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International Oil Working Group Collection

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Read collection overview

Nonprofit research and advisory organization that worked to implement the oil embargo initiated against South Africa and its apartheid government by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. Collection consists of administrative documents, correspondence, UN testimony, printed materials produced by the IOWG, various conference files, UN documents relating to South Africa and sanctions, and assorted reference materials, including shipping and tanker information as well as relevant news clippings.

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Antiracism

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Background on International Oil Working Group

In December of 1979, the United Nations General Assembly initiated an oil embargo against South Africa in order to put pressure on the government to end the racist policies of apartheid. Anti-apartheid forces outside of South Africa recognized the country's dependence on foreign oil, not only to meet domestic energy needs, but also to maintain occupation forces in Namibia. Under the auspices of the UN, an embargo on the sale of oil was organized in an attempt to persuade oil producing countries to stop exporting to South Africa. The International Oil Working Group (IOWG) is one of a number of different organizations that worked to implement the embargo.

The International Oil Working Group grew out of the Sanctions Working Group, which was established in 1979. Although the nature and timing of the change in names is unclear from the organization records themselves, it appears that Dr. Teresa Turner was instrumental in the formation of both groups, and was primarily responsible for their organization and administration, continuing to act in the capacity of co-director of the International Oil Working Group. Other directors have included Luis Prado, Arnold Baker, and Kassahun Checole.

While the group was loosely organized, it maintained the basic structure of a special advisory board and a pool of research associates. The advisory board has included such distinguished members as C.L.R. James, Denis Akumu, George Weekes, Rene Ortiz, and Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. Research associates were primarily involved in gathering information pertaining to various aspects of the embargo, while the advisory board members acted as expert consultants and were more peripherally associated with the organization.

The International Oil Working Group described itself as a "tax exempt, non-profit educational organization dedicated to carrying out work towards implementing the United Nations oil embargo against South Africa." Primary activities involved researching topics related to the oil embargo; writing papers for regional, national, and international conferences; giving testimony at UN meetings; providing information to governments, unions, and other groups committed to aiding in the implementation of the oil embargo; lecturing to students and members of the community on the subject of sanctions against South Africa; and collaborating with the UN Center Against Apartheid. Research topics included tanker monitoring to detect and expose those shipping companies that break the embargo; the energy needs of those countries in southern Africa which depend upon South Africa to meet some of their energy demands; ways to effectively implement and enforce the oil embargo; trade union action by oil transport workers; Namibian independence/decolonization; and underground oil storage in South Africa.

Scope of collection

The collection consists of administrative documents, correspondence, UN testimony, printed materials produced by the International Oil Working Group, various conference files, UN documents relating to South Africa and sanctions, and assorted reference materials, including shipping and tanker information as well as relevant news clippings. Materials reflect the loosely-constructed character of the organization, in which the work itself was more important than the structure. Documents span the years 1957-1987, but the bulk of material is from 1980-1985. Please note that in many cases dates are not inclusive.

Arrangement

This collection is organized into seven series:

Series 1. Administrative, 1979-1986

Series 2. Correspondence, 1979-1986

Series 3. Writings & Publications, 1960-1986

Series 4. Conference Materials, 1976-1986

Series 5. UN Documents, 1960-1987

Series 6. Shipping/Tanker Reference Materials, 1957-1986

Series 7. Reference Materials, 1974-1987

Series descriptions

Series 1. Administrative

1979-1986

Contains statement of purpose, photographs, curriculum vitae, and other information on the directors of the IOWG (1982-1984). Internal memoranda provide the most complete records of the inner workings of the organization (1981-1985). Financial records (1982-1986) are relatively scant, though they provide valuable information on work done, and by whom, in the "Work Descriptions" included. Minutes (1983-1985) are also incomplete, though it is difficult to ascertain how regularly meetings were held. As budget proposals initially accompanied the minutes, they remain filed with them. Travel and conference reports also include some financial information, and, while not a complete set, are fairly thorough for 1983-1985. Council for Namibia grant proposal material has been included in this series (separate from a general proposal file), because it constituted a major focus of the group's work during 1981-1983. It includes financial and background information on the IOWG. Applying for UN NGO (non-governmental organization) status (1982) was an important step in furthering the goals of the group as it provided access to both information and contacts. The UN church center accommodation application (1982) also provides insight into the loosely constructed nature of the organization.

