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STATEMENT BY MARTIN LUTHER KING

Press Conference - December 17, 1964

" I am gravely distressed over the news which reached us in Oslo that on the same day the civil rights movement was receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, a U.S. Commissioner was dismissing charges against 19 of the men arrested by the FBI in connection with the brutal slaying of three civil rights voter registration workers in Mississippi last summer. All of the people of Europe share this acute distress.

" I am convinced that the whole national conscience must be mobilized to deal with the tragic situation of violence, terror, and blatant failure of justice in Mississippi. I have already indicated that we intend to consider calling for a nation-wide boycott of Mississippi products that would summon all people of good will across our country into active participation in the struggle for justice and human dignity in this nation.

" Aside from the proposed boycott, however, there is a more immediate opportunity for congress to speak out in the next few days in a way that would remedy the root cause of Mississippi injustice -- the total denial of the right to vote to her Negro citizens.

" On Monday, January 4th, the House of Representatives will have an opportunity to vote upon a challenge to the seating of the entire Mississippi delegation in the House of Representatives. I am informed that, under the provisions of the act of February 23, 1870, readmitting Mississippi to representation in the Congress, it was stipulated that the principal condition for readmission, never to be changed or amended, was that all citizens 21 years or over, who resided in the State for six months or more, and who are neither convicts or insane, be allowed to vote freely. Mississippi has deliberately and repeatedly ignored this solemn pact with the nation for more than 50 years and maintained seats to which she is not entitled in an indifferent Congress. These members will be challenged on the opening day of the Congress by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. This Act of 1870 provides that these Mississippi congressmen are only entitled to their places when all citizens can vote freely in that State.

" The conscience of America, troubled by the twin Mississippi tragedies of the presence of violence and the absence of law, now can express itself in supporting this moral challenge to immoral representation."