

Statement of the Philadelphia Coalition

March 29, 2008

In 2005, a Neshoba County jury found Edgar Ray Killen guilty in the brutal deaths of civil rights activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. That trial, and the community organizing that helped prompt it, were important steps toward justice and reconciliation. But we must still seek justice in the case. Recent reports suggest new avenues for investigation. **We call now on local and state officials to seek the support of the United States Department of Justice in reopening an investigation into those who remain at large in the Neshoba case.**

Other communities also witnessed such violence in the civil rights era. Each loss of life was a horrible crime. Each victim deserves justice. **We call on all officials to zealously investigate and prosecute those cases and to seek any assistance necessary to prepare the cases for trial. We also strongly urge that the Mississippi congressional delegation aggressively support passage of the Emmett Till Bill, which awaits consideration by the Senate so that other communities can accomplish what we have.**

In our own community, three brave young men were not murdered by a lone individual. While a vigilante group may have fired the gun, the State of Mississippi loaded and aimed the weapon. The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission monitored and intimidated civil rights activists to prevent black voter registration. The White Citizens' Councils enforced white supremacy through economic oppression. And decent people remained silent while evil was done in their name. These shameful actions have been little understood by Mississippi citizens. We must now seek the truth; telling the truth is the path for community redemption.

We call on the State of Mississippi, all of its citizens in every county, to begin an honest investigation into our history. **After exhaustive scrutiny if it is determined that there is not sufficient evidence to prosecute these brutal crimes, officials should release all records related to racial crimes so the truth can finally be told.** While it will be painful, we must understand the legacy of racism that continues to divide us, and which prevents all of us from participating fully in the promise of democracy.

We challenge our fellow citizens to join us in an honest appraisal of the past, creating a truth process to tell the story. Knowledge brings truth and the truth brings freedom. Today we have a cause for hope because our community came together to acknowledge the evil that occurred here and to assert that we will no longer accept it as a description of who we are. Our purpose for the future should be: to seek the truth, to insure justice for all, and to nurture reconciliation through education. And so we promise in our own community to see this journey through to the finish line.