



## Sullivan Principles

By Molly Roth

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The Global Sullivan Principles, launched in 1977 by Philadelphia civil rights leader Leon H. Sullivan (1922-2001), represent one of the twentieth century's most powerful attempts to effect social justice through economic leverage. More a sustained movement than a static document, the principles sought to bring the power of American investment in South Africa to bear on the cruel injustice of the apartheid state by establishing baseline commitments to fairness and empowerment as conditions for operating in the country.

Sullivan, a native of West Virginia coal-mining country, came to Philadelphia in 1950 to pastor Zion Baptist Church on North Broad Street by way of a stop in Harlem, where he served as assistant minister to Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (1908-72) at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Sullivan believed that Christian ministry needed to be geared to action and described himself as preaching a "pragmatic gospel."

Sullivan had honed his economic activism through what he called the "selective patronage" campaign, begun in 1958. Dissatisfied with the economic opportunities open to minorities and women, he helped to organize a coalition of 400 black ministers across Philadelphia to address discrimination in employment. If companies declined appeals from the coalition to hire blacks into professional and managerial positions, the ministers would urge their congregants to withhold their patronage. "Don't buy where you can't work," they advised. This flexing of consumer muscle by Philadelphia's black population yielded impressive results in terms of access to employment and confirmed the tactical power of coordinated economic resistance.

### National Attention

The campaign's success also won Sullivan national attention. *Life* magazine included him in its list of the country's 100 leading citizens in 1963, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68), called on him to help develop "Operation Breadbasket," later headed by the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson (b. 1941). This exposure also contributed to Sullivan's appointment in 1971 to the board of General Motors as the first black director of a major U.S. corporation.

Sullivan voiced his opposition to General Motors' involvement in South Africa beginning with his first shareholder meeting, taking the highly unusual step of speaking in opposition to a majority

position of the board. “To a great measure, the system of apartheid is being underwritten by American industry, interests, and investments,” Sullivan said. His commitment to the anti-apartheid cause intensified during a 1975 trip to South Africa, where he saw some of apartheid’s evil effects up close. He wrote that the inspiration for the principles was born out of suggestions by African leaders he met with on that trip.

“Why doesn’t someone do something about apartheid?” Sullivan described himself as asking. “I prayed to God. God spoke back to me and said, ‘You do something about it’.”

On April 1, 1977, the Principles of Equal Rights, which became known around the world as the Sullivan Principles, were publicly announced with twelve signatories: 3M, American Cyanamid, Burroughs, Caltex (Chevron Oil), Citibank, Ford, General Motors, IBM, International Harvester, Mobil, Otis Elevator, and Union Carbide. By 1987, 125 companies from around the world had subscribed. The Sullivan Principles were enshrined in the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, legislation authored by Congressmen William H. Gray (1941-2013) of Pennsylvania and Stephen J. Solarz (1940-2010) of New York and passed with a congressional override of a veto by President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004). The legislation prohibited U.S. companies from engaging in segregationist practices anywhere in the world.

## **Compromise Had a Role**

In his book *Moving Mountains*, Sullivan described his struggles with the proper formulation of his principles, because he believed that the correct course was to compromise at some moments to win acceptance and support. “Each year...the principles became more ambitious and thus more difficult to implement,” he wrote. In their original form, the principles lacked the demand that foreign companies recognize black labor unions; this was added in 1984.

After a decade, Sullivan came to believe that the principles were no longer contributing sufficiently to pressuring the government of South Africa to end apartheid, and so he moved from the original principles’ call for constructive engagement to worldwide boycott. Sustained international opposition eventually brought about multi-racial democratic elections and the election of Nelson Mandela (b. 1918) as the first black president of South Africa in 1994.

Continuing the principles’ evolution, in 1999 Sullivan and then-United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (b. 1938) unveiled the Global Sullivan Principles of Social Responsibility, an expanded formulation of the principles of corporate citizenship. Into the twenty-first century, the legacy of the Global Sullivan Principles continued to be invoked in strategies to use buying and investing power to address a wide range of social issues, from combating gun violence to ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

***Molly Roth** is a non-profit administrator in Philadelphia with an interest in the cultural anthropology of Mande West Africa. She served as Executive Director of OIC International, an international development agency founded by Leon H. Sullivan, from 2007 to 2009, and as Founding Executive Director of the Global Philadelphia Association in 2010 and 2011.*

### **The Principles of Equal Rights**

1. Nonsegregation of the races in all eating, comfort, and work facilities.
2. Equal and fair employment practices for all employees.
3. Equal pay for all employees doing equal or comparable work for the same period of time.
4. Initiation of and development of training programs that will prepare, in substantial numbers, blacks and other nonwhites for supervisory, administrative, clerical, and technical jobs.
5. Increasing the number of blacks and other nonwhites in management and supervisory positions.
6. Improving the quality of employees' lives outside the work environment in such areas as housing, transportation, school, recreation, and health facilities.
7. Working to eliminate laws and customs that impede social, economic, and political justice.  
*(added in 1984)*

### **The Global Sullivan Principles**

As a company which endorses the Global Sullivan Principles we will respect the law, and as a responsible member of society we will apply these Principles with integrity consistent with the legitimate role of business. We will develop and implement company policies, procedures, training and internal reporting structures to ensure commitment to these principles throughout our organisation. We believe the application of these Principles will achieve greater tolerance and better understanding among peoples, and advance the culture of peace.

Accordingly, we will:

1. Express our support for universal human rights and, particularly, those of our employees, the communities within which we operate, and parties with whom we do business.
2. Promote equal opportunity for our employees at all levels of the company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs, and operate without unacceptable worker treatment such as the exploitation of children, physical punishment, female abuse, involuntary servitude, or other forms of abuse.
3. Respect our employees' voluntary freedom of association.
4. Compensate our employees to enable them to meet at least their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability to raise their social and economic opportunities.
5. Provide a safe and healthy workplace; protect human health and the environment; and promote sustainable development.
6. Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights, and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
7. Work with governments and communities in which we do business to improve the quality of life in those communities – their educational, cultural, economic and social well-being – and seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
8. Promote the application of these principles by those with whom we do business.

We will be transparent in our implementation of these principles and provide information which demonstrates publicly our commitment to them.