

The African-American Manifesto on Southern Africa, 1976¹

[This ten-point manifesto was adopted at a conference convened by the Congressional Black Caucus, September 24-25, 1976, in Washington, D.C. It was attended by members of the Caucus, as well as representatives of major African-American organisations - NAACP, PUSH, AFRICARE, Black Economic Research Council and National Council of Negro Women. It promoted campaigns in the United States to end apartheid and to free Nelson Mandela.]

There comes a moment in the affairs of humankind when honour requires unequivocal affirmation of a people's right to freedom with dignity and peace with justice.

This is such a moment. We express solidarity with Africans protesting racism and oppression in the streets of Soweto, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, Johannesburg and elsewhere. The intransigence of white settlers in Zimbabwe and Namibia and the bloody repression of Blacks in South Africa have created explosive environments which threaten world peace and raise the spectre of an internationalised, anti-colonial war which could have an ominous impact on race relations in America and abroad.

Inaction in face of such a threat is betrayal of our future - betrayal of humanity, betrayal of the long line of Black men and women who have given their lives in the struggle for freedom.

Conscious of our duty to speak, and recognising our responsibilities to humanity and to the revolutionary ideals of our forebears, we, the descendants of Africa, meeting in Washington, D.C., on this 200th anniversary of the first modern war for independence, proclaim our unswerving commitment to immediate self-determination and majority rule in Southern Africa.

¹ From: Esther Cooper Jackson (editor), *Freedomways Reader*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, USA, 2000.

We do this because we are African-Americans, and because we know that the destiny of Blacks in America and Blacks in Africa is inextricably intertwined, since racism and other forms of oppression respect no territories or boundaries.

We do this because we are African-Americans and because we have a mandate from our revolutionary predecessors: from Crispus Attucks to W.E.B. DuBois, from Dinizulu to Amilcar Cabral, from Martin Luther King to Malcolm X, from Nkrumah to Lumumba, from Nat Turner to Whitney Young, from Sojourner Truth to Mary McLeod Bethune, to proclaim the truth of the Revolution of 1776, which is also the truth of the Revolution of 1976 in Southern Africa.

In this spirit and with this understanding, we contend that it is mandatory for all Americans, and especially Americans of African descent, to understand the root causes of strife in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. These root causes are:

Despotism and racism that serve to polarise the white government and the African majority;

The continuing violence by the Europeans to sustain institutions of racism and exploitation;

Economic exploitation.

The history of our common struggle and recognition that our cause is just have brought us this day to proclaim and adopt the following 10 points:

1. We believe the present government of South Africa is the main barrier against majority rule in Southern Africa because of its continued illegal occupation of Namibia, its refusal to implement economic sanctions against Rhodesia and its unwillingness to share political and economic power with Blacks within its own borders. Specifically, if present negotiations fail or are unacceptable to African liberation leaders and the African people of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, the President of the United States should:

Support a finding in the Security Council that South Africa's continued illegal occupation of Namibia is an act of aggression

and a threat to the peace, calling for action under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Provide assistance, both humanitarian and military, to the liberation movements through the Organisation of African Unity.

Impose a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa and a stoppage of shipments of equipment to be used by the military, including all technology and nuclear material.

2. We totally support the liberation of Southern Africa from white minority rule by means of armed struggle, where necessary, and affirm the right of the African liberation movements to seek necessary assistance from whatever sources available to achieve self-determination and majority rule. We firmly reject the notion that such assistance implies external domination within Cold War context. However, we are unalterably opposed to external intervention, from whatever quarter, designed to thwart the inevitable extension of African freedom to the southern tip of Africa.

3. Negotiations can achieve a genuine peace only when they occur between the contending forces. High level diplomatic involvement by the U.S. and other powerful, concerned states can be of positive assistance, but they can be considered "successful" only when they achieve the full liberation of the suppressed people. In light of this principle we look to the representatives of the Front Line States and the organised fighting forces of the suppressed populations for the standard by which to judge the success of good will negotiations involving third parties. Transitional arrangements to majority rule must include an opportunity for the organised fighting forces to participate in the drafting of constitutional arrangements and the free public discussion and voting which is required for their ratification. Therefore, we support the five Front Line Presidents in their call on the United States to support the Freedom Fighters if Prime Minister Vorster and Mr. Smith obfuscate the fundamental changes which the struggle in Zimbabwe is on the verge of accomplishing. Similarly, we oppose United States support for any settlement in Zimbabwe and Namibia that compromises the freedom of Blacks in South Africa.

And in this connection, we urge the Administration to call upon South Africa to release its political prisoners and to begin negotiating with them and other Black leaders toward the establishment of a real democracy which guarantees majority rule and human rights for all.

