

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 181

Commending the Sinomlando Centre for Oral History and Memory Work.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 2012
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 2, 2012

WHEREAS, the Sinomlando Centre for Oral History and Memory Work of the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa was established in 1994 after the end of apartheid and charged with the duty to add indigenous oral history to the nation's historical records; and

WHEREAS, the Sinomlando Centre, named for the Zulu word meaning, "we have a history," strives to recover the history and silenced memories of the Christian communities and individuals who suffered under apartheid, a rigid and repressive legal system of racial segregation instituted in 1838 in which the ethos of the indigenous people of South Africa was shattered and obliterated; and

WHEREAS, with great sensitivity to the culture, faith and gender of generations of people who have been silenced and forgotten and who are living with memories of unspeakable trauma, the Sinomlando Centre works tirelessly to facilitate healing and reconciliation and to assist people in retrieving their history, developing resilience, and building capacity in oral history and memory work in partner organizations in communities throughout South Africa; and

WHEREAS, the Sinomlando Centre is one of the leading research and training institutions in the world for oral history and memory work, assists in community development, provides psychosocial support to families and orphans affected by HIV/AIDS, and helps families preserve the history of deceased relatives through the Memory Box Programme, which includes their collections of personal objects and memorabilia; and

WHEREAS, with wide-ranging training programmes in English and isiZulu, and with special attention devoted to monitoring and evaluation, the Sinomlando Centre is integrally involved in training and mentoring in oral history and memory work to enable and empower the community to develop the skills required to record and document its history; and

WHEREAS, oral history and memory work are powerful tools used in historical research to document a people's past, complement document-based history, facilitate the grieving process, and allow persons who have survived individual and collective ordeals in human history to cope with horrible experiences by sharing their memories; and

WHEREAS, as a part of the Commemoration of the Public School Closings (Massive Resistance) in Virginia led by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, the Commission has traveled throughout the Commonwealth and engaged the public in candid dialogue concerning Virginia's school desegregation history; it was discovered that (i) much of Virginia's public and other school desegregation records have been lost, (ii) the history of Massive Resistance has not been preserved, (iii) school children are not exposed to this aspect of Virginia's history because Massive Resistance is not treated appropriately in history textbooks, and (iv) scholars and researchers have limited access to primary and secondary resources due to the loss of records; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has determined the need for healing and reconciliation throughout the Commonwealth, as feelings of deep resentment, bitterness, and hopelessness are frequently expressed by Massive Resistance survivors, and many others are unable or reluctant to talk about their experiences even after more than 50 years have passed, due to overwhelming and painfully haunting memories; and

WHEREAS, the Commission, supported by the *Brown v. Board of Education* Scholarship Committee, has entered into a partnership with the Virginia Commonwealth University Department of African American Studies for the Massive Resistance Oral History Project to collect the oral histories of Massive Resistance survivors to augment Virginia's existing school desegregation history; and

WHEREAS, in December 2011, in preparation for the oral history project, a team of professionals consisting of representatives of Virginia Commonwealth University and of the Commission traveled to South Africa to study and train in oral history and memory work at the Sinomlando Centre; and

WHEREAS, the ethical principles of the Sinomlando Centre and its methods for conducting oral history and memory work will be used in implementing the Massive Resistance Oral History Project and in conducting interviews with survivors who voluntarily participate in the Project; and

WHEREAS, the VCU Massive Resistance Oral History Project will result in at least four benefits for the Commonwealth: personal healing, reconciliation, safeguarding of Virginia's school desegregation history, and preservation of oral histories and primary source documents; and

WHEREAS, with the aid of the tireless and dedicated work of the Sinomlando Centre, South Africa has made considerable progress in building a democracy, ensuring and protecting human rights, mending

wounds of alienated citizens, and reconstructing the history of indigenous peoples whose ethos and history were decimated under apartheid; and

WHEREAS, the exemplary work of the Sinomlando Centre is a beacon for other countries seeking national restoration and serves as the inspiration for the preservation of Virginia's school desegregation history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Sinomlando Centre for Oral History and Memory Work; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Dr. Philippe Denis, Director of the Sinomlando Centre, as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation and high regard for its leadership and labor to facilitate democracy, reconciliation, and nation-building.