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to

**Mahatma Gandhi**

**Dr. William E.B. DuBois**

**The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**Paul Robeson**

**Statements by H.E. Mr. Leslie O. Harriman (Nigeria),  
Chairman, United Nations Special Committee  
against *Apartheid***

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*H.E. Ambassador Leslie O. Harriman (Nigeria), Chairman, Special Committee against Apartheid.*

*(UN Photo: M. Tzovaras)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Special Committee against *Apartheid* held special meetings between January and April 1978 to pay tribute to four great leaders who have made significant contributions in support of the struggle for liberation in South Africa: Mahatma Gandhi on the thirtieth anniversary of his assassination; to Dr. William E. B. DuBois, on the one hundred and tenth anniversary of his birthday; to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the tenth anniversary of his assassination; and to Paul Robeson on the eightieth anniversary of his birthday.

This pamphlet includes the statements made by the Chairman of the Special Committee, His Excellency Mr. Leslie O. Harriman of Nigeria, at these meetings. Explaining the decision of the Special Committee to honour these and other leaders, he said:

“These prophets of a new world order and leaders of people deserve our eternal gratitude. They deserve to be honoured by monuments in the United Nations and around the world.

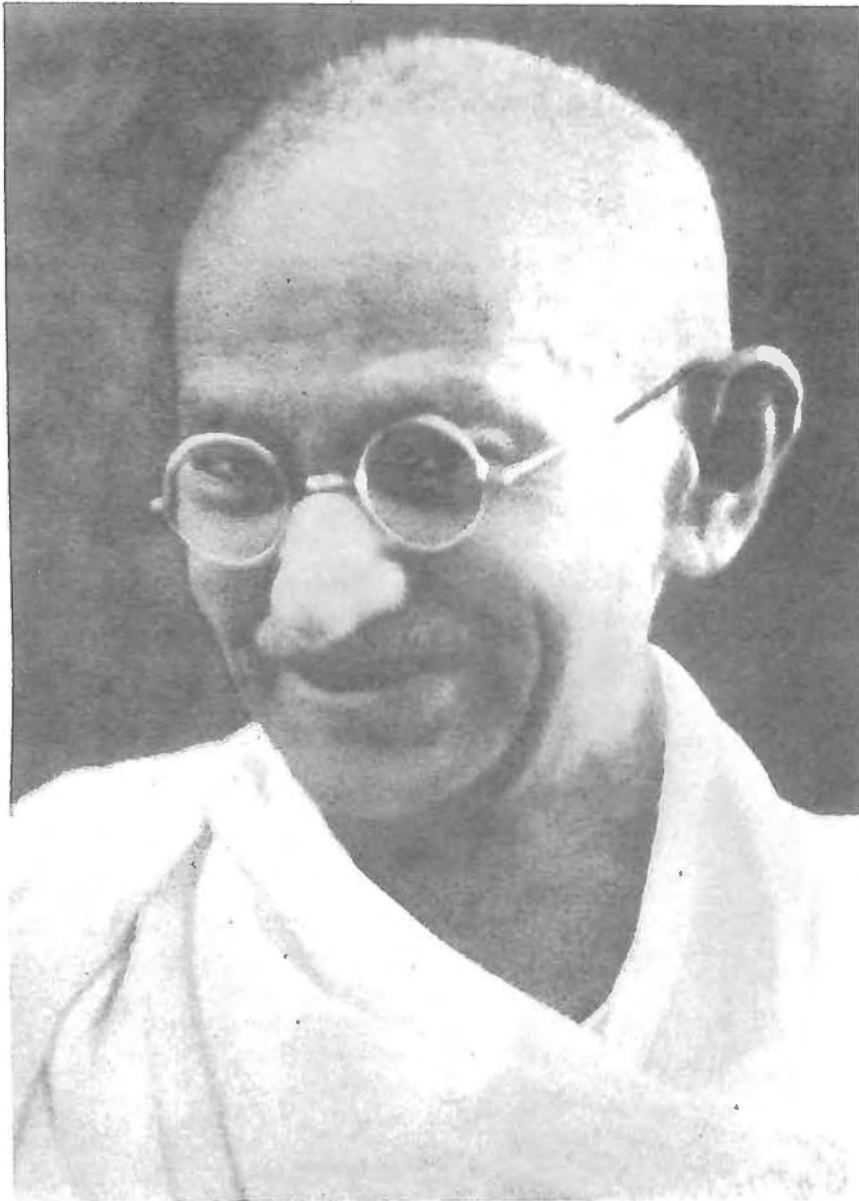
“They dedicated their lives to the welfare of humanity. None of them tried to enrich himself or to seek comfort from his genius. All of them remained loyal to their peoples and gave generously for the redemption of the humble and oppressed peoples. They have all suffered grievous persecution but remained undeterred.

“Humanity owes them a debt which it can never repay except in terms of carrying forward their ideals, and building a new world order of freedom and human dignity, of peace and international co-operation.

