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NEWS

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Martin Luther King Jr., President

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FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

DR. ABERNATHY APPEALS TO NEW GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA

ATLANTA, GA., Jan. 17 (SCLC) -- Civil Rights leader Dr. Ralph David Abernathy today called for the new Governor of Alabama to "comply with the law of the land so than nearly 200,000 Negro and white citizens of Alabama will not lose their subsistence payments from federal funds."

The Federal Government has announced that it will cut off support for welfare programs in Alabama by the end of February if the State does not stop racial discrimination in those programs.

Dr. Abernathy is Vice President At-Large of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and a long-time associate of SCLC's President, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who is on leave writing a book.

"It is shameful and tragic and brutal," Dr. Abernathy stated, "that the State of Alabama has not seen fit to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and that because of this failure, nearly 200,000 persons in Alabama may be denied their full welfare payments and old-age assistance allowances. Federal support for these benefits amounts to almost \$100 million a year.

(More)

"Unless the State of Alabama complies with the law, the blame for this is purely on the former Governor, George C. Wallace, who has flouted the law and shown disrespect for the Federal Government in the name of racial segregation on several occasions. For more than a year, he has been warned repeatedly of a welfare fund cut-off.

"I certainly hope that the new Governor, Mrs. George C. Wallace, will see fit in these first days of her Administration to show good faith with the citizens of her State and see that the law is complied with, so the poverty-stricken Negro and White people of Alabama can receive their full benefits."

Dr. Abernathy observed that "every other State in the Union -- even Alabama's sister States of the South, such as Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina -- have obeyed the law on use of welfare funds.

"The problem in Alabama," he continued, "arises from a long history of trickery and deception to deprive Negroes of their full welfare benefits. Now, thousands upon Thousands of white and Negro parents, children, elderly and ill persons face a loss of their already meager welfare subsistence. This additional suffering and hardship would last until the State of Alabama adopts a fair and democratic welfare policy. It is not the Federal Government which is responsible for this situation. It is the State of Alabama and its officials who have ignored the law of the land and threatened the livelihood of Alabama citizens. The easiest, most obvious and humane solution to this problem is prompt compliance by the State with the national statute."

(End)