



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. NOWORYTA (Poland)

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AGENDA ITEM 36: POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 36: POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA (continued)

Hearings (A/SPC/43/L.3 and Add.1-9)

1. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that it had been decided to grant the requests for hearings relating to agenda item 36, "Policies of apartheid of the Government of South Africa", contained in documents A/SPC/43/L.3 and Add.1-9.
2. Ms. von ROEMER (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)), speaking on behalf of a body that represented some 87 million workers in all parts of the world, said that 1988 had been a year of escalating oppression in South Africa. One of the most disturbing developments had been the Government's decision virtually to close down 17 non-governmental organizations and to restrict the activities of the Congress of South African Trade Unions. In another repressive measure, the South African authorities, in collusion with employers, had introduced legislation to undermine the trade union movement by placing limitations on the right to work. There had also been a crackdown on trade-unionists, with 200 arrests, and the whereabouts of many of those still being held were unknown. A campaign to muzzle the critical media had reached its peak in October 1988, when the Government had served a "28-day suspension order" on the Weekly Mail.
3. The latest wave of repression had been an attempt by Pretoria to stifle opposition to the sham elections held in October 1988. The elections had been rejected by the large majority of the black population of South Africa. The suppression of debate and violations of human and trade union rights again showed that the Pretoria Government had no intention of dismantling apartheid. The imposition of comprehensive and mandatory sanctions would therefore appear to be the logical response of the international community. Earlier in the year, ICFTU had denounced the continued use of the veto in the Security Council to prevent the adoption of such sanctions.
4. ICFTU would continue to intensify its work in support of the independent black trade movement in South Africa and to press for sanctions. In particular, it was urging a cessation of coal trade with South Africa; it was targeting South Africa's effort to gain self-sufficiency in energy and was conducting a campaign against bank loans to South Africa; it was planning to organize a special workshop on sanctions to identify possible areas in which pressure could be put upon South African employers and to consider appropriate action to expose transnational corporations that maintained their interests in South Africa while claiming to disinvest and that adopted arbitrary measures detrimental to black workers and unions.
5. ICFTU was also intensifying a campaign to free the Sharpeville Six, the Alexandra Five and all other detainees and political prisoners of South Africa. It had also intervened with the South African authorities for the release of Nelson Mandela.

(Ms. von Roemer)

6. The black trade-unionists in South Africa were not alone in their struggle. The free trade union movement would remain behind them until apartheid was totally eradicated and a new society based on universal suffrage and full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was finally established in South Africa.

7. Mr. JOSEPH (National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL)) said that his organization addressed the racism and oppression that black Americans continued to be the victims of as a result of the policies of the Reagan Administration. The National Conference of Black Lawyers had committed itself to providing legal and political support for the black liberation movements in South Africa and Namibia and to publicizing the policies of the United States Government in south-western Africa. Reagan himself had characterized the racist Pretoria régime as a friend and ally of the United States, and it was common knowledge that Pretoria had drawn strength for intensifying its internal repression from the diplomatic, economic, military and political support given to it by the Reagan-Bush Administration, which was about to become the Bush-Quayle Administration.

8. Past years had seen a shocking escalation in the hardship inflicted upon the black people of South Africa by the régime through the continuation of the state of emergency, detentions, police violence and even torture and murder of children. The media continued to be muzzled. The recent sham elections, which had taken place without the majority of the population, were an abomination. The Pretoria régime had destabilized the entire region through border raids, assassinations of members of the African National Congress of South Africa, support of such terrorist groups as UNITA and MNR and the continued illegal occupation of Namibia.

9. NCBL intended to focus on the lack of media coverage of the issue. Despite restrictions imposed by Pretoria, the United States media were quite capable of dramatizing the situation. The American people seemed to have difficulty rousing themselves to events they could not see covered consistently in the media. If coverage picked up, Americans would put added pressure on the new United States Administration and Congress. NCBL also intended to join other groups in urging for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners, and it endorsed the campaign to dramatize the plight of the Sharpeville Six and others. NCBL would push for a completion of the Namibian independence talks. It was essential to close loopholes in the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act and pass the comprehensive sanctions bill. Disinvestment campaigns must continue. It was important to conduct education campaigns at schools and universities to educate the American public to be not only anti-apartheid but pro-liberation movement.