“The millions of people, who have laid down their lives in this century in struggles against colonialism and racism, have sacrificed not only so that their peoples would be free — but also so that the people of metropolitan countries and the privileged groups, presently poisoned by racism, would themselves become free.

“They gave their lives for the future of ‘all’ humanity. The oppressed people who constitute the great majority of mankind — who were blessed with such great visionary leaders — have become the trustees of all humanity.

“It is with that vision that we must, and we will, carry on the struggle for the emancipation of Africa and of the oppressed peoples.”



*Mahatma Gandhi  
(1869-1948)*

## II. TRIBUTE TO MAHATMA GANDHI

### Thirtieth anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

#### Gandhi's struggle in South Africa

There need be no surprise that the Special Committee against *Apartheid* is holding a special meeting today, 30 January 1978, to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest leaders of humanity in the twentieth century, a fighter for freedom and human dignity, and an apostle of peace. We have observed the centenary of his birth in 1969. I have had the privilege, on behalf of the Special Committee, to pay respects at his cenotaph in New Delhi in 1976. For, Gandhi had spent twenty years of his life in South Africa, where he led the struggle of the Indian people — the poor indentured workers on the plantations — against racial discrimination before returning to India to lead that biggest of the colonies to independence.

The struggle of Gandhi in South Africa has built an indissoluble bond between South Africa and India, and, indeed, between Asia and Africa. The national liberation movement of India has consistently supported the struggle for freedom in South Africa and the South African people have lent their solidarity to India. In fact, the Pan African Conference in Manchester in 1945 adopted a special resolution calling for the independence of India.

Many African leaders have been inspired by Gandhi in launching campaigns of passive resistance or positive action for independence. I will not attempt today to recount the activities of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, but only to make a few general comments.

Gandhi, I may recall, suffered many humiliations and assaults and terms of imprisonment in South Africa. But he led his people in a "civilized" struggle, because his goal was not to humiliate the whites but to end injustice. Before he left South Africa, he sent a pair of sandals he had made in jail to General Smuts as a gift. Twenty-five years later, General Smuts confessed:

"I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then, even though I feel I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man."

All the great leaders of the liberation movements have been conscious that their struggles were not only for the oppressed people but for "one humanity". They have all kept this objective in mind in deciding the strategies of their struggles.

### Limit to non-violent struggle

The South African people have carried on a non-violent struggle for many decades in the face of police brutality, and even massacres, in the hope that they can ultimately persuade their oppressors to see reason—oppressors who are not worthy to stand in the shoes of the fighters for freedom. But, as I have said during my visit to India, there is a limit to non-violence and that limit was perhaps reached in South Africa in 1960. Gandhi himself recognized that non-violent passive resistance has been, for some, a matter of faith, and for most people a tactic of expediency in the face of the brute power of the enemy.

Non-violent movements have been based on the hope that by their suffering, the oppressed people can draw attention to the justness of their cause and change the hearts of their oppressors. But in South Africa, the leaders of the *apartheid* régime have been immune to any human feelings so far as the black people are concerned. They refuse to recognize the humanity of the black people. They resorted to floggings against the non-violent movement in 1952. They met the non-violent movement in 1960 with the Sharpeville massacre.

A few weeks ago, the so-called Minister of Justice, James Kruger, said that Mr. Biko's death left him cold. There can, therefore, be no hope of changing the hearts of these criminals—as there was no hope of changing the hearts of the Nazi criminals who carried trainloads of human beings to gas chambers. That is why the national liberation movement in South Africa was obliged to abandon its strict adherence to non-violence, and prepare for an armed struggle.

Mahatma Gandhi himself has often said that violence is better than cowardice. In 1942, when the Indian people resorted to violence after his arrest, he rejected the demand of the British rulers to condemn them. He pointed out that their violence was a reaction to the "leonine violence" of the British. In the same way, Chief Lutuli in South Africa refused to condemn Nelson Mandela and his colleagues in 1964, and suffered further persecution. I said that non-violence was also a matter of expediency for the unarmed people faced by a heavily-armed oppressor. We know that the *apartheid* régime has a massive arsenal of arms, and is even trying to get nuclear weapons. But the oppressed people are no more totally unarmed. They have many friends. The partisans of freedom need not match the oppressors in sophisticated arms, but they will surely get all the arms they need to defeat the oppressors.

### Support by the people of India

During my visit to India, I was happy to see that the Indian people appreciated the situation in South Africa and were prepared to support the national liberation movement in any form of struggle which it chose, without any hesitation.

This day, the anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, is observed in India as the "martyrs day". The martyrs who fell in the struggle for freedom, in any country, are indeed the martyrs for the freedom of "all humanity".

We, therefore, associate ourselves with the people of India in paying tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi and all other martyrs in the cause of freedom.



