Africa are gross and indefensible. All peoples must join in their condemnation as immoral and uncivilized." -- Senator Wayne Morse.

". . . Your movement is a very laudable and timely one . . . which the world so direly stands in need of as long as a halt is not put to the innumerable indignities, inhumane actions, and brutalities meted out as a result of racism." -- W. R. Tolbert, Jr., Vice President of Liberia.

"A Christian must speak out against such policies as those of the South African Government, but one must be careful not to forget the log in his own eye." -- Rev. Henry L. Bird, St. Paul's Church, Bedford, Massachusetts.

"I can assure you that the Legion is unqualifiedly behind the very noble objectives of your Committee." -- Philippine Veterans Legion.

"The All African Student Union of the Americas is pleased to associate and identify itself with the Declaration of Conscience." -- Executive Secretary.

"My organisation shall see that the day is observed in a befitting manner. We hope and pray that our efforts may succeed and prove a solace to the suffering humanity." -- National Union of Students of India.

". . . Your Declaration of Conscience has been translated in Maltese and given wide publicity . . . I may assure you that it has aroused nationwide interest. . . Your Declaration of Conscience is wholeheartedly supported by the Malta Labour Party. . ." -- Malta Labour Party.

"The National Board of the Norwegian Liberal Youth wants to express its deepest sympathy with all those who are today struggling against and suffering by the brutal policy of segregation pursued by the South African government. . ." -- Norges Unge Venstre, Oslo.

"Many people must have wondered why the Cabinet took the trouble to put up Mr. Louw to reply to the Declaration of Conscience. . . The whole tone of Mr. Louw's speech shows that he was addressing himself, not as Minister of External Affairs to overseas opinion, but as a party politician to South African voters." -- Rand Daily Mail, Johannesburg.

"By branding the sponsors of the Declaration of Conscience as ultra-Liberalistic and smearing them as Communist, the Minister of External Affairs, Mr. E. H. Louw, did not absolve South Africa from the charges made by leading individuals and statesmen throughout the world. . ." -- Chief Albert J. Luthuli, South Africa.

South African Government Response

The impact of this expression of world opinion was deeply felt in South African Government circles. In an almost unprecedented and certainly a surprising action, Mr. Eric Louw, the Minister of External Affairs for South Africa, gave a 3,000 word radio address to his countrymen on the night of December 12, attempting to reply to the Declaration of Conscience. Giving evidence of the effectiveness of the world-wide Day of Protest, Mr. Louw began by saying to his radio audience: "I have been requested by the Cabinet to address you . . ." If there are any doubts that South Africa is sensitive to world opinion, this address should answer them, for the purpose of the speech was to "deplore in the strongest terms this concerted effort to undermine our international position."

An underlying theme of the address was the accusation that the critics of South Africa are Communist sympathizers. Mrs. Roosevelt was characterized as "not a stranger in American left-wing circles." The American Committee on Africa, which initiated the Declaration of Conscience, was typified as an organization with "a decidedly pinkish tinge."

The Right Reverend Ambrose Reeves, Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, gave an effective answer to the charge of Mr. Louw. He said:

"While he [Mr. Louw] accused the American Committee responsible for this document of having 'a decidedly pinkish tinge' he did not tell his listeners that its membership includes four U.S. Senators, sixteen members of the House of Representatives, both Republican and Democrat, two university presidents, as well as eight national religious leaders, and eleven authors and scholars . . . Those who heard the Minister's broadcast would do well to recognize that it is the present Government of South Africa, and not the white population as such, that is being criticized."

The Cape Times of Capetown, in editorializing on Mr. Louw's speech and the Declaration of Conscience, said: "The trouble about our troubled country is that unless the Government changes its ways there is no real answer to criticism of race policies here."

On December 17 the South African Government announced that it was dropping the case against 61 of the 156 who were arrested a year ago on the charge of treason. The Declaration of Conscience campaign with its world-wide support may well have been a factor in causing the Government to moderate its action against those accused of treason. Not only the outcry from within South Africa in opposing the manner of the arrests and the seriousness of the charge, but the international reaction has given the South African Government cause for reflection.

It may well be that the Declaration of Conscience campaign should be continued from year to year as a fitting expression of the meaning of Human Rights Day.