Series 2. Correspondence

1979-1986

Arranged chronologically.

It consists of both incoming and outgoing letters, many of which were written by Teresa Turner. Frequent correspondents include Peter Onu, Assistant Secretary General of the OAU; Theo Ben Gurirab of SWAPO; Nouri Razzak Hussain, Secretary General of AAPSO; Gregory Denichen of the UN Council for Namibia; and Sally Swing Shelly of the UN Department of Public Information. Topics covered, among others, include: Israeli-South African relations and the importance of oil in any war effort; an IOWG project proposal to carry out and publicize research on shipments to Namibian ports; application for NGO status; oil and transport workers efforts to implement sanctions; and cooperation in researching tanker movements. In some instances, where letters refer directly to a subject group or conference, they have been filed with those materials.

Series 3. IOWG Writings and Publications

1960-1986

Contains five subseries: Proposals (1979-1983), Articles (1980-1985), Papers (1977-1985), Publications (1981-1985), and UN Testimony (1981-1986). Each subseries is chronologically organized.

Each subseries gives a sense of the development of the organization and the subjects with which it was most concerned. These include the implementation of an effective oil embargo against South Africa, control of the oil market and the UN oil embargo, tanker tracking, oil transport workers, and Namibian independence.

Series 4. Conference Materials

1976-1986

Arranged chronologically and divided into files by conference title.

It is not clear whether the IOWG presented papers in every case, but the series gives a good indication of the kinds of contacts the IOWG made, and provides information about the broad range of topics that were of interest to IOWG members. While some conference materials may seem obscure, they can be very revealing about the complexity surrounding the issue of the oil embargo.

Series 5. UN Documents

1960-1987

Divided into three subseries.

Subseries A (1983-1985), consists of documents derived from and pertaining to the Center Against Apartheid (CAA), with which IOWG worked closely. These documents focus primarily on sanctions against South Africa. Subseries B (1960-1985), consists of general documents and, like CAA, is arranged alphabetically by subject. Subseries C, NGOs and Missions (1979-1986), is made up of documents issued by non-governmental organizations and permanent missions to the UN.

Series 6. Shipper/Tanker Reference Materials

1957-1986

Contains two subseries.

Shipping Reference Materials (1979-1986), include general shipping information such as open registry, oil exporting countries and shipping, and port entry. It also includes documents from Lloyd's Maritime Information Service, Petrola, and the Shipping Research Bureau-most notably on secret oil deliveries to South Africa. Tanker Reference Materials (1957-1985), deal more specifically with topics such as tanker movements, flags of convenience, market trends in the tanker industry, world tanker fleet ownership, and a list of all tankers stopping in South African ports.

Series 7. Reference

1974-1987

Divided into six subseries.

It includes some of the materials that the IOWG drew upon for its papers, testimony, and for general dissemination. Subseries A, General Reference (1975-1987), contains a wide variety of documents on such subjects as the IMF and loans to South Africa, the Kairos Document, oil reserves, sanctions legislation, and Namibian independence. It also includes materials such as the Freedom Charter, leaflets announcing events, and resource materials on South Africa. It is arranged alphabetically by subject. Subseries B, Non-IOWG Papers (1975-1986), arranged chronologically, covers a wide variety of topics, from transnational corporations to trade unions. Subseries C, D, and E, News Clips, Newsletters, and Journals and Magazines respectively (1966-1986), are arranged alphabetically by title, except for news clips which are generally left in order. Where the IOWG specified a heading, clips were so arranged (i.e., clips ostensibly used for "The Bulletin" were left together). Subseries F consists of miscellaneous documents.

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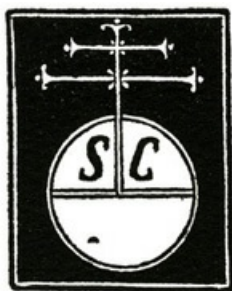
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