*Dr. William E. B. DuBois  
(1868-1963)*

### III. TRIBUTE TO DR. WILLIAM E. B. DuBOIS

#### One hundred and tenth anniversary of the birth of Dr. William E. B. DuBois

##### Learning from the life of a great man

The Special Committee has convened this special meeting today, 23 February 1978, to pay tribute to Dr. DuBois for his historic contribution as the guide, the philosopher and the militant in the struggle against colonialism, racism and *apartheid*. It seeks to learn from the life of this great man of the century—a “titan” as he has been aptly described—in discharging its own duty to the oppressed people of South Africa. I may add that we have a further reason to recall the lives of Dr. DuBois and other leaders of the oppressed people.

For too long have we been fed with histories which glorify the colonialist and racist politicians and generals, the practitioners of “real-politik” and brinkmanship, the buccaneers and the robber barons, as the main actors in the affairs of humanity. The real moving forces of the history of the present century—the leaders in the struggle to emancipate the great majority of the people of the world from slavery, humiliation and exploitation—people like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. DuBois, Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, José Martí and Chief Lutuli—are ignored because they are the leaders of men and women, and not the wielders of power. The time has come to recognize that people count more than guns and that it is the liberators who have laid the foundations for genuine international co-operation. And the best place to do that is the United Nations which is the mirror of the emergence of the new world order.

##### The colour line as the problem of the twentieth century

This century unfolded with the prophetic warning by Dr. DuBois that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea”.

Dr. DuBois spent his whole life—which stretched from the end of the American Civil War to the founding of the Organization of African Unity—in the struggle to destroy that colour line which manifested itself as colonialism and Jim Crow, as neo-slavery and *apartheid*, against the people of darker skins. He was a participant in the Universal Races Congress in London in July 1911, which was sponsored, among others, by Mahatma Gandhi, and the organizer of five Pan African Congresses from 1919 to 1945.

As Dr. Martin Luther King said:

“He, [Dr. DuBois] symbolized in his being his pride in the black man . . .

“He was proud of his people, not because their colour endowed them with some vague greatness but because their concrete achievements in struggle had advanced humanity and he saw and loved progressive humanity in all its hues—black, white, yellow, red and brown.”

Dr. DuBois struggled with an unbounding faith that the future will be determined by the oppressed people and not by the oppressors, because their cause is just and because they are the great majority of the human race. He wrote in 1915:

“Most men in this world are coloured. A belief in humanity means a belief in coloured men. The future world will, in all reasonable possibility, be what coloured men make it.”

#### Dr. DuBois and the Pan African movement

But in struggling for emancipation, Dr. DuBois and the Pan African movement were not fighting for the black and oppressed people alone, but for all humanity. As the great majority of humanity, they were the trustees for its future. They were fighting for a vision in which all men and women would be free.

Dr. DuBois wrote in the manifesto of the Niagara Movement in 1905—in words which recall to mind the declarations of the South African liberation movement half a century later:

“We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights. We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a free-born American, political, civil and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone, but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals . . .”

This has been the vision of the black people for a long time, even in the days of slavery.

I recall the “Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World” by David Walker, a black freed man and anti-slavery worker in Boston, as long ago as 1829. He appealed to the Americans:

“We must and shall be free I say, in spite of you . . . Throw away your fears and prejudices then, and enlighten us and treat us like men, and we will like you more than we do now hate you. Treat us like men, and there is no danger but we will all live in peace and happiness together . . . What a happy country this will be, if the whites will listen . . . Treat us like men, and we will be your friends.”

In paying homage to DuBois today, we also honour the other great leaders of the Pan African Movement—Mr. H. Sylvester Williams, the Trinidad barrister, who convened the first Pan African Conference in London in 1900; Mr. Blaise Diagne of Senegal who helped arrange the Pan Africanist Congress of 1919 in Paris; Mr. Bellegarde of Haiti, who conveyed the results of that Congress to the League of Nations; Mr. George Padmore, the moving spirit behind the Pan African Congress in Manchester in 1945; and many, many others.

They built the Pan African movement of freedom and international cooperation, as against the Pan Africanism of imperialists who dreamt of a colonial empire stretching from the Cape to Cairo. We honour DuBois as a true patriot of the United States. He wrote in his autobiography:

“I know the United States. It is my country and the land of my fathers. I have served my country to the best of my ability . . . At the same time I have pointed out its injustices and crimes and blamed it, rightly I believe, for its mistakes . . .”

#### Dr. DuBois as an internationalist

We honour Dr. DuBois as an internationalist. That is why he is respected far beyond the shores of the United States of America; not only in the Caribbean and Africa, but also in India, in the Soviet Union, which honoured him with its highest decoration, in China and in many other lands.

He recognized the indivisibility of the struggles of all oppressed peoples for liberation. He said in 1949:

“Every victory of the people of Asia is known throughout Africa. And what happens in Africa will affect my people in

the United States and Brazil and other lands in the hemisphere.”

