

You Have Touched the Women, You Have Struck a Rock

"Now You Have Touched the Women,
You Have Struck a Rock,
You Have Dislodged a Boulder,
You Will Be Crushed."

Thus spoke the women of Azania (South Africa) as they organized, defying violence and repression to demand the end of the pass laws. On August 9, 1956, they came together 20,000 strong in Pretoria, touching off a wave of protest which would sweep the entire country.

We join with them, the women and men of South Africa, and, like people everywhere, are inspired by the strength of a growing movement against apartheid. More and more of us are coming together from a common anger against US racism in this country and its support for slavery in South Africa. We come together from a shared optimism that, in solidarity with the resistance of the people of Azania, we can help build a movement which will end apartheid. A movement which will aid the liberation struggle in taking power and establishing majority rule.

As North American women we are particularly moved by the courage and determination of the Azanian women. We want to learn from them, follow their example and give them concrete support by building a women's movement committed to the creation of a free and independent Azania,



HISTORY OF RESISTANCE

South African women are following a resistance set by their grandmothers and great-grandmothers who fought from the first against the invasion of the Europeans. For instance, because of their militant struggle in the early 1900s, passes for women were withdrawn and were not re-instituted until the 1950s. In response, the first big protest against the pass laws took place in October 1955 with 2000 women, mostly Africans, converging in Pretoria. Protests and pass burnings grew all over the country throughout the year. A demonstration was planned for August, 1956. The government made every effort to prevent the demonstration -- through intimidation, withdrawing public transportation services, banning processions. Despite threats of arrest, extreme poverty and fears about the welfare of their families, women saved and worked together to raise money to hire trains, buses, cars to bring them thousands of miles to the capital. 20,000 women demonstrated in Pretoria that day. Though they faced beatings by the police and mass arrests, women did not give up. The courage and determination of these women helped inspire hundreds of thousands of Africans to unite in building a militant anti-pass movement.

Today in Azania, women who are forcibly removed from their homes to the bantustans have put up a tremendous resistance. They have set up squatter camps, like Crossroads, throughout the country, risking harassment, arrest and the destruction of their homes by bulldozers, often bearing sole responsibility for their children. Women have also shown tremendous leadership in the trade unions and all organizing at the grassroots level.

DIVEST NOW

We come here demanding an end to UC investment. For when UC invests in South Africa, they are investing in genocide. Black South Africans, who make up 80% of the population, are denied all political, economic and social rights. By law, they are told where they may live and with whom, at what job they may work and where they can travel. South African families are routinely separated with the men working in mines and factories and the women having to live elsewhere. South African women must work either in the cities, separated from their families or are banished to bantustans where they can only eke out survival. One half of South African children die before the age of five. A large percentage suffer from malnutrition. There is not adequate housing, health care or education for the 3 ½ million people who, in the last 10 years, have been forcibly removed to the bantustans.

It is in this context that the liberation movements have developed. There are mass organizations, like AZAPO and the UDF, that mobilize workers, students, the unemployed. The PAC and the ANC have committed themselves to the development of an armed struggle inside South Africa, understanding that this is the only way to end the violence of the South African regime and build a free and independent Azania.

We support these developments and the growing movement in Azania. Many of us are new to politics. Some are more experienced. Yet, the lessons for all of us are the same. As women we transform who and what we are by following the examples set by peoples all over the world. To fight for an end to oppression, to demand an end to exploitation, an end to US militarism, domination and imperialism itself. Women's solidarity with one another, our desire to achieve justice for ourselves and the people and children of the world opens up a force that not one of us has alone. The women of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Palestine and South Africa are showing us the way. For, when you have touched the women, you have struck a rock.