

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

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Dear Friend,

Let me tell you about South Africa today. I could list statistic after statistic about the mass detentions, the torture and violence that make South Africa one huge prison, but it's people, not numbers, that really tell the story.

People like Ivy Gcina, a middle-aged woman active in community and women's organisations, who has been detained without trial for over two years. She suffers from serious high blood pressure and, as a result of severe torture by the police, is partially deaf. When her son was killed by agents of apartheid she was prevented from attending his funeral.

People like Deborah Josephine Marakalla, a member of the Tembisa Detainees' Support Committee. Deborah is 23 with two children and was detained whilst pregnant with a third. Alone in her cell she began to miscarry. She cried out for help but none came and she was left in agony.

Eventually, close to death, she was taken to have emergency surgery that has left her unable to bear any more children.

People like 19 year old Eugene Dlamini who, whilst in detention, had his arms and legs strapped to the arms and legs of a chair, was blindfolded, gagged and had water poured over his head. Six police torturers then administered electric shocks to his neck, wrists and ankles until he lost consciousness.

People like the five youths in their mid-teens who were kept in a dog cage for over 36 hours then taken out, assaulted and tortured. The mother of one described their experiences: 'There was blood coming out of his ears and there was a wound on his forehead and cheek. I asked him what had happened and he said the police had beaten him and shot him in the face with a bird gun. He also told me he had been beaten all over his body with a sjambok'.

Another of the mothers found her sons cramped with three others into the dog cage, crying. Later one of the youths described how 'we all got into one cage which was high enough for us to stand in if we kept our heads forward or bent down. The door of the cage was locked and we were taken out and questioned one by one during the night. They put a tyre tube over my head and hit me ... I could not breathe. We slept in the dog cage for a second night and it rained the entire period.'

Throughout our country, hundreds of people are suffering experiences such as these. Scores of trials are taking place, many simply going unreported. Hundreds of people are sentenced to long prison terms. Others, after long spells of imprisonment without charge, are released and placed under severe restrictions. They are confined to their homes between certain hours, and confined to their magisterial districts at all times. This frequently deprives them of their means of livelihood, as in the case of Zwelakhe Sisulu, editor of New Nation newspaper, who was released after two years in detention.

Media controls forbid reporting of detentions, prison conditions or security force actions, thus attempting to ensure the plight of detainees remains hidden, detainees such as Oscar Mpetha, veteran trade union and ANC activist. Oscar is 79 years old and suffers from diabetes, and he has had a leg amputated. Yet he remains incarcerated in an apartheid prison.

In an open letter to Mr Adriaan Vlok, South African Minister of Law and Order, the Reverend Allan Boesak says:

'You and your government, and the people who vote for you, have created a

system of systematic exploitation, oppression and degradation, the only yardstick being your own privileges. You have wilfully and callously trampled upon the rights and dignity of millions without blinking an eye. You have made laws that make a mockery of the laws of God. When we

protested, you have threatened, harassed, teargassed, beaten, imprisoned, detained and killed us. You have promulgated a State of Emergency under which you have given yourself and your security apparatus almost limitless powers.'

As I think of the leaders convicted in the Delmas treason trial these words ring so true. Former UDF publicity secretary Patrick Lekota was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, the former national secretary Popo

Molefe and former Transvaal secretary Moss Chikane were sentenced to 10 years each, and Tom Manthata, who worked with the South African Council of Churches, received a 6 years' sentence. After being held in custody for three years, these men have been accused of 'treason'. To be a representative of the mass democratic movement for a new, free South Africa is treason in the eyes of apartheid law courts. As they were bundled down to their incarceration in prison cells after the trial, many of the huge crowd who had gathered to show their support broke down and wept. Yet the courage of the three shone through as they smuggled out a message of hope: 'Somewhere in the future lies a date when black and white will take a second look at these moments of our history ...'

I ask you to take up the struggle against apartheid, for the sake of these brave men and women, for the sake of all those who have died in South Africa's prisons and for the sake of those who await execution on death row. The thousands who crowd the prison cells and torture chambers need your help now. We cannot let them down. That's why I ask you to send us a donation today to help 'Break the Bars of Apartheid'.

Please send as much as you can. Every donation helps but it is especially useful to us if you fill in the enclosed banker's order form in support of the cause of peace and freedom.

Please show all those unjustly imprisoned in South Africa that they are not alone.

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Mendi Msimang
Chief Representative

ANC Mission to the United