

Statement to Executive Board

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George M. Houser

It is very important that at this particular meeting of our Executive Board we re-assess our general situation. First, it is appropriate because we must adopt a budget for next year, and this budget must be based upon our program plans. These program plans in turn must be based upon the direction in which we plan to go.

Second, we are confronted with some internal problems and this always makes a re-evaluation important. At the moment we have the largest financial deficit that we have had for the last couple of years. And yet we have this deficit in a year in which we have raised significantly more money than we have in any previous year. Our financial problem therefore is not an absolute one, but relative. Also we have had a number of staff changes in the last few months that have necessarily affected the efficiency of our work. It is always difficult to break new people in, and it takes several months to incorporate a new staff person completely into effective implementation of program.

Third, in many ways we are confronted with a new situation as regards African affairs. In a special memo which I prepared for the Board meeting which we held a month ago, I outlined some of these new factors. I don't wish to analyze these factors again, but only to refresh our minds by listing them: One factor is the greatly increased concern about Africa found in the United States and consequently the growth of new organizations and program plans within existing organizations relating to Africa. This means that there is stiffer competition for any group such as the American Committee on Africa. Another new factor is the mushrooming of newly independent African states. Obviously it is different working with an independent state than with private organizations within non-independent countries. And finally, the Congo situation has introduced a dimension into African affairs and African-American relations that cannot be overlooked. The cold war is definitely at work in the heart of Africa.

We must assess our direction in the light of these circumstances. I should like to make it very clear that in the discussion we must have we should try as far as possible to think objectively and without regard to personalities involved. The fact, for instance, that I have been with the American Committee on Africa for the past five years and was associated with it in an informal way from the beginnings should not be given any more consideration than any other fact in our past history. We are now addressing ourselves to the future. It should not be assumed that because a person has been with the organization for a period of years, it is always best for him to remain there. All I am saying is that I think I can approach this discussion as objectively as almost anyone else and can think of the future of the organization and its program with or without myself being involved in a staff position. Whether it is wise for present staff members, whoever they might be, to remain associated with the organization depends upon an assessment of what they contribute to the organization as well as upon their ability and disposition to carry out any new directions which the Board itself may decide upon.

The fundamental question which a policy-making body of any organization must continually ask itself and must especially do so at certain points is: Is there a need for and a distinctive place for the work of the organization now? I personally am convinced of the fact that it would be tragic for the Committee to lessen

its activities at this moment in history. My recent travels in Africa have made me feel this all the more keenly. For one thing, we have a distinctive function in relation to the intensification of the struggle in the Union of South Africa. Our organization is looked upon as perhaps the chief opponent of apartheid outside the Union. In a series of articles written by one of the principal Afrikaans journalists of South Africa, editor of an Afrikaans magazine, the American Committee on Africa was called the principal enemy of the white supremacist government. My contacts on this recent trip with key figures in the South African United Front in Accra and in London also back up this position.

With those Africans who are struggling for independence and freedom in Portuguese Africa, the American Committee on Africa is looked upon as one of their chief sources of support. I spent a great deal of time in Leopoldville on this last trip, for instance, with the Union of the Populations of Angola. We have been in touch with the leadership of this group ever since it was founded several years ago. Also I had contact in London with a leader of another group whose initials are M.P.L.A. A Mozambique group established in Dar es Salaam now has also been in touch with us regularly. Our help is sought and expected from many groups.

Then there is the terribly important question of Algeria. Limited as our work has been on the Algerian question, our Algerian friends look upon the Committee as one of their chief supporters in the United States.

There is an increased need, if anything, for the work of our Defense and Aid Fund now. The appeals are coming to us constantly from South Africa, South West Africa, Portuguese Africa, petitioners to the United Nations, for refugees from Southern Africa, etc.

Then on the broad front of policy questions, there are constant issues arising at the United Nations not only affecting non-independent Africa but also independent Africa such as the Congo question. We have had a key role working with petitioners from South West Africa, for instance, in distributing information which has been helpful to delegations that are wrestling with the problem of South Africa, Portuguese Africa, and other areas. But there is an increased role which I hope we could begin to fill even more adequately than we have in the past on questions involving United States economic assistance to Africa, resisting the introduction of the cold war into Africa and into the Congo, and many other such problems.

