

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 13, 1967

Statement to Afro-Asian Missions to the United Nations on June 12, 1967, was released today by James Forman, Director of International Affairs for SNCC (SCLC).

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We reject the position of the United States government that intolerable racism in the United States is a purely domestic concern. We find this claim as hypocritical as the claim of the racist government of South Africa that its suppression of the human rights of 13,000,000 Africans is an internal matter, or a similar claim by the government of Portugal. Such claims are typical of colonial powers. We maintain that unwarranted and brutal suppression of black people in the United States is a matter of international concern. We are therefore addressing to you an appeal for your moral support, in the form of direct and indirect pressure upon that government which loudly proclaims its concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people yet will not guarantee basic human rights to black people in this country. We make this appeal in the spirit of SNCC'S declaration, made formal in May, 1967, that it is a Human Rights organization concerned with human rights not only in the United States but throughout the world.

Needless to say, the suppression of the human rights of black people is a long-standing reality in this country. The immediate basis for our appeal is the recent attacks on black people in Prattville, Alabama, about which we would like to inform you at this time:

On the afternoon of Sunday, June 12, a meeting of black people to discuss political organizing was held on the grounds of the St. Mark's church in Prattville, Alabama, a small town located in Wilcox County, about 40 miles from Montgomery. It is in this county that Mrs. "Ladybird" Johnson has extensive land holdings. The meeting was being addressed by former SNCC Chairman Stokely Carmichael when a police car drove up and an officer began harassing Brother Carmichael for speaking of "Black Power" to the gathering. The officer was Ken Hill, who earlier this year was accused of murdering a black prisoner in the Prattville jail (he was later cleared despite strong evidence of guilt). Hill repeatedly harassed Brother Carmichael for saying "Black Power" and finally arrested him on charges of disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace. This was at approximately 5 p.m.

Black people in Prattville, angered by the arrest, moved swiftly to protest it at the jail and elsewhere. Guffing was exchanged by black and white residents. Later that evening, a meeting of black people was taking place in the home of Mr. Daniel Hauser, a local resident. KU KLUX KLANSMEN and other whites began firing on the house, where there were approximately 40 persons, the majority of them women and children. SNCC Executive Secretary, Stanley Wise and Alabama Field Secretary, Johnny Jackson were also in the house. The police cordoned off a large area of the community; newsmen and others were not allowed through. A unit of the National Guard arrived from Montgomery. The house remained under siege until approximately 4 a.m. The local telephone operator repeatedly cut off calls between the house and SNCC staff as well as newsmen. Rumors that Stokely Carmichael had been lynched spread in the town.

At about 4 a.m., police ordered those in the house outside. Stanley Wise, together with Theophilis Smith and Ulysses Nunley, two Alabama volunteers working with SNCC, were arrested on a charge of inciting to riot. The other black people went back into the house about an hour later and remained there until late in the morning, June 12.

That morning, Johnny Jackson of SNCC reported that the Alabama State Patrol had "taken over the town" and was searching people's homes, forcing black people on the street into their houses, and denying entry to the town by persons from out of town. Mr. John Hulett, chairman of the Lowndes County Freedom Party, was badly beaten in front of the Hauser home; Mr. Hauser himself was also picked up and beaten; SNCC worker Wealth Long was beaten.

Throughout the night, SNCC officials had made appeals to the Justice Department for federal protection. Mr. John Doar of that Department informed the national office of SNCC in Atlanta that people were "bothering" him. Doar's response typifies the attitude of the federal government in this and similar situations which have faced black people.

Autauga County, in which Prattville is located, forms part of the Alabama "Black Belt" where SNCC has been working since 1963. This area is thus called because of its high proportion of black residents and its rich black soil. It is equally notable for widespread terrorism, particularly by the Ku Klux Klan, and economic exploitation of black people which has kept them in conditions of extreme poverty for many years. Autauga County is adjacent to Lowndes County, where the first county Freedom Organization ran candidates under the black panther ballot symbol in November, 1966. They won sufficient votes to become an official county political party. SNCC has helped to build such parties in other areas of Black Belt, Alabama, always in the face of economic intimidation and the threat of death to any black person who dares to register to vote or otherwise engage in political activity. Racist suppression, however, is by no means limited to Alabama.

Early in the morning of June 12, SNCC Chairman H. Rap Brown issued a brief statement from Chicago: "If anything happens to the black people in the house in Prattville, SNCC will call for full retaliation by the black community. We further feel that this is part of America's Gestapo tactics to destroy SNCC and to commit genocide against black people."

Later that morning, at a press conference in Atlanta, Brother Brown stated "Our course of action has been set. We will no longer sit back and let black people be killed by murderers who hide behind sheets or behind the badge of the law. It is clear that the law cannot and will not protect black people. This is no accident. The racist attitude completely dominates their relationship to the black community and is blatantly exemplified by their actions. We recognize and accept yesterday's action by racist White America as a declaration of war. We feel that this is a part of America's Gestapo tactics to destroy SNCC and to commit genocide against black people. We are calling for full retaliation from the black community across America. We blame Lyndon Johnson. We extend a call for black brothers now serving in Vietnam to come home to the defence of their mothers and families. This is their fight. We say to brothers in the armed forces, 'If you can die defending your motherland, you can die defending your mother. It appears that Alabama has been chosen as the starting battleground for America's race war. This is both fitting and appropriate. For next to America's Vietnam action Alabama polls the highest death toll of black men.'"

Yours in brotherhood,

James Forman