

The next time the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid issues its register of performers to be boycotted because of their support for the government of South Africa, the name of Paul Simon could well be on it. According to the UN, Simon has violated the cultural boycott and much more seriously as far as the UN is concerned, he has refused to apologize for doing so.

To most observers of the South African situation, the inclusion of Paul Simon on such a list would appear absurd. Since the "Graceland" album and tour, Simon's name has come to be associated with black South African music and with the movement to abolish apartheid. Any suggestion that he is supporting apartheid or the South African government is without foundation, and not even his sharpest critics will directly accuse him of that.

Instead, he has been labeled as either naive ("Simple Simon," the hostile British press has come to call him)—the unwitting dupe of the South African government—or exploiting the situation in South Africa in order to further his own career. But the main thrust of the argument against him is that he violated one of the cardinal rules of the anti-apartheid movement by going to South Africa to record the "Graceland" album in 1985.

The fuss stems from a 1980 UN resolution that "requests all states to take steps to prevent all cultural, academic, sporting, and other exchanges with South Africa." And it "appeals to writers, artists, musicians, and other personalities to boycott South Africa. . . ."

This has usually been interpreted as not playing or performing in South Africa or the homelands, most notably the infamous Sun City in Bophuthatswana, as these performances by international celebrities are used by the white government in South Africa to imply that their homelands policy has international support and to give the impression that it is business as usual in the country.

Since 1983, the names of artists who have worked in South Africa have been listed in the Centre Against Apartheid's "Register of Entertainers, Actors and

Others who have Performed in Apartheid South Africa," the aim of which is to blacklist those who have profited by performing in South Africa. As the introduction to the most recent register states, "Artists have become increasingly unwilling to suffer the adverse publicity of appearing in the Register."

Simon has twice registered offers to play Sun City—proof enough for most that he opposes apartheid and supports the aims of the boycott. He was also anything but naive in his consideration of the "Graceland" project. He was clearly aware of the political sensitivity of recording in South Africa, and for that reason spoke with black American leaders and entertainers, like Quincy Jones and Harry Belafonte, as well as with South African exiles and musicians before going to South Africa to record the album.

All of these people encouraged him to go ahead with the project, and South Africa's most prominent artists-in-exile, Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, have joined the "Graceland" tour in celebration of South African music.

From the UN's perspective, however, Simon has committed several sins. First, he clearly violated the letter, though not necessarily the spirit, of the boycott by recording in South Africa. And second, he entered into a gray area by touring with a group of South African musicians. Here the wording of the UN boycott lacks watertight specificity and

according to Amer Aram, senior political affairs officer at the UN Centre Against Apartheid, the Special Committee Against Apartheid is taking steps to clarify the situation so that there will be no confusion about what is and is not permissible under UN guidelines.

But in the debate over whether or not rules were broken, the UN and those who support the UN's position have clearly lost sight of the original intention of the cultural boycott. Instead, they are considering a violation of the cultural boycott a crime in and of itself, paying little attention to the reality of the situation in South Africa or the contributions that Simon and the "Graceland" tour have made to the anti-apartheid movement.

For now, Simon rates only this footnote in the register: "The Special Committee considered the case of the well-known American singer and composer Paul Simon who was involved in recording an album in South Africa. It decided not to place his name on the register on receiving his pledge that he does not intend to perform in South Africa while apartheid prevails and will maintain this position in the context of the United Nations cultural boycott."

Simon's pledge, as interpreted by the United Nations, came in what one UN spokesman called a "cleverly worded" letter dated January 29 and addressed to Ambassador Joseph Garba of Nigeria, chairman of the Special Committee.

## The Sins of Paul Simon

Did Paul Simon violate the cultural boycott by recording an album in South Africa and touring with black South African artists? While the UN Centre Against Apartheid has not blacklisted Simon for the "Graceland" effort, neither has it embraced the record and tour, putting itself in conflict with the musicians who have gained international notoriety from their association with the American pop star.

United Nations

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