The people of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, and the independent African states acting in their behalf, have tried for more than half a century through petitions, representations, negotiations, peaceful demonstrations, appearances before the United Nations and through appeals to international tribunals to achieve self-determination through majority rule. It is a matter of fact and history that these peaceful efforts have never received the full support of western powers. Multinational corporations and industrialised nations, headed by the United States and including Great Britain, France, Germany, Israel and Japan, which collectively account for over 60 percent of all trade with South Africa, reinforced the white minority ruled regimes through expanded investments, violation of economic sanctions and arms embargoes, and by sales of military related equipment and nuclear technology to South Africa.

4. We strongly condemn the Pretoria Government for crimes against humanity through its wanton killing of hundreds of African youthful demonstrators and its wholesale detention without legal redress of Africans and their allies. We urge that the U.S. provide special political refugee status, similar to that accorded to the Cubans, to Africans forced to emigrate from Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa because of political repression.

5. We, in support of the Organisation of African Unity, oppose any U.S. Government recognition of the "Transkei" and United States corporate investment in that "Bantustan" whose independence will deny Africans their birthright to full economic and political participation in the entire Republic of South Africa.

6. We reject any U.S. policy that stresses "minority rights" rather than "human rights" in Southern Africa, since minority rights in context implies the preservation of European privilege. Therefore, we question any large-scale financial subsidy of "minority rights" for Rhodesian whites, which would serve to reward the villains at the expense of the victims. Moreover, we denounce those pronouncements by Ad-

ministration officials that repeatedly speak of the need for “moderate leadership,” of “responsible government” and any policy which interferes with the right of the people to decide for themselves their system of government. Neither the United States nor any other power has the right to impose any government on the people of Namibia, Zimbabwe or South Africa. Self-government is the most inalienable of all rights.

7. We believe that independence in Namibia - including Walvis Bay, the principal port presently considered part of South Africa - must be achieved according to the guidelines set forth in Security Council Resolution 385 of January 30, 1976, which demands that South Africa withdraw and end its illegal administration of Namibia, and transfer power to the people of Namibia with the assistance of the United Nations; that is, release all political prisoners, hold free elections under United Nations supervision and control and “abolish all racially discriminatory and politically repressive laws and practices, particularly bantustans and homelands.”

SWAPO (South West African Peoples’ Organisation) must have a principal role in any negotiations. The Turnhalle Conference should have no standing whatsoever since it excluded SWAPO participation and is the creation of South Africa.

8. We urge proper recognition of the expanded potential of the United Nations as a fully representative body. The people and government of the United States must accept the changing perspective of U.S. interests among the family of nations and work within the United Nations and its affiliated institutions to deal with the emerging North-South issues which are the principal sources of tension and potential conflict in global affairs. Majority ruled African nations now constitute nearly one-third of United Nations membership, and consequently, are a pivotal group in that body.

We urge the U.S. to join the Council on Namibia, contribute to the U.N. Trust Fund, and we condemn the use of the veto by our government in the Security Council to protect South Africa.

9. We urge our government to recognize the People’s Republic of Angola and support its admission to the United Nations. The PRA has

joined the other Front Line States in efforts to obtain an appropriate settlement in Southern Africa. U.S. alignment on the same losing side with South Africa during the Angolan conflict demonstrated the bankruptcy of the government's Africa policy. This error should not be perpetuated. A normalisation of relations with the Angolan Government will facilitate any U.S. involvement in bringing about a just peace in the region.

10. We condemn the role played by the United States and other foreign corporations and banks, which by their presence and activities collectively have participated in the oppression of Blacks and have undergirded the repressive white minority governments of Southern Africa. No longer must Mr. Vorster be able to exact U.S. political support as ransom for America's hostage private corporations. Multinational corporations must recognise that the South African economy is not sound, and that the investment climate there is no longer favorable. The government should institute a program of tax disincentives to U.S. corporations operating in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. And should those corporations remain unprepared to use their leverage to bring about concrete steps towards economic and political justice in South Africa, and to operate there, in Namibia and in Zimbabwe on the basis of fair and non-discriminatory employment practices, humane working conditions and just compensation for the exploitation of African resources, they should withdraw.

Our Commitment

We challenge the Judeo-Christian community, the labor movement, the media and the political, business, and civic leadership in this country to see that our government upholds its values and its historical commitment to self-determination, freedom and justice, and to understand that the appeasement of South Africa can only invite an escalated war that will exacerbate racial tensions in the United States.

Finally, in turn, we commit ourselves to mobilising Black Americans and others of good will to formulate and support a progressive U.S. policy toward Africa. And we state our opposition to those Blacks who work directly or indirectly to support white minority regimes in Southern Africa.

The policies we have recommended are not only morally just, they are in America's best interests. Africa's economic and strategic importance to the United States in an increasingly interdependent world must be fully recognised.