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peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by New Future Foundation, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women of Struggle and Strength

The 60th Anniversary of Mississippi Freedom Summer and the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964

Excellencies and fellow delegates. We address the 68th Commission on the Status of Women to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Mississippi Freedom Summer, to honor the Black women of Mississippi and the thousands of volunteers and supporters of the summer community engagement project, freedom fighting activities and tragedies which they faced. Also, to give special attention to the triumphs of the summer which included the landmark United States legislation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the foundation for contemporary rights of women and girls and their empowerment, social protection, and advancement.

The film “Women of the Struggle: Facing Fear in the Civil Rights Era” which we are featuring during this year’s international women’s events narrates the story of women who lifted the banner of liberty and justice not only for themselves but a nation and a world. Often these women are overlooked in the international arena, but they lifted the banner of social, economic, and political rights, and equality that women throughout the world wave in contemporary times. Their path to freedom was no less brutal than that suffered by women of other nationalities and their road to gender equality and justice was paved with blood and torment as faced by women in many other countries of the world.

The 48-minute film by G. Mark LaFrancis, Robert Morgan, and Darrell White chronicles the contributions to the Civil Rights Movement of eighteen women, from national figures such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Myrlie Evers to Tougaloo Nine member Geraldine Hollis, McComb, Mississippi activist and author Brenda Travis, and Flonzie Brown Wright, the first Black woman elected to public office in Mississippi since the Reconstruction Era after the American Civil War.

The Black women of Mississippi achieved their goals for freedom despite poverty and classism by other women within their own race and suffering the indignance of having their dresses lifted in public as they stood up in the face of men of ill repute and craze dogs. These women not only challenged the hatred of a nation, but they challenged the gender discrimination, sexual harassment and religious bigotry present in civil rights organizations that they served. Despite barriers, they laid the foundation for gender, social and economic progress of the feminist movement in the United States and elsewhere on the globe. It was because of their perseverance that the fruits of the fight for civil rights were realized for all.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 was a 10-week community engagement program focusing on literacy, voting and civic education, and cultural exchange. The project was spearheaded by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and supported by major civil rights organizations. It sparked a grassroots movement that mobilized thousands of Black Mississippians willing to sacrifice their lives, property, and dignity to bring about social change for themselves and countless persons across the globe who would never hear of, understand, or appreciate their movement or sacrifice.

A Summer of Activism, Achievement, and Anxiety

Freedom Schools

Some thirty to forty Freedom Schools were formed. Some 3,500 students of all ages attended the Freedom Schools. The teachers were from multiracial backgrounds of college students from across the country. The curriculum included academic studies, arithmetic, psychological empowerment programming, and Black history lessons.

Freedom Libraries

Freedom Libraries were established throughout the state. Donations of books, resources, and educational materials ranged from a few hundred at some libraries to tens of thousands at libraries in other areas of the state.

Freedom Houses

Many volunteers stayed in homes of Black Mississippians in a type of cultural exchange program. But considerable number of other volunteers resided during the summer in residential settings, schools, churches, and offices that became known as Freedom Houses.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

The Freedom Schools also taught political organizing. The Black population of Mississippi is approximately 40 per cent. In the early 1960s, Blacks supported President John F. Kennedy. The Mississippi Democratic Party did not allow Blacks to join. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was formed. By the time of the August convention the party had over 80,000 members. On August 6, 1964, 2500 party delegates had its convention in Jackson, Mississippi. They challenged the whites-only party for legitimacy during the 1964 Democratic National Convention. President Johnson asked the party members to compromise but they refused. Although, they were not seated at the convention, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was the catalyst that ignited Blacks to push for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and participate in contemporary American political parties.

Freedom Summer Murders: Mississippi Burning

As a result of Mississippi Freedom Summer, the nation and the world witnessed a 1960s version of a reality biopic of life in Mississippi and the American South. The summer witnessed a spiritual wrestling of will. On one side was a people determined to see social and economic transformation and on other hand was a society dedicated to reactionary politics, segregation, and the willingness to maintain it through violence and resistance. On June 21, 1964, after a meeting, James Chaney of Meridian, Mississippi and two volunteers of Jewish heritage Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner from New York City were abducted and murdered. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and American sailors from the state Navy base searched through the summer for the missing civil rights workers as a part of the operation known as Mississippi Burning. During the search for the missing three civil rights workers, eight other bodies were founded. On August 4, 1964, their bodies were unearthed in Neshoba County, Mississippi near an American Indian reservation.

According to Doug McAdams (1988), during Mississippi Freedom Summer the tragic incidents and murders included:

- 1,062 people were arrested (out-of-state volunteers and locals),
- 80 Freedom Summer workers were beaten,

- 37 churches were bombed or burned,
- 30 Black homes or businesses were bombed or burned,
- 4 civil rights workers were killed (one in a head-on collision),
- 4 people were critically wounded,
- At least 3 Mississippi Blacks were murdered because of their support for the Civil Rights Movement.

The U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964

The major triumph during Mississippi Freedom Summer was the signing of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2, 1964. It was according to its title an Act to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States of America to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes.

Conclusion

The 60th Anniversary of Mississippi Freedom Summer and the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 are milestones in international history. These highlights remind the world of the role of Black women in the United States, especially those of the State of Mississippi and the American South, in the forefront of women empowerment despite poverty, political rights, international justice and gender equality. New Future Foundation and all the Daughters of the (United States) Freedom Movement salute and honor these Women of Struggle and Strength during this august occasion. Thank you.