10. Despite the best efforts of Pretoria and Washington, the process leading to national liberation, self-determination, independence and black majority rule was inevitable.

11. Mr. JONES (American Committee on Africa (ACOA)) said that the results of the presidential election in the United States meant that the Reagan doctrine of world-wide military intervention and economic interference would be continued, and the task before the international community was therefore to ensure that the United States did not put on hold a serious dialogue on overcoming the apartheid system in South Africa.

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(Mr. Jones)

12. The situation inside South Africa had changed for the worse. Repression had risen steadily and media censorship had continued to grow. It was too late to talk about a reform of the system of white minority rule, which must be completely dismantled and replaced by democratic structures.

13. Over the past year, the Pretoria Government had placed a ban on major democratic opposition organizations. Newspapers had been shut down and the headquarters of the Congress of South African Trade Unions and of the South African Council of Churches had been bombed. But the struggle continued.

14. The Special Political Committee was meeting at a historic time, because 1988 had seen two dramatic defeats for the South African régime. The first had been the devastating military defeat at the hands of the Angolan and Cuban armed forces at Cuito Cuanavale, a tremendous blow for the cause of freedom and self-determination in southern Africa, which had shattered the myth of the South African military invincibility. The second defeat had come at the hands of the black majority in South Africa, which had refused to vote in the sham elections.

15. As in previous years, the United States Government had again vetoed the Security Council resolution to impose comprehensive and mandatory sanctions against the apartheid régime. At the same time, the American Committee on Africa felt a certain pride at the action of millions of Americans who, in 1986, had pressured the United States Government into adopting some economic sanctions. The United States Administration at the time had not been the least bit interested in turning away from the policy of so-called "constructive engagement". Furthermore, the majority of Congressmen who had voted in favour of sanctions had only done so as a result of prompting by the American people. It was with the American people that the American Committee on Africa was working. Americans continued to care deeply about the plight of the black majority in South Africa, despite the lack of media coverage and a concerted effort to portray the apartheid régime as engaging in reform. The American people was in favour of ending all United States economic support for apartheid and was bringing pressure to bear at the church, municipal and state levels for an end to investments by United States corporations in South Africa. In the past year, ACOA had been successfully linking the concept of government sanctions to the movement for disinvestment, selective purchasing and other sanctions of the sort. It had also been pressing for the adoption by local governments across the United States of resolutions supporting comprehensive sanctions. The success of those efforts had helped to mobilize the strong grass-roots movement that had led to the House of Representatives passing the strongest sanctions ever proposed in the United States. Although those sanctions had not been passed by the Senate, understanding had grown on the need for disinvestment. Efforts were currently being made to address the sham "pull-outs" of many American corporations. In response to a set of guidelines that ACOA and other national anti-apartheid groups had issued in January 1987, the state of Michigan and the cities of Miami and New Orleans had adopted measures that defined "doing business" in South Africa in a way that would include even those companies that no longer had direct investment in, or ownership ties to South Africa, and New York City was looking into a similar step.

(Mr. Jones)

16. ACOA was also helping to produce the second season of a weekly television programme called "South Africa Now", aired in more than 50 cities across the country. It had proved to be a very successful way to bring the reality of apartheid and regional destabilization to the attention of the American public and thus combat Pretoria's press black-out and the self-imposed censorship of the major Western media. ACOA was also organizing a youth-oriented project using the rap video "A.F.R.I.C.A." by the group "the Stetsasonics" to explain to inner-city youth in high schools across the country the links that existed between apartheid in South Africa and their own day-to-day situation.

17. The American Committee on Africa drew inspiration from the heroic struggle of the South African people to end apartheid and build a free South Africa. ACOA pledged to continue its work to forge a grass-roots movement in support of comprehensive and mandatory sanctions.

18. Mr. FASEHUN (Nigeria) requested that a further speaker, a representative of the Inter-Faith Centre on Corporate Responsibility, be heard by the Committee in connection with agenda item 36.