He was a consistent champion of freedom of all colonies and, under his leadership, the fifth Pan African Congress in 1945 not only called for the freedom of Africa, but adopted resolutions demanding the freedom of India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

On DuBois’ eightieth birthday, Prime Minister Nehru of India cabled him greetings declaring: “India remembers with gratitude your sympathy during her struggle for freedom”.

As Paul Robeson, the disciple, friend and colleague of Dr. DuBois said:

“Dr. DuBois was . . . in the truest sense an American leader, a Negro leader, a world leader”.

Dr. DuBois was instrumental in the adoption of the mandates system in the League of Nations—a recognition of international responsibility for the colonies.

At the San Francisco Conference in 1945 and in New York a year later, he seized the United Nations — when most of our countries were still under colonial domination — with the problem of emancipation from colonialism and racism.

He recalled that when he had pleaded in 1919, on behalf of the colonial peoples, the Congress of Versailles had paid no attention to them except as pawns to satisfy the greed of colonial Powers. “That is one reason why there is a San Francisco Conference,” he said, and “why there followed the most devastating war humanity has ever known; and why the chief problem before San Francisco ought to be the future of the colonial system and of colonial peoples”.

But his hopes were in vain.

#### Dr. DuBois as a man of peace

We honour Dr. DuBois as a man of peace, who understood that lasting peace is inseparable from freedom. He wrote in 1915:

“We, then, who want peace, must remove the real causes of war . . . We must extend the democratic ideal to the yellow, brown and black peoples”.

To those hypocrites under the mask of peace who condone the violence of the racists and call on the oppressed to confine themselves to non-violence, he replied, as early as 1906, in the tribute to John Brown, by making a clear distinction between the oppressors and the martyrs of the freedom struggle.

“We do not believe in violence, neither in the despised violence of the raid nor the lauded violence of the soldier, nor the barbarous violence of the mob; but we do believe in John Brown, in that incarnate spirit of justice, that hatred of a lie, that willingness to sacrifice money, reputation, and life itself on the altar of right”.

The fifth Pan African Congress put the issue succinctly when it said that the delegates believed in peace and added:

“How could it be otherwise when for centuries the African peoples have been victims of violence and slavery? Yet if the Western World is still determined to rule mankind by force, then Africans, as a last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve Freedom . . .”

#### His uncompromising opposition to racism

I am reminded that Dr. DuBois was “controversial” in his life. He was a revolutionary and he made enemies by his uncompromising opposition to any accommodation with racism, by his total rejection of exploitation of man by man, and by his condemnation of all imperialist and neo-colonialist manoeuvres in Africa. In his own country, he was even handcuffed and jailed in 1951, in the heyday of the cold war, for his chairmanship of the American Peace Information Centre. He was denied a passport to attend the independence celebrations of Ghana in 1957.

We admire him precisely because he was a revolutionary who strove to destroy the system of inequality and establish a new world order of human equality. This Special Committee which is charged with promoting international action for the liberation of South Africa cannot but pay special homage to Dr. DuBois for his constant denunciation of racism in South Africa and his espousal of the cause of the South African people.

He put the problem in a nutshell in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1915 when he pointed out that, a century ago, the Africans had owned all but a morsel of land in South Africa. When the whites in South Africa were given power in 1910, they had less than a tenth of the land. The white racist régime even enacted laws to deny Africans the right to buy land.

He tore the mask of hypocrisy worn by pseudo-liberals in South Africa and exposed the truth in all its nakedness. His comments on Jan Christian Smuts of South Africa are memorable. For instance, in the declaration of the Pan African Congress in Lisbon in 1923, he asked:



“What more paradoxical figure today fronts the world than the official head of a great South African State striving blindly to build Peace and Good Will in Europe by standing on the necks and hearts of millions of black Africans?”

#### Dr. DuBois' vision and faith

The most crucial battle of Pan African liberation is today being fought in South Africa by the black people under the leadership of their glorious liberation movement. Their path is lighted by the vision of Dr. DuBois—a vision of a world without prejudice and exploitation, a world without colonies and slavery, a world based on a common humanity. That new and just world will be created by the people who have suffered oppression—the people of colour—with the support of all decent men and women.

In that spirit, I appeal, on behalf of the Special Committee, for the unity of all people of the black diaspora in support of the oppressed people of South Africa and for the fraternal support of all nations and all men and women of goodwill.

As Dr. DuBois said, the “coloured folk have much to remember and they will not forget”. They will never forget their friends in this hour of destiny. Dr. DuBois was, above all, an optimist, whose optimism was based on faith in the future. In his “Last Message to the World”, he said:

“As you live, believe in life. Always human beings will live and progress to greater, broader and fuller life. The only possible death is to lose belief in this truth simply because the great end comes slowly, because the time is long”.

