DATE: 5 September 2001

FROM: Charles P. Korr

TO: Ron Turner

RE: Report of 2001 activities funded by UMSAEP grant

I was in Cape Town from 29 June to 13 August. I also made one trip to Johannesburg and Pretoria during that time. I was involved in a number of different activities, all of which dealt with my ongoing research into the role of sport in the political and social life of South Africa.

The primary purpose for the trip was to acquire new material for my study of sports activities of the political prisoners incarcerated on Robben Island. Once I arrived in South Africa, I changed the research activities somewhat from the plan I outlined in the proposal. Some of the men whom I planned to interview were out of the country. I was able to conduct interviews with eleven former Robben Islanders, including two of the three whom I had identified as being the most important men whom I had not interviewed. I was able to make contact with the administrative assistant of the third, as well as members of his family. I will either be able to interview him by telephone/email or when I return to Cape Town in December. I also made contact (after much effort) with the conveners of two groups of former political prisoners. Through their efforts, I will be able to send questionnaires to some of the former prisoners whom I was not able to contact directly.

The inability to contact some men was more than offset by the new developments at the Mayibuye Centre. As a result of a co-operative arrangement between the Robben Island Museum (RIM), the Mayibuye Centre and UWC, the RIM has taken over the bottom floors of the UWC Library for use as its archives. For the first time, the collection of the RIM is housed in a facility that will protect the integrity of the material and enable people to make proper use of them. The RIM has also catalogued much of the material and made it much more accessible. I discovered a large amount of written material that bears directly on my research that I had not been able to see in past visits to the Mayibuye.

The research concerning sport on Robben Island is an ongoing project, but I have gone far enough that I am ready to start writing.

I was involved in a number of activities in addition to the Robben Island research. Each year, the RIM runs a one week “Spring School” which the bring teen-age students from all over South Africa to the Island. This year, the theme of the school is sports and values. The organizers enlisted my help in creating the curriculum for the school, suggesting prospective speakers and identifying documentary sources for the students to use. I worked with the historical research section of the RIM to develop a list of questions they will use in their ongoing project to interview former prisoners.
I also did some work with the Amy Biehl Foundation. I gave a presentation to the staff about my research and the broader themes of the importance of sports in South African society and the changes that have taken place in that area of life since the late-1980's. One of the student interns was developing a “sustainable sports program” as part of the after-school activities organized by the Foundation. I worked on the proposal with her and identified potential sources of support. I introduced her to some of the officials in various sports organizations. This resulted in the Foundation receiving a number of contributions towards the creation of the sports program.

The Foundation has also organized a Speaker’s Forum which brings together representatives from schools, community organizations, NGO’s, and the Foundation to discuss ways in which they can organize joint efforts to improve conditions in areas such as Guguletu, Khayelitsha, New Crossroads, and Pacaltsdorp. Solomon Makosana (a long time school teacher and administrator) is the employee of the Foundation who is responsible for the creation of the Forum. He invited me to be the speaker at the first Forum. The topic was the importance of sports - the role it played in previous political struggles and how it might be used in future community building activities. There were approximately thirty people in attendance representing a broad range of constituencies.

The final result of my trip was an unexpected bonus. On 1 December, the RIM will open the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island. This building, situated at the Waterfront, will contain exhibits, the ticket office for tours of the Island, a conference center, and other facilities. It will be the land-based home of the RIM. Mr. Mandela will preside over the grand opening. Members of the council of RIM and a significant number of former Islanders will bed in attendance. The Chairman of the RIM Council invited me to attend. It will be a special event, one that holds great significance for the former prisoners and the nation as a whole. I feel privileged just to be there. In addition, it will afford me the opportunity to meet many of the men whom I have not yet talked with about my work and to renew friendships.