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NEWS

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Martin Luther King Jr., *President*

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FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

DR. ABERNATHY SAYS FULL STEAM AHEAD IN '67

ATLANTA, GA., Jan. 6 (SCLC) -- Rev. Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, long time friend and close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said today:

"I keep hearing that 1966 was a 'bad' year for civil rights. But let's don't forget that some real progress was made last year, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference fully intends to carry on its broad range of programs in 1967."

Dr. Abernathy is Vice President At-Large of SCLC and currently is directing activities of the organization with another veteran, Rev. Andrew Young, Executive Director, while Dr. King is on a two-month leave to write a new book on the future of the Movement.

Dr. Abernathy, who has been a civil rights leader with Dr. King since the birth of the Freedom Movement in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56, noted that forces of segregation and racism took comfort from difficulties encountered by civil rights groups during the last year.

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"But I'm not a pessimist," Dr. Abernathy declared. "The cause of justice made substantial gains in 1966, and the Southern Christian Leadership will move ahead with our nonviolent action programs in the year ahead."

He said historic victories for the Negro people last year included these:

*The landmark "open housing" agreement between the Chicago Freedom Movement and Chicago's leaders in government, business, labor and religion.

*Unprecedented concessions by businesses to SCLC's "Operation Breadbasket," a national program which has won thousands of new and better jobs for Negroes, and stimulated Negro-own companies and services.

*A rapidly growing Negro vote in the South, spurred by registration and political education efforts of SCLC and other organizations. That vote was an influential factor in the November elections.

*A full-scale civil rights program in Grenada, Mississippi, which was a citadel of racism and segregation before SCLC moved in last summer. SCLC and local Negro leaders in Grenada have conducted effective selective-buying campaigns, raised funds for a Negro-owned and managed co-operative super-voter registration, market, and launched programs of tutorial education, health services, food commodities for the needy, and organization of welfare recipients.

*SCLC's first voter registration and political education drive in the North, now underway in Chicago, designed to win for Negroes their fair share of political power.

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*Organization of slum tenant unions which are battling slum landlords and the humiliations of ghetto life in Chicago.

*Organization of low-paid hospital workers in Chicago.

*Continued education of adults in the South by SCLC's Citizenship Education Program. CEP has trained more than 3,000 adults at its education centers and these adults have gone on to teach tens of thousands in their home towns.

*Recently started antipoverty education projects for seasonal farm workers who face the loss of their jobs in Lowndes and Wilcox Counties, Alabama. This is the first SCLC participation in the federal war on poverty.

*More sessions of Operation Dialogue, the SCLC branch which builds biracial understanding by bringing together groups with contrasting backgrounds.

*Co-operation and joint efforts with SCLC Affiliates, which are churches and other organizations scattered throughout the South. Many affiliates conduct their own education, economic and civil rights programs.

*A pioneering project to rehabilitate slum buildings and establish co-operative housing for low-income families in Chicago. The project is financed by \$4 million in federal funds and is also backed by SCLC and Negro businessmen.

"These are some of our major SCLC programs," Dr. Abernathy commented. "We strongly believe that the Civil Rights Movement must continue and strengthen positive actions like these, and SCLC will do just that. This is the best moral and practical route to Freedom."

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He warned of roadblocks on that route, noting that politicians are already using the so-called "white backlash" as an excuse for impeding progress. "But SCLC will not be detoured from our course by any excuses," Dr. Abernathy said. "This country will hear more from us throughout 1967."

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