

Commission on Religion and Race
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
475 Riverside Drive, Room 554, New York, New York 10027

EXHIBIT A

Statement on Mississippi and the Role of the
National Council of Churches in the
Mississippi Summer Project

The Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches considers the violent opposition to the establishment of human justice and freedom for all citizens in Mississippi to be one of the gravest problems facing the country.

The horrifying disappearance of the three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, this past week is notable, but not for its uniqueness. Scores of people have disappeared or have been mysteriously killed there in recent years because of real or imputed involvements with civil rights. Now, at long last, the attention of the nation is being focused on the deplorable conditions which exist there.

From the beginning the Commission has worked as closely as possible with the governor of Mississippi urging him to give maximum protection to civil rights workers in the state. From the beginning the Commission has worked closely with the Federal Government, particularly its Department of Justice, both giving and receiving advice as to the best way to work for justice in Mississippi. We shall continue this full cooperation with all agencies of government on the clear understanding that our basic commitment is to the earliest possible establishment of racial freedom and justice. We support law and order and, therefore, we remind all Americans that to delay justice in an effort to preserve peace is to provoke violence.

The National Council of Churches is involved in Mississippi precisely because it is a national organization and because Mississippi is a part of this nation. We work in the expectation that full rights for all citizens will be secured speedily not only in that state, but also in every other state of the Union. We pledge ourselves to this cause.

During the year of its existence, the Commission on Religion and Race has been closely identified with the struggle for freedom in the South. When the Summer Project was planned by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a Mississippi based civil rights organization, the Commission decided that its most obvious duty was to try to prepare the student volunteers to work effectively alongside the dedicated civil rights workers who have been working there for many months and even years. Many of the young people come from our churches. Accordingly, the orientation and training course at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, was planned and carried out in close association with the local Mississippi civil rights organizations. We are proud to have had some part in the counselling and preparing of these young people. Knowing full well that they are walking into certain danger, they are surely following in the best tradition of American courage in behalf of freedom.

In addition to the Commission's training program for the students, we have directly recruited minister-counsellors to go into Mississippi with them. We have decided today to increase the number of these and other adult leaders who will be asked to volunteer for this dangerous task of staying with each group of student workers. We expect some of these to be Roman Catholic and Jewish

as are the students.

We have also recruited over 100 lawyers through their several organizations to work in the south this summer and hope to provide a lawyer to be with each minister-counsellor and - in especially dangerous places - to have a lawyer present on twenty-four duty. All of these will be volunteers and most of them will go at their own expense. We shall continue to have a small staff present in Mississippi for full liaison with the local civil rights leadership.

The Commission has reason to believe that there are white Christians in the state of Mississippi who welcome the Summer Project and will support it in every way possible under present conditions. We welcome such support as essential to working out means of providing at last a full measure of freedom to all citizens in the state.

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