

PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY 'CONCERNED SOCIAL WORKERS'

A group of Concerned Social Workers have organised a conference focussing on 'children under repression' to be held at the University of the Witwatersrand, on the 25th and the 26th October, 1985. The conference is being organised to draw public attention to the violation of children's rights in our communities, particularly under the present state of emergency.

We are concerned about the effects of children's exposure to and experience of violence in the townships. We believe that such exposure can never be conducive to the physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development of children.

We further believe that professionals in the social services such as doctors, lawyers, social workers, psychologists and teachers need to face this issue. We cannot remain silent whilst the rights of children are being violated.

Based on the information at our disposal, we are convinced that the present experiences of children under repression, contravene the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which sets out internationally accepted standards for the humane and dignified treatment of children.

Over the past month, 6 children between the ages of two years and ten years have died as a result of police or South African Defence Force action. Of the total number of people arrested and detained since the declaration of the state of emergency, well over 1 050 have been reported to be children below the ages of fourteen years. The South African Catholic Bishops' Conference Report on Police Conduct during Township Protests, August - November 1984, contains allegations of rape and abuse of children.

A Child Welfare Social Worker and the Detainees Parents Support Committee have records of children who have been reported missing. Parents are frantic about the whereabouts of their children. Other forms of violence include the whipping of children by the Defence Force in an attempt to force them out of their homes and into classrooms.

Many children have been physically injured and treated by township doctors for the adverse effects of rubber bullets, teargas and baton charges. Others have experienced severe psychological problems due to their exposure to and experience of various forms of violence.

The information that we have is still sparse. It relies mainly on testimonies from parents, children and professionals working with such persons. Parents are reluctant to expose their children by reporting them as missing, injured or detained for fear of re-crimination from authorities. The result has been that many cases are unreported.

We hope that this conference will be able to draw together parents, professionals, community and social service organisations to examine the issue more closely. The fatal shooting of Hector Peterson in Soweto 1976, of 3 year old Mita Ngobeni of Atteridgeville and 10 year old Hilton Stuurman in Cape Town recently, are the tragic symbols of the violation of children's rights in our country.

E. Testimonies

- * The Johannesburg Child Welfare Society appointed a deputation to approach the Government Minister on the issue of children in detention. The director of the agency, Mr Howard Ferreira said the effect of imprisonment on young children could have a terribly warping effect.
(The Star, 21 August 1985)
- * Professionals - doctors, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists passed the following resolution at a meeting held on 14 September 1985.
"We express our deeply felt horror and revulsion at the State's assault on children and call upon the Government to release all the detained children immediately into the custody of their parents or guardians (and) put an immediate end to the security forces harassment and detention of children. Children are particularly susceptible to the development of long - term adverse effects of these brutalising experiences - such as anxiety disorders, adjustment and behaviour disorder and even psychotic episodes."
(The Star, 17 September 1985)
- * Human Rights Lawyer Mr Nicholas Haysom said that South Africa departed significantly from international standards in its imprisonment of children. "International Codes, he said, embody an almost preemptory requirement that children should not be held in the same prison as adults. While South African law complies with this and stipulates that children should not be kept in jail at all unless no other institution existed these rules are honoured more in the breach than the observance."
(The Star, 17 September 1985)
- * The Star editorial condemned the violence against children saying, "The case of an 11 year old child who was kept in prison for 57 days is at last before the courts... He allegedly threw stones... It took a Supreme Court ruling to get him out of jail ... He was kept in police cells to protect society from his influence and to ensure he did not flee justice... What sort of madness is this?"
(The Star, 17 September 1985)

D. Report on 'Police Conduct during Township protests' August - November 1984.
Compiled by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference.

* Indiscriminate and excessive beating

"The description of random shooting of township residents is paralled by the allegations concerning widespread assaults perpetrated against residents by the police.

The most savage example of this conduct is the incident involving Miss MN, a standard 3 pupil from Soweto. While she was walking home, a hippo passed her and a policeman told her to board the truck and he would buy her sweets. When she refused, another policeman pointed a small gun at her and ordered her on to the hippo. Inside the hippo she was told that the children in uniforms were the ones who caused the trouble. They sjambokked her and she screamed. One policeman then put his hand over her mouth and two other policemen continued to sjambok her for some time. Thereafter they told her to get out and go home. A medical practitioner at the Orlando Clinic examined her the following day and found the following injuries: 8 weals on her left thigh; 3 weals on her left buttock; 14 weals on her left forearm; 5 weals on her left chest; 12 weals on her right forearm and 7 weals on her right thigh. The beating was also found to have caused internal bleeding." (page 10)

* Other Allegations

"On November 21, 2 girls of 15 and 16 were allegedly raped by two white policemen in a police hippo. While returning from the shops, they were ordered into a hippo in Sharpville at about 4pm and kept inside until approximately 6.30am the next morning." (page 27)

* Statement by Dr. Y. Veriava

"I have treated people from Sebokeng and Lenasia who have suffered from injuries during the unrest in these areas. Two of these collapsed as a result of teargas. One child whom I saw after inhalation required mouth to mouth resuscitation as a result of the teargas."

"I know of one child whose skull was fractured by a rubber bullet and who died of meningitis as a result. I treated a child who was shot on the right side of the head by a rubber bullet. He is suffering from weakness of the left arm and is confused. His brain has been damaged and he has become forgetful."

"The police have also used real bullets. I have treated two patients who were shot in the back. One of these, a 15 year old boy, was shot in the back of the skull in September and the bullet is still lodged in his brain. He has suffered brain damage and is now mentally abnormal."

INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

A. Reported incidents of the violation of children's rights

- * 746 pupils arrested at Soweto's Hlengiwe Secondary School. Major Zwane, police liaison officer for Soweto, confirmed that the children were detained on the Thursday at their White City Jabavu school. Many of the children were as young as 12 years of age.
(The Star, 12 September 1985)
- * A teacher and 10 pupils were shot at Musi High School after police used shotguns and rubber bullets.
(The Star, 13 September 1985)
- * 173 people arrested including 13 children under the age of 14 years, at Alexandra Sinton High School in Belgravia, Athlone.
(The Star, 18 September 1985)
- * About 87 of the 104 Thuto - ke - Matla pupils in Tembisa who were arrested at Mahwelereng, Potgietersrus on Saturday, 14 September, have been released.
(The Star, 19 September 1985)
- * A 3 year old, Phillip Dhlamini was shot in the leg at his home in Zola.
(City Press, 29 September 1985)

B. Figures on the number of children arrested, detained and missing will be released at the conference by members of the Detainees Parents' Support Committee and Child Welfare Society.

C. Deaths as a result of police and SADF action in the Townships

- * A 3 year old Mita Ngobeni was fatally shot with a rubber bullet by police while playing in her yard with two cousins.
(City Press, 15 September 1985)
- * 13 year old Ester Mantwa was shot on her way from school, It is alleged that pupils had been ordered to leave the school premises by members of the SADF.
(The Star, 17 September 1985)
- * A 16 year old Diepkloof pupil died after he was allegedly shot by police.
(The Star, 17 September 1985)
- * 10 year old Hilton Stuurman was shot in Cape Town.
(The Star, 30 September 1985)
- * An unidentified girl, aged about 14 years was killed by shotgun fire at Nyanga station.
(The Star, 17 October 1985)
- * Three youths were shot dead by police on Tuesday in Thornton Road, Athlone.
(The Star, 17 October 1985)