We, in the Special Committee, share that faith and that optimism—for South Africa, for Africa, for the world.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from an article by Dr. DuBois on the “African Roots of War” in 1915:

“Twenty centuries before the Christ a great cloud swept over sea and settled on Africa, darkening and well-nigh blotting out the culture of the land of Egypt. For half a thousand years it rested there until a black woman, Queen Nefertiti, ‘the most venerated figure in Egyptian history’, rose to the throne of the pharaohs and redeemed the world and her people. Twenty centuries after Christ, black Africa, prostrated, raped,

and shamed, lies at the feet of the conquering Philistines of Europe. Beyond the awful sea a black woman is weeping and waiting, with her sons on her breast. What shall the end be? The world-old and fearful things, War and Wealth, Murder and Luxury? Or shall it be a new thing—a new peace and new democracy of all races: a great humanity of equal men?”



*The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
(1929-1968)*

#### **IV. TRIBUTE TO THE REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

### **Tenth anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

A great fighter for human dignity, freedom and peace

Today, 4 April 1978, is the tenth anniversary of the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King, a great American, a great fighter for freedom and peace, and a friend of this Committee.

One of the first letters received by this Special Committee after its establishment in 1963 was from Dr. King who had co-sponsored with Chief Albert J. Lutuli—on Human Rights Day, 10 December 1962—an “Appeal for Action against *Apartheid*”; They said:

“We therefore ask all men of good will to take action against *apartheid* in the following manner:

Hold meetings and demonstrations on 10 December, Human Rights Day;

Urge your church, union, lodge or club to observe this day as one of protest;

Urge your Government to support economic sanctions;

Write to your Mission to the United Nations urging adoption of a resolution calling for international isolation of South Africa;

Don't buy South Africa's products;

Don't trade or invest in South Africa;

Translate public opinion into public action by explaining facts to all peoples, to groups to which you belong, and to

countries of which you are citizens until an effective international quarantine of *apartheid* is established.”

In recalling the memory of the late Dr. King, therefore, we recall not only a great leader of the black people in the United States of America but a leader in the international movement of solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa and their national liberation movement.

Dr. King was always conscious of the bond between the struggle of the black people in his country and the wave of colonial revolutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He said in 1958:

“The determination of Negro Americans to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world. The rumblings of discontent in Asia and Africa are expressions of a quest for freedom and human dignity by people who have long been the victims of colonialism and imperialism. So in a real sense the racial crisis in America is a part of the larger world crisis”

He recognized the link between the struggle for human dignity and the struggle against poverty. Indeed, in the last days of his life, he was busy helping the sanitation workers of Memphis and preparing for a Poor People’s March on Washington.

Dr. King saw at the same time that the oppressed people have a vital stake in peace and called for an end to the gruesome war in Vietnam. Dr. King not only preached but led tens of thousands of his people into heroic action against segregation and humiliation, for an end to poverty, and for peace. He lived and died for the purposes and principles of the United Nations and the noblest aspirations of humanity. Few greater men have set foot in this building than Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King.

#### Lessons from Dr. King’s life

Dr. King was brutally assassinated on 4 April 1968 at the young age of thirty-nine, little more than twelve years after he entered public life by leading the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. But his life has many lessons for us.

First, it teaches us that the struggle against racism—even at this stage when that evil is doomed to extinction, and when the nations of the world are pledged to eradicate it—can be no easy task. Dr. King himself was jailed a score of times, beaten and stabbed. His home was bombed and his family was constantly subjected to threats. His name was vilified by powerful forces, including even an agency of the United States Government. In the movement he led, non-violent though it was, his followers were subjected to savage brutality. His non-violence was met with violence—in fact he was victim of violence and of an assassin’s bullet. The whole world shuddered at the sight of the Sheriff of Birmingham, Alabama—Bill Connor—unleashing fire hoses and vicious police dogs against little children. We recall the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham on 15 September 1963, in which four little black girls attending Sunday School were killed and 21 injured.

The national liberation movement in South Africa has learnt that its own struggle against racism will be no easy walk and has steeled the black people to pay the price of freedom.

Second, Dr. King has taught us that there can be no freedom without struggle and direct action by the oppressed people. Laws and resolutions alone can bring no meaningful change. This was true of the United States where the provisions of the Constitution were not implemented for a hundred years and the Supreme Court judgement of 1954 against school segregation remained a dead letter until the oppressed people fought to enforce it at great risk to themselves and their children. It is even more true in the case of South Africa where racism is a State policy of the minority régime. The national liberation movement of that country recognized that truth many years ago.

Third, Dr. King teaches us that the oppressed people must struggle now and must not wait until it is convenient for the oppressors or their accomplices.

In his historic “letter from the Birmingham jail” in April 1963, Dr. King confessed his total disappointment with the so-called “white moderates” who proved to be greater stumbling blocks in the stride of the black people toward freedom than the racists. They were always asking the black people to wait for a “more convenient season” and advising against direct action. We who have followed the situation in South Africa have also encountered the “white moderates”—not only those in South Africa, but their counterparts in the community of nations. Every time we call for action against *apartheid*, they find that the time is not convenient. Every time we call for sanctions against the *apartheid* régime, they find one excuse or another. If we wait for them, we wait for ever.

