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PRESENTED TO THE NATIVE COMMISSIONER ON
FRIDAY, AUGUST 9TH, 1957

We who are here today on behalf of thousands of women present to you our objections to the pass laws, to permit regulations and to the continued efforts of the government to force passes upon the African women.

We protest again today, as many thousands of women have protested before, against these laws. We who are women and mothers, know too well what suffering the pass laws have brought to our husbands, to our families and to ourselves. We have lived our lives under the dread shadow of the pass laws; our men have been arrested on their way to work, have been sent to gaol, to forced labour on farms to unendurable hardship and privation, while we women wait in anxiety and agony for their return. Our men have been endorsed out of the towns where we live, have been torn from their homes, have been deprived of their right as fathers, as human beings, to earn a living to support their families.

We say to you that these are inhuman, intolerable burdens upon our men and upon us. AS WIVES AND MOTHERS WE CONDEMN THE PASS LAWS AND ALL THAT THEY IMPLY.

And we say once again that the pass laws have NOT been abolished but have been made harsher than ever before. The reference book is a pass and we know it for what it is. We know it to be a chain forged to make the African people slaves and to keep them in conditions of slavery.

Today it is not only our men, but we women who are to be subjected to passes. All over South Africa attempts are being made to place women also under the cruel rule of the pass laws. We know what this would mean to us and we are not deceived. We know that women will be arrested, torn away from their children and their homes, exposed to unbearable humiliations and brutality at the hands of the police, that we too shall be sentenced to imprisonment and taken for forced labour, just as our men, that we too shall live in terror of being "endorsed" out of the towns where we have our homes, of being exiled from our children.

We say to you also that we condemn the location permit system which is being introduced for women. We know the permit to be the fore-runner of the pass. We urge that no woman should be called upon to accept or to carry such a document and we charge you, the Native Commissioner for this area, to take heed of our objections and to forward them to the Native Affairs Department and to the Council non European Affairs Department, for we are not prepared to submit ourselves to the horrors of midnight permit raids, to the forcible intrusion of police and permit searchers into our homes, to undergo arrest. We demand the right to live peacefully in our homes without fear of raid or arrest.

A year ago today 20,000 women went to Pretoria to the Union Buildings to protest against passes. We handed in our protests, signed by ourselves, for the Prime Minister, who had refused to see us, to see women who had travelled from all parts of South Africa. We have learnt with indignation that our protests were not accepted by the Prime Minister, but were given to the police. Thousands of women have protested, in the areas in which they live, to the Native Commissioners, as we who are here today, protest to you. We have learnt that those protests were not forwarded to the Minister of Native Affairs but that they also were handed to the police. Today we say to you, the Native Commissioner, that you are obliged to forward our protest to the head of the Department which you represent, to the Minister of Native Affairs. We say that if you hand our protests to the police, you fail in your duty as Native Commissioner.

We say here for you and all South Africa to know, that we women will continue to oppose the pass laws. We support the courageous resistance of the women of Pietersburg, of Balfour, of Uitenhage, and Queenstown, of Standerton and of many other places. Their courage inspires us. We too shall be prepared

to sacrifice and to suffer, for we know that we shall not suffer in vain, and we shall count our suffering as nothing if we can save our children from the intolerable horrors of the pass system.

We know that the reply of the Prime Minister to the 20,000 women who went to Pretoria was to arrest their leaders; we charge you to tell the Prime Minister and the Minister of Native Affairs that we stand by our leaders who are on trial, for they suffer for us. No intimidation will move us, for we are determined that we shall continue to oppose passes, to call upon men and all women to oppose all pass laws and permits and all laws which restrict our freedom.

WE SHALL NOT REST UNTIL WE HAVE WON FOR OUR CHILDREN THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND SECURITY.

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FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN 1954-1963

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