



Dear Friends,

On Friday and Saturday of next week, July 15-16, 2005, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) will hold the first of three public hearings focusing on the question "What brought us to November 3, 1979?"

The Commission was established to examine the events of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi Party opened fire on a racially mixed gathering of political activists and labor organizers, killing five and wounding 10 others.

Public hearings have become a common feature of truth-seeking processes around the world, most recently in Ghana, Peru, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste. Public hearings are not trials; they are conducted more informally and can cover broader ground than a criminal or civil case. Their aim is usually not to uncover previously unknown information, but to share with the public information that the truth commission has gathered and to encourage further public engagement with the truth-seeking process. Through public hearings, society as a whole can be part of the important debate about its own past, the abuses that were committed, their origins and causes, and the safeguards that must be put in place to prevent the repetition of such abuses.

"It is important to note that the Greensboro Commission is still in the process of collecting information, so the testimonies that will be heard at the hearing on the 15th and 16th are still 'raw input,' so to speak," said Lisa Magarrell, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) lead adviser to the Commission. "Sifting through dozens of statements and hundreds of documents to sort out truth from untruth and to discern relevant context is a complex and ongoing task. By sharing this process with the public, the GTRC underscores both the transparency of its endeavor and the central role of personal testimony in the search for understanding about these events."

The Commission was seated and its commissioners were sworn in on June 12, 2004. In January 2005, the Commission began taking statements from individuals with information related to the events of that day. This statement-taking process, along with the review of documents and other sources of information, is expected to continue for several more months. The GTRC's research will lead to a final report setting out its findings, and recommending possible paths toward reconciliation and healing. That report is expected in 2006.

The Reverend Bongani Finca, a former commissioner on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), will be observing the hearing and participating in community activities leading up to the hearing, as a consultant for the ICTJ. Rev. Finca is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in South Africa, and served primarily on the Human Rights Violation Committee of the South African TRC.

The ICTJ has served as an adviser to the organizers of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission and currently provides technical assistance to the Commission and its staff, as it has in similar efforts worldwide. For further information or to schedule an interview with Lisa Magarrell or Bongani Finca, please contact me at 917.438.9331 or sgreggo@ictj.org.

For additional information about the public hearings in Greensboro on July 15-16, please refer to the Commission's press release below and contact Joya Wesley.

Best regards,

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**NATION'S FIRST TRUTH COMMISSION TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARING
JULY 15-16**

GREENSBORO, N.C. -- The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first of its kind in the United States, will hold the first of three public hearings 2-9 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, July 15-16, at the Weaver Education Center, 300 S. Spring St.

Modeled on truth-seeking efforts in South Africa, Peru and elsewhere, the Commission is mandated to seek the truth and work for reconciliation around the five shooting deaths in Greensboro of Nov. 3, 1979, which -- for many -- remain unresolved.

Public hearings, which have played a powerful role in all international truth and reconciliation efforts, increase understanding of events and surrounding social issues by offering a rare opportunity to hear diverse voices sharing, uninterrupted and in their own words, their personal, human experience of traumatic events. Telling and hearing personal stories has proven healing for groups as well as individuals.

With a five-member staff, volunteers and collaborations with a wide range of community organizations, the Commission is doing work it hopes will become a model that other American communities can use to address incidents of unresolved injustice in their own histories.

Created through a public nomination and selection process, the independent Commission is mandated to objectively examine "the context, causes, sequence and consequence" of Nov. 3, 1979, when Klan and Nazi members killed five labor organizers and wounded ten others at a rally organized by the Communist Workers Party.

The defendants were twice acquitted in state and federal trials. However, a civil trial found that Klansmen, Nazis and members of the Greensboro Police Department were jointly liable for wrongful death for one of the five killed. Given the confusion caused by these verdicts and the volume of rumors and misinformation that surrounded these events and their aftermath, the Greensboro community has been deeply divided in its collective understanding of what actually happened and why.

Central to the Commission's work is collecting statements -- the oral or written individual stories of people who experienced Nov. 3, 1979, in various ways. People with insights on

background issues such as race, economics, labor, political organizing and police-community relations also are being urged to make statements.

The Commission's three planned hearings, as well as its final report and various other community forums, will give voice to the community's collective experience of the shootings and their aftermath. The report, to be completed in early 2006, also will include specific recommendations for the Greensboro community and its institutions for concrete healing, reconciliation and restorative justice.

The International Center for Transitional Justice (www.ictj.org), an agency created by one of the architects of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is serving as a consultant for the Commission as it has for similar efforts in nations including Ghana, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste (East Timor).

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