19. The CHAIRMAN said that he would take it, if he heard no objection, that the Committee agreed to that request.

20. It was so decided.

21. Mr. MARDER (U.S. Peace Council) observed that the issue of apartheid had become part of the national debate in the United States. The people recognized that the policies of the Administration were influential in maintaining the racist, brutal and terrorist Government in power in South Africa, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the people's position now paralleled that of the United Nations. An evidence of their revulsion against the régime was the public pressure that had forced the Reagan-Bush Administration to agree to the limited sanctions it had undertaken. Nor was it incidental that the Democratic Party had adopted at its Convention a strong platform that called for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, an end to the illegal occupation of Namibia and a change of United States policy towards Angola and Mozambique. Coupled with that had been an overwhelming vote in Congress for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa. Even a casual observer of the political scene could conclude that there was powerful popular support throughout the political spectrum, unaffected by the recent election, for change in the United States policy towards South Africa.

22. The U.S. Peace Council attributed that heightened awareness to the world community's persistent support for the struggle of the people of South Africa and Namibia and for their liberation organizations, and to the dramatic domestic campaigns by the broadest coalition of mass organizations. As a result, it was no longer possible for a candidate for public office to ignore the issue of apartheid. One of the obvious weaknesses, however, of the campaign in the United States against apartheid was the lack of realization that apartheid had an impact on all southern Africa. The problems of the front-line States were not fully appreciated, as evidenced by the recent visit of the leader of the United States-supported rebel group in Angola and the support for him in the United States Senate.

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(Mr. Marder)

23. In September, 300 grass-roots anti-apartheid activists from the north-east had met to discuss common strategies and to muster support for the liberation movements and the front-line States.

24. The conference had agreed that future activities would be based on the following points: support for comprehensive mandatory sanctions, economic support for the independence of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference; recognition of the Angolan Government and an end to United States support for the subversive rebel group in that country; increased emergency and development assistance to Mozambique and withdrawal of all support from the South African-supported rebel group there; support for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia and its immediate independence as provided in Security Council resolution 435 (1978); and recognition of the African National Congress of South Africa and the South West Africa People's Organization as legitimate liberation movements.

25. Mr. JACQUES (National Alliance of Third World Journalists), speaking on behalf of a nation-wide organization of journalists working in both the mainstream and Afro-American press as well as in other media, said that its members were dedicated to acting as a "fourth estate", a public watch-dog peering into the bastions of power on behalf of the powerless on issues of racism. It was not an easy task in a country where only the previous day 49 million had voted for a President who, with much assistance from the big-business-allied major media, had run in one of the most openly racist, white-supremacist campaigns in recent memory.

26. While giving extensive coverage to all right-wing counter-revolutionaries throughout the world, the mass media had readily complied when the apartheid régime had, after the imposition of the state of emergency in South Africa, imposed silence regarding the people's resistance and uprising there. For years there had been virtually no news from the cities and townships in South Africa, and the coverage of the recent South African election had focused on the white minority.

27. That erasure of the black people's heroic struggle for freedom had been a contributing factor to the rise of racist attitudes and violence in the United States. Yet, since only one branch of the Government - the Executive - had in the recent election been turned over to those who sponsored racism and world-wide terrorism, it was clear that the United States electorate was still struggling against racism and social ugliness. The task of journalists was to report that struggle and fight against the collaboration between apartheid and the mass media. His organization pledged itself to continuing solidarity with the journalists of South Africa who sought to bring voice to the people struggling for freedom.

28. Mr. HALEV (New Jewish Agenda), speaking as one born in South Africa and as a Jew, said that in South Africa the majority of its citizens were now facing their own holocaust of tyrannical oppression and deprivation of human rights; and that many countries were simply not facing up to their responsibility to maintain the political pressure needed to effect change.