## Dr. King's teachings and actions in relation to the struggle in South Africa

I must make reference to the attempts of some people to cite the teachings and actions of Dr. King in order to oppose the right of the South African national liberation movement to resort to armed struggle and to argue that multi-national corporations can play an important role in ending racism.

We who recognize the close inter-relationship between the struggle of the black people in the south of the United States of America and in the south of the continent of Africa know that the situations were not entirely identical. Dr. King led a campaign of disobedience against unjust local laws which were in conflict with the constitution and the laws of the United States. The struggle in South Africa has been, on the other hand, a struggle against discrimination enshrined in the national constitution and legislation. Dr. King had conceived his task as precipitating "creative tension" so that meaningful negotiations could take place.

In South Africa, the oppressed people have carried on numerous similar campaigns at great sacrifice. But the *apartheid* régime has consistently refused negotiations because the end of racism involves the end of that régime and the system it represents. It has met protests and non-violent resistance by a constant escalation of violence. It has responded with brutal extermination even against women and children and against detainees in its custody.

It was under these circumstances and after a series of massacres that the national liberation movement felt obliged to abandon its strict adherence to non-violence. Chief Lutuli refused to condemn that decision, as did most votaries of non-violence around the world.

Then there is also the myth that economic interests had played a positive role in desegregating Birmingham and it is argued that *ipso facto* similar methods could lead to eliminate racism in South Africa. But the facts are that the approaches by Dr. King and his partisans to the business world in Birmingham were an utter failure. It was only when direct action of the oppressed people affected business—as, indeed, the struggle in South Africa since the Soweto massacre unnerved the investors—that the businessmen saw the handwriting on the wall and then attempted to save the situation.

The main force for change in Birmingham was the struggle of the black people and their white supporters which aroused public opinion all over the country—

indeed, all over the world—and led to action by the Federal Government.

In the case of South Africa, it is only the struggle of the oppressed people—combined with effective international economic sanctions and an aroused world public opinion—which can bring liberation.

There can be no reliance on a "change of heart" among the multi-national corporations. They are deeply involved in the system of racist oppression. They are tied up with powerful State corporations of the *apartheid* régime. They depend on the régime for their super-profits. They cannot be the agents of change.

Like all the great leaders of the oppressed people, Dr. King had a dream, a vision for the future, which was not for the oppressed people alone but for all the people. Between the dream and the fact, he made the supreme sacrifice. Even in the face of brutality by the Birmingham police, he dreamed of bringing the "beloved community" to that city. He said in 1965:

"It is not black people struggling against white people. It is justice struggling against injustice".

It was his faith that inspired many whites to join the civil rights struggle and risk their lives and their security. It was his firm attachment to principle that convinced President John Kennedy to declare in his address in 1963:

"We are confronted primarily with a moral issue, as old as the Scriptures and as clear as the American Constitution . . . - Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence".

In South Africa, they cannot discover the moral issue. They see the Scriptures as one of divine supremacy of the white minority. They see their constitution as an instrument for amassing power to brutalize the blacks and enslave them. They know no shame. It is rather Christian nationalism. In their laager and euphoria they cannot see the handwriting on the wall in blood and racial violence.

Dr. King's committed empathy with the oppressed

In his short life, Dr. King helped bring about a historic transformation in his country. His contribution was recognized by all the oppressed people of the world and he became the youngest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

But the tasks to which Dr. King had lived and died—the elimination of racism, the abolition of poverty, the establishment of a just and lasting peace—remain. His life shall inspire the peoples of the world to redouble their efforts to reach those noble goals.

Addressing the March on Washington in August 1963, Dr. King said that, in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the Founding Fathers of the United States had signed a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. But America had defaulted on this sacred obligation and had given the black people a bad check. There would be no rest, no peace and no cooling off, he declared, until the obligation was honoured.

Let it not be said of the United Nations, which has affirmed the sacred principles in its Charter, that it too has given a bad check to the black people of South Africa and to the world.

The greatest virtue of Dr. King—to quote from his tribute to Dr. W.E.B. DuBois—was “his committed empathy with all the oppressed and his divine dissatisfaction with all forms of injustice.” Dr. King continued:

“Let us be dissatisfied until every man can have food and material necessities for his body, culture and education for his mind, freedom and human dignity for his spirit . . . Let us be dissatisfied until our brothers of the Third World—Asia, Africa and Latin America—will no longer be the victim of imperialist exploitation, but will be lifted from the long night of poverty, illiteracy and disease.”

As Mrs. Coretta Scott King said at the funeral of Dr. King:

“The day that Negro people and others in bondage are truly free, on the day ‘want’ is abolished, on the day ‘wars’ are no more, on that day, I know my husband will rest in a long-deserved peace.”

May the soul of our great and beloved Dr. Martin Luther King rest in peace even though we are yet to achieve this goal of freedom of all human beings and be able to sing with him in his grave “we shall overcome”.