There is no other overall organization dealing with African affairs that is covering this list of problems. We have had a distinctive role in relation to these questions, and we must continue to have in the future. If a time does come when we must limit our activities, that time is certainly not now. If we were to drop out of existence for any reason, the vacuum that we would leave would necessarily have to be filled by another group that would come into existence or by a presently existing group that would somehow or other assume the kinds of programs we have been carrying on.

If the above is true, then how do we proceed from here? First we must make a decision on which I hope there is wholehearted and general agreement of what our major emphasis must be. I believe that our program must relate itself especially to U.S. policy in Africa. We have an essential role in criticizing government policy and of suggesting new directions. Furthermore, we must give continued support to those people who are struggling for freedom and equality in the various parts of Africa not yet independent. We must continue to carry on our general

interpretation of the African dynamics to the American people.

Second, we must realistically assess what our resources are. We cannot scatter ourselves over the whole map, but must concentrate as far as possible. We should not adopt a budget which is beyond what we raised this year but undoubtedly should tighten our belt. Nevertheless, we must have a staff which can carry out the real essentials of our program.

Specific program suggestions which I would make are the following:

1. Emphasis upon the issues which affect U.S. policy both at the United Nations and in Washington. This would mean continued emphasis of course on issues such as South West Africa, Portuguese Africa. But it would mean perhaps more active work on U.S. policy toward the Congo, U.S. policy in regard to economic development and economic assistance to independent Africa.
2. Continuation and expansion, if possible, of our Africa Defense and Aid Fund. Without question this has been one of the most important aspects of our work and has established us in both American and African eyes as a principal agency which has lined itself up on the side of equality and freedom.
3. Our literature program. I believe this program has to be re-examined in the light of what its value to the overall image and work of the organization is. Also it has to be re-evaluated from the point of view of how much it costs and what it brings in financially to the organization. Furthermore the literature program must be examined as to its effectiveness in being a vehicle giving expression to the point of view of the organization. Where this re-examination would lead us, I am not prepared to say at this point, but I am convinced that the discussion should take place. In the meantime, our program should continue.
4. Visiting speakers program. One of the most valuable things which we have done over the years has been to bring persons like Mboya, Banda, Kaunda, Nkomo, Chiume, and others to the United States. We fortunately have been able to pick out leaders of not-yet-independent Africa and we have introduced them to the United States, which has been helpful both to them and to us. We can continue to do this on an expanded basis, I hope, in the year ahead.
5. Special events. I believe that in the course of the year we should plan only perhaps two or three special events but should give some concentrated attention to them. Such benefits as Africa Freedom Day, or special large meetings when we are bringing speakers through, are the kinds of things we cannot do very frequently because of the time they take, but when they are done they should be done so that they can command considerable attention.

As far as staff is concerned, at the moment because of our financial situation, I doubt if we ought to look around for any other high-priced, or relatively high-priced, executives. Rather, I think that we should have a couple of people who act in the position of executive assistants with responsibility for carrying out the details of particular programs, leaving in the hands of the Executive Director implementing the program on policy questions. If funds become available to take on another executive who can give increased attention to any particular aspect of our program, we should take action without delay.

The final point I would make is in the form of a recommendation. I think we immediately should look into the practicability and advisability of dividing the functions of the American Committee on Africa from the Africa Defense and Aid Fund. I say this somewhat tentatively because I don't know where it would lead us. Nevertheless I am convinced of the fact that the American Committee on Africa either is not going to get tax exemption or if it should, then our fears of losing tax exemption would stop us from carrying on certain of the activities that I think we should increase. The American Committee on Africa might very well concentrate all of its efforts just on action and allow other aspects of the program to go through the Africa Defense and Aid Fund. We should explore with appropriate lawyers how to go about separating the Africa Defense and Aid Fund from the Committee and then spend as much time as necessary in Washington in order to push tax exemption through for the Defense Fund. At least I am suggesting that this be explored and that a committee be assigned the responsibility to guide this through. If this division were made, somehow or other within the limitations of whatever legal requirements there are, a close understanding and working relationship should be established between the two agencies.