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Congress of the United States

Committee on Foreign Affairs

House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 23, 1983

JOHN J. BRADY, JR.
CHIEF OF STAFF

President Harold T. Shapiro
Administration Building
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

3/28/83 - Copies to Kennedy and Brinkerhoff
and Heebink.
3/29/83 HTShapiro general response sent.

Dear Mr. Shapiro:

I understand that on April 14 the Regents of the University of Michigan will vote to determine the University's position on Public Act 512, which requires state education institutions to divest themselves of holdings in corporations that operate in South Africa. I want to take this opportunity to urge you, as a Regent, to support what is in my judgment a very important initiative, one that is wholly consistent with American traditions and America's national self-interest.

It is apparent that divestiture in and of itself will not bring about the elimination of the apartheid system within South Africa. However, I am convinced that the South African government is keenly sensitive to international pressure and international opinion. A divestiture proposal--such as the law now before the University regents--represents one means of applying pressure on the South African government to begin taking seriously the need for substantial political reform within South Africa. Moreover, an initiative such as this serves to demonstrate to our own government the willingness and desire to the American public to pursue a more aggressive policy directed toward the elimination of the system of apartheid.

South Africa offers the world a unique example of systematic, legally enshrined discrimination on the basis of race. Of the 24 million people who live in South Africa, only the four million whites enjoy full political, legal, and economic rights. Millions of blacks have been stripped of their citizenship and arbitrarily assigned to ethnically based homelands which have remained in a state of perpetual underdevelopment. Blacks are confined to an inferior educational system in which per pupil spending is roughly one-tenth of the spending in white schools. Blacks and other nonwhite South Africans have been uprooted from their homes in order to allow white citizens to move in.

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To keep the country locked into a policy of white supremacy, the Government has consistently refused to allow meaningful political participation to non-white South Africans. The recently announced new constitutional arrangements institutionalize to a greater degree minority rule in South Africa. Nor has the government recognized that by pursuing its present policies it greatly increases the chances of serious and sustained violence in South Africa.

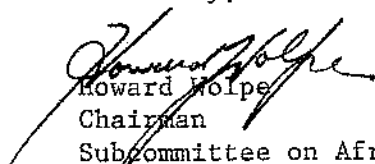
In the final analysis, a political resolution of South Africa's problems will come from within South Africa, not from the United States or any other outside nation. Yet given the large amount of economic interaction between our two countries there are a number of steps that could be taken which would have a significant symbolic and substantive impact upon events within South Africa.

We must take these steps for humanitarian, as well as strategic reasons. In the first place, the apartheid system in South Africa is repugnant to our own democratic principles. Second, South Africa's racial policies are assailable on strategic grounds. It is inconceivable that a small minority in South Africa will be able to continue indefinitely the denial of political rights to the majority of its people solely on the basis of race. It is therefore in the enlightened self-interest of the United States, in terms of our future relations with South Africa as well as many other African and Third World countries, to distance ourselves from the South African regime and demonstrate in meaningful and concrete terms our affinity with the legitimate aspirations of nonwhite South Africans.

The passage of divestiture legislation in the State of Michigan will, I believe, result in meaningful long-term gains for our state. During a recent trip to the African continent, I spoke with several African Ministers in an effort to facilitate greater trade between the State of Michigan and the African continent. In each discussion, I made reference to the fact that the State of Michigan had approved divestiture legislation. This opened doors for us in a way I previously thought impossible, for there is no issue African nations feel more strongly about than the South African system of apartheid. Michigan will be far better positioned in our dealings with African nations as a result of its divestiture initiative.

While some may question the efficiency of divestiture as a way of encouraging social change in South Africa, what needs to be recognized is that America's willingness to conduct "business as usual" has led to the perception throughout the African continent that the United States is closely tied to the maintenance of the South African regime and the system of apartheid. This identification is clearly not in the long-term self-interest of the United States. As compelling as the humanitarian concerns are, it is the consideration of American self-interest which, in my view, offers the most important justification for pursuing a policy of divestiture affirming I hope that the University Board of Trustees will give serious consideration to Public Act 512. Such an initiative would give the University Community the opportunity to contribute to peaceful change in South Africa.

Sincerely,


Howard Holpe
Chairman
Subcommittee on Africa