(Mr. Halev)

29. He himself had been born to privilege in South Africa and as a young man had known something was wrong but had been too involved in his own life. In the intervening years he had revisited the country many times and observed the so-called changes that had taken place. Those changes were only a result of pressure from the outside and were only on the surface, because the most basic democratic right of the people to have a say in their own destiny was denied. South Africa had perhaps the strongest system of censorship in the world, and the amazing claim was that it was necessary for the protection of democracy.

30. He could testify to the fact that the isolation that had followed on the sports boycott against South Africa had really pained South Africans. The official contention was that sports in South Africa were now non-racial, and there had indeed been some integration, but at the end of the day the paths of the black and white athletes parted. The whites still went on to their manicured lawns while the blacks still returned to the townships where the conditions were often appalling.

31. Other major inequities continued in South Africa. A miniscule amount was spent on black education and teacher-training. The situation of black women, who often worked in white households and were unable to live with their husbands, was deplorable. Moreover, in order to get to work, people had to rise at 3.30 a.m. in order to be bussed into the cities, and they returned home late at night. Parents rarely saw their children, since the men often lived in singles hostels on the diamond and gold mines, while the children remained, usually with grandparents, in the so-called homelands. With home visits by the parent totalling only three weeks a year; a mother might see her children the equivalent of 3 years over a period of 18 years. People outside South Africa had great difficulty in understanding that situation, which to his knowledge did not occur anywhere else.

32. It was his experience that the whites in South Africa refused to acknowledge the conditions of the blacks for what they were. They still did not face up to the fact that thousands, including children, were in jail without trial, that there was harsh censorship, and that they heard only what the Government allowed them to hear. The whites-only elections of the previous week had been a complete sham. Moreover, there had been a move to the political right, and that would only strengthen white South Africa's resolve to do nothing to improve the conditions of the black majority.

33. He was often asked what would happen if a black Government took over in South Africa. In response he could only cite the example of Zimbabwe, where Mugabe had steered his country from oppressive rule to self-sufficiency in food and where many returned whites lived contentedly. The very words of the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress of South Africa promised a completely non-racial society. A message had to be sent to the racists in South Africa that other nations would not accept them as equals until they treated their own people as equals. Policies like "constructive engagement" did not help the people. The argument that sanctions would hurt the blacks more than the whites was simply untrue. Those who already had so little had, after all, little to lose. It was the whites in their spacious, elegant houses who would suffer, and only when they were affected would many of them begin to think about change.

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(Mr. Halev)

34. In his recent visits he had seen a very different kind of leadership developing among the blacks at the grass-roots levels: the children were not afraid to die; where some of their parents had been prepared to put up with the status quo, they were not. He had no doubt that freedom would come, but must those children die in great numbers, and must freedom come at such a cost?

35. South Africa was a beautiful country, rich in all natural resources with plenty for all, but only when all the people were free could there be a proper sharing in the bounty of that country.

36. Ms. BLAKEY (Transafrica) said that her organization was an African-American foreign-policy lobby best known for its initiation of the Free South Africa Movement. Much had changed since 1948 when the Nationalist Party in South Africa had begun to codify the vicious system of apartheid, but unfortunately, all too much had remained the same. While other African and Asian countries had won their struggles for national liberation, popular resistance within South Africa and in Namibia had been brutally repressed. Yet whatever progress had been made had been the result of pressure by the newly independent African States on the more advanced technological societies, forcing them to adopt at least the rhetoric of condemnation of apartheid and to impose some limited bilateral sanctions.

37. More importantly, the people of South Africa themselves had continued to organize resistance through popular demonstrations, mass strikes and economic boycotts, despite the régime's attempt to eradicate political leadership by means of banning, detentions without charge and forced exile. It was the bravery of the South African and Namibian people that made the lack of effective world action even more tragic.

38. The United States participated in verbal condemnations of apartheid but continued to veto every Security Council resolution that would effectively disrupt the régime's economic and strategic links to the Western world. The Reagan Administration had carefully avoided taking any initiative to help resolve the crisis through multilateral action.

39. The United Nations must continue to press for collective action. The new United States Administration might or might not be more responsive to the pleas of the world community. Transafrica, for its part, was determined to continue the pressure, since it recognized that all of humanity was diminished through the perpetuation of apartheid.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.