May I now invite all to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King.

I hear no objection, and it is so decided.



*Paul Robeson  
(1898-1976)*

## V. TRIBUTE TO PAUL ROBESON

### **Eightieth anniversary of the birth of Paul Robeson**

#### A spokesman for equality and dignity

We meet here today, 10 April 1978, to pay tribute to one of the great men of this century, a valiant fighter for freedom and peace and a pioneer in the movement of solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa and their national liberation movement, Paul Robeson, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of his birth on 9 April.

Robeson was a great athlete as a student at Rutgers University where he won letters in four sports—football, baseball, basketball and track. He was one of the greatest actors and greatest singers of all time. He was also a great scholar who mastered over twenty languages—including the languages of East and West Africa—and made a significant contribution to the study of African history, linguistics, music and folklore.

A son of a slave who ran away to freedom, he rose to heights of glory, despite all the handicaps laid by the racists, as one of the most accomplished men of his time. Yet he remained, throughout his life, a loyal son of his oppressed people in the United States and in Africa. He declared:

“ . . . in my music, my plays, my films I want to carry always this central idea: to be African. Multitudes of men have died for less worthy ideas; it is even more eminently worth living for”.

Paul Robeson thus became the living refutation of racist myths and a personification of the unbreakable link between Africa and the black people of the United States which could not be destroyed by centuries of cruelty and inhumanity meted out to the people of African descent. Because of him, millions of people in all continents learned to reject the prejudices inculcated by the racists and to respect the black people, their culture and their dignity.

Paul Robeson dedicated his superb talents and all his energies to the freedom and human dignity of the black people, to the struggle for the emancipation of all oppressed peoples, and to the cause of peace and international co-operation. When he died two years ago, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, declared:

“Throughout his life, Paul Robeson defended with courage and dignity basic principles of equality among all men which are at the very heart of the United Nations Charter . . .

“Mr. Robeson’s career as a distinguished artist and an eloquent spokesman for human dignity contributed enormously to greater understanding among peoples and significantly advanced the human condition”.

The Board of Directors of the Screen Actors Guild pointed out that “Paul Robeson exemplified in life the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.

#### Contribution to solidarity with the struggles of African peoples

We, in this Committee, have been particularly aware of the magnificent contribution of Paul Robeson as a pioneer in promoting solidarity with the struggles of African peoples. Paul Robeson was the founder and chairman of the International Committee on African Affairs formed on 28 January 1937—and of the Council on African Affairs which was established in 1943—to inform American public opinion about freedom struggles in Africa and to encourage support for those struggles.

Wherever the colonialists tried to suppress the African people, Robeson and the Council on African Affairs raised their voice in firm denunciation—when a strike of workers in Ghana was suppressed in 1948 with the arrest of Kwame Nkrumah and other leaders; when African miners seeking a living wage were killed in Enugu, Nigeria in 1949; when the British Government plotted in 1950 to deprive Seretse Khama in Botswana of his chieftainship, because he married a white woman; when the British colonialists unleashed terror against Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and his followers in Kenya in 1952; and when the French Colonialists killed nationalists in Tunisia in 1952.

They provided humanitarian assistance to the struggling African peoples and pressed for action by the United Nations in support of freedom. The publications of the Council were an important source of information on the colonialist manoeuvres in Africa and on the struggles of the African workers and freedom movements. Above all, Paul Robeson and his associates were unswerving in their solidarity with the struggling people in that bastion of racism, the Union of South Africa.

The International Committee sponsored lectures by Professor D.D.T. Jabavu and Dr. Alfred Xuma, two prominent leaders of South Africa, as early as 1937.

The Council on African Affairs submitted a memorandum to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, as early as May 1946, calling for an investigation of racism in South Africa, to be followed by appropriate action by the Security Council. On 9 June 1946, it organized a massive rally of 15,000 people in Madison Square Garden to denounce the racist régime of South Africa and oppose its plans for the annexation of Namibia.

Later in 1946, the Council hosted the first delegation of the South African liberation movement to the United Nations consisting of Dr. Xuma, then president of the African National Congress of South Africa; Mr. H. A. Naidoo, a leader of the South African Indian Congress; and Mr. H. M. Bassner, a Senator representing the Africans in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. It organized meetings in support of the freedom struggle—and a large picket line in front of the South African Consulate to protest racist laws and the brutal massacre of African miners during their historic strike in August 1946.

It tore the mask off the then Prime Minister of South Africa, Field Marshal Jan Smuts, who was being paraded in the West as a liberal. It denounced the hypocrisy of the so-called “Free World” which betrayed its professions and its promises and allied the racist régime of South Africa in its oppression of black people of South Africa and Namibia.

In 1952, when the South African people launched a “Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws”, the Council raised funds to support the liberation movement and organized petitions to the President of the United States.

