

April 24, 1986

Dr. Harold T. Shapiro  
President  
University of Michigan  
Office of the President  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

Dear Dr. Shapiro:

I am deeply disturbed by the refusal of the University of Michigan to confer an honorary degree at its May commencement on Nelson Mandela because of his inability to leave a South African jail.

The denial of a degree to Mr. Mandela for the reasons publicly stated -- that is, in accordance with a prevailing tradition of not awarding honorary degrees to those "in absentia" -- is truly unfortunate. I believe such a denial demeans the truly meaningful traditions of our University, and exhibits either a disregard for, or an ignorance of, the extraordinary circumstances of the current situation in South Africa.

As an alumnus of the University, a strong supporter of its enlightened programs over the years, and a Member of Congress from Michigan, I am extremely disappointed in the University for its failure to take a stand on this issue.

I cannot think of a better nominee than Nelson Mandela for the University's Doctor of Humane Letters degree. He is today the leading symbol of resistance to political and economic oppression and to race and color prejudice not only in South Africa, but throughout the world. By honoring him, the University not only would express its abhorrence of apartheid, but also pay tribute to those who fight racism and intolerance wherever it exists in our world.

In addition, by making this honorary award to Mr. Mandela, the University of Michigan would tell America's non-white community that, notwithstanding some recent perceptions to the contrary, it continues steadfast in its determination to support forces

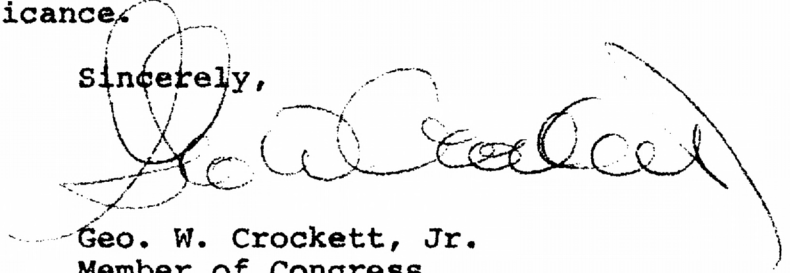
*Mandela*

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for justice, equality and freedom for all men and women everywhere. Surely the prevailing rule of absentia pales when compared to the urgent need for action in support of these principles and their application in South Africa.

An institution such as the University of Michigan cannot afford to hide behind outdated rules or traditions when faced with issues of such significance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geo. W. Crockett, Jr.", with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Geo. W. Crockett, Jr.  
Member of Congress

GWC:tj/jtw

cc: Members, Board of Regents