

# American Committee On Africa

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## NEWS

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### COORDINATED NATIONWIDE PROTESTS TARGET U.S. SUPPORT FOR SOUTH AFRICA

New York, N.Y. April 9...In the largest anti-apartheid mobilization in several years, thousands of people throughout the country held protests against U.S. support of South African apartheid. The protests were focused around Two Weeks of National Anti-Apartheid Action from March 21 (anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa) through April 4 (anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King). The mobilization was coordinated by the American Committee on Africa (ACOA) and was initiated by an October 1983 National Student Conference of 300 organizers from 24 states. According to ACOA student coordinator Joshua Nessen, "These Weeks of Action have sent a strong message of opposition to U.S. investment in South Africa and to the Reagan Administration's policy of 'constructive engagement' with the white minority regime of South Africa."

In Washington DC a coalition of student groups from Georgetown, UDC, American, George Mason, and George Washington universities held activities beginning March 21 that culminated in a march and picket outside the South African embassy on April 4 opposing Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement". The April 4th marchers wore black armbands as part of a National Armband Day commemorating victims of apartheid and racism in the United States. In Los Angeles the armband day was also a focus for activists at UCLA who set up radio shows and a forum with several hundred participants on U.S. policy in southern Africa. On April 7 UCLA students also participated in a rally of 300 people organized by the USC anti-apartheid coalition which called for divestment of all state funds in corporations with ties to South Africa. During those same days activists in Portland, Oregon held a South Africa Awareness Week April 1-7 which featured a forum with South African Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reform Churches.

Action in the South was especially strong in Atlanta. On March 24 a rally involving students from six Atlanta-area schools commemorated the Sharpeville Massacre and was followed by an April 4 rally at the grave of Martin Luther King organized with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and stressing King's support of economic sanctions against South Africa. In the South protests and forums were also held at the University of Texas in Austin, Duke University in Durham, N.C., New Orleans, Charlottesville and Blacksburg Virginia, Lexington, Kentucky as well as at Florida State University in Tallahassee where a three day divestment mobilization took place.

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Illinois was at the center of activity in the Midwest during the Weeks of Action. On April 4 the Coalition for Illinois Divestment from South Africa (CIDSa) and AFSCME, the public employee union, organized 300 people to lobby at the state capitol for a divestment bill involving billions in state pension fund money. The lobbying effort was joined by students from the University of Illinois at Champaign who held a March 21 rally for divestment of 200 people addressed by David Ndaba of the African National Congress. Activists at Western Michigan University (WMU) in Kalamazoo held events beginning March 21 highlighted by an April 4 march of 100 people from the WMU campus to Kalamazoo College where a commemorative service for victims of apartheid and U.S. racism was held. During the Weeks of Action there were also activities in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, and North Dakota.

Groups throughout the Northeast were also active during the action weeks. At Yale University an April 1 rally for divestment attracted 300 participants and was followed by an April 6 commemoration of Solomon Mahlangu--an ANC activist hung in 1979--at which 200 people heard presentations from poet Dennis Brutus, Reverend Sipo Mzimela, and Tandi Gcabashe (all exiled South Africans). On that same day in New York City 250 people held a candlelight vigil outside the South African consulate calling for a halt to apartheid executions and support for legislation to divest billions in state pension fund money linked to South Africa through U.S. corporations.

Harvard University was the site of an April 4 march to President Bok's office calling for divestiture of Harvard's \$500 million in South Africa linked stock, and on that same day a divestment rally was held at Princeton University. The Columbia University divestment committee held a March 21 Sharpeville commemoration followed by a campus-wide rally April 3, and at Dartmouth College ten days of activity were initiated by an April 4 event featuring Mel King--sponsor of the successful Massachusetts divestment legislation. From April 2-7 a student coalition at MIT in Cambridge held a South Africa Awareness Week which included presentations by the Nigerian Ambassador to the United Nations, SWAPO of Namibia, the ANC and the American Committee On Africa. In southern New Jersey activists at Stockton State College held two jog-a-thons to raise funds for Namibian refugees and a similar event was organized at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

Canadian students at the University of Concordia in Montreal also mobilized for the Weeks of Action beginning with a fundraising drive for southern African refugees followed by forums with the ANC, Warren Allmand, a member of Parliament, and Gerard Gaudin, a provincial cabinet minister.

According to Brooke Baldwin of the Yale Coalition Against Apartheid, "The Weeks of National Action served to put our Administration and other university administrations on notice that the divestment movement is broad-based and permanent."