We have today anti-*apartheid* movements and solidarity movements in many countries of the world which are playing a crucial role in the international campaign against *apartheid* in co-operation with the United Nations. The first of these movements, we must recall, was founded by Paul Robeson and the black people of the United States.

On this occasion, we must recall also the dedicated work of the colleagues of Robeson: Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, the father of Pan Africanism and co-chairman of the Council on African Affairs; Dr. Alphaeus Hunton, the Executive Secretary of the Council, whose wife, Dorothy, is with us today; Mrs. Eslanda Goode Robeson who, along with Dr. Hunton, was the representative of the Council at the United Nations; and many others.

In the course of this year, the Special Committee intends to publicize the contribution of Paul Robeson to the struggle for liberation in South Africa, and to bestow on him a special award on behalf of the Special Committee. But we recognize that Robeson’s contribution goes far beyond the struggle of the South African people and the mandate of this Special Committee.

### Robeson's conviction and faith

No words can adequately describe the personality and the life of Paul Robeson—a man of immense sincerity and generosity, an incorruptible leader of his people, a true internationalist, and an epitome of courage and conviction. I will only attempt to point to some lessons he has left in his legacy to us.

When the racists and colonialists were busy spreading contempt for the heritage of the black people, Robeson pointed with pride to the nobility of the African civilizations and reminded the world that much of what was distinctive in American culture was the creation of the black people. He had, therefore, great faith and confidence in the potentialities of his people, when they break their chains to enrich the world culture.

He recognized the truth that the freedom and human dignity of the black people of the United States was inextricably tied up with the freedom and human dignity of the people of the continent of Africa and the Caribbean. Thus, while he was demanding a law against the criminal lynching and mob violence against the blacks in the United States in 1946, he was also calling for the freedom of the people of Africa and the Caribbean. Indeed, as a friend of many of the leaders of the revolutions in Asia, Africa and Latin America, he saw that the struggle for emancipation of the black people had become a part of the irresistible march of all oppressed peoples to freedom.

His great voice immortalized not only the songs of his people but the songs of freedom of many other peoples in many of the world's languages—Spanish and Russian, Finnish and Yiddish, German and Chinese—in many battle fields of freedom.

When many others were overawed by the power of the colonialists and racists, he never wavered in his faith that the oppressed peoples would triumph. He rejected so-called gradualism, which was still being advocated after repeated betrayals of the black people, and called for "freedom now," saying:

" . . . too long, too long have my people wept and mourned. We are tired of this denial of decent existence."

He was not one who would beg the oppressors for freedom nor accept the crumbs from the master's table. He recognized that there can be no freedom without a struggle, without sacrifice. "Our freedom," he said, "is going to cost so many lives . . . When we talk of freedom we do not discuss lives."

While fighting for his people's freedom, Paul Robeson—like Dr. DuBois and Dr. Martin Luther King, whom we have honoured in the past few weeks, and like many other leaders of the oppressed peoples—had a vision which encompassed

not only the liberation of his own people but the building of a new world. He believed that "the common people of all nations are truly brothers in a great family of mankind." He wrote in *Here I Stand*:

"This belief in the oneness of humankind, about which I have often spoken in concerts and elsewhere, has existed in me side by side with my deep attachment to the cause of my own race."

We cannot but recall that petty and short-sighted men in his own homeland—steeped in the alliance with colonial powers and with racism—sought to silence this great patriot and humanist. They tried to take vengeance on him for the advance of the irresistible movement of liberation. Paul Robeson stood up—never wavering, never compromising—and declared:

"I will never retreat 1000th part of an inch."

His towering figure became the symbol of Africa and of the black man—determined to be free, determined to assert the dignity of man. The more he was scandalized by the racists the more he was revered by humanity as the "purest kind of a guy." In his own lifetime, Paul Robeson could see the defeat after defeat suffered by his persecutors, and the victories of the forces of freedom. He wrote in 1955:

" . . . the verdict of history, which we are reading in the stormy events of our day, is unmistakably clear. Those forces which stand against the freedom of nations are not only wrong—they are doomed to utter defeat and disaster."

In his public statement on 28 August 1964, he pointed out:

"The issue of 'freedom now' for Negro Americans has become the main issue confronting the nations, and the peoples of the whole world are looking to see it finally resolved.

"When I wrote in my book, *Here I Stand*, in 1958, that 'the time is now', some people thought that perhaps my watch was fast (and maybe it was a little), but most of us seem to be running on the same time—now".



In his last public message in June 1974, he said:

“It has been most gratifying to me in retirement to observe that the new generation that has come along is vigorously outspoken for peace and liberation . . . To all the young people, black and white, who are so passionately concerned with making a better world, and to all the old-timers who have been involved in that struggle, I say: Right On!”

That is the testament of Paul Robeson we shall cherish.

His watch was a little fast perhaps but his confident prediction will surely come true. To that end the Special Committee makes its pledge today in the name of Robeson, in the presence of his loyal friends and colleagues.