

Statement by Rev. A. Donald Coleman
Co-Director of Guild House - A United Campus Ministry

Before the Civil Rights Committee

Nov. 27, 1979

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Don Coleman. I am a campus minister at the University of Michigan. Guild House is one of the campus ministries supported by the statewide Michigan Commission for the United Ministries in Higher Education (an ecumenical coalition of denominations including the United Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ) and locally by First Congregational Church and the First Unitarian Church. I do not speak for these denominations. I do, however, speak out of an awareness that these and other religious organizations are struggling to know how to respond to the apartheid government of South Africa.

As you may know religious bodies, through their Pension Boards and other agencies, are institutional investors with substantial holdings. These bodies highly value the growth potential and the dividends from these investments. Profits from such investments are used to provide substantial pensions and security for retired clergy and church workers.

An increasing number of church people are becoming concerned about the larger context and social impact investments have on the lives of people around the world. They believe, as I do, that issues of basic human rights and social justice are important dimensions in ordering the human community.

Various church bodies, in their social pronouncements and resolutions, have for years condemned the South African government for its inhuman treatment of the black majority. A white minority of some 4.5 millions governs a black majority of over 25 millions. Within South Africa the racist government ardently pursues policies of apartheid increasingly relying on arrests, detention, torture, violence and intimidation to suppress dissent and the cry for human rights and civil liberties. Its policy of "bantustantization" seeks to assign blacks to "homelands" (bantustans) under black rule. This policy deprives blacks of any rights as citizens of South Africa and provides an excuse for the government not accepting responsibility for black social welfare. The benefits of black labor for productivity of course is retained.

Such policies are blatantly immoral.

It is claimed that U.S. (and other western) corporations provide jobs for blacks and help them make better lives for themselves. The fact of the matter is that Western corporations and investments operate there under South Africa's laws. They reinforce the present structures of apartheid by

providing additional capital and military strength for white domination over black. Racial discrimination is the law of the land in South Africa, enshrined in its constitution.

As church bodies have become more and more aware of these factors we recognized that we are PARTNERS IN APARTHEID. Investments made to provide security for retiring church workers become instruments of death and torture and racism through corporations in South Africa. A few church bodies have already divested - many others are seriously considering divestment as perhaps the only serious witness for a concern for justice.

Public interest in South Africa is growing. Those who understand the nature of apartheid in South Africa are horrified. We should have learned a long time ago that there are moral limits to national sovereignty - boundaries a nation and its rulers may not cross with impunity. South Africa has long passed that point.

Moral arguments and pressures alone will not change South Africa. Political and economic pressure will make a difference. We need not only have the right but the duty to refuse to continue empowering a racist nation like South Africa. We must divest ourselves and our institutions of investments that support and profit from business in South Africa.

I urge the Civil Rights Committee to support House Bills 4831-4840. This is certainly one step in which the citizens of the State of Michigan can say "no" to apartheid in South Africa and cease being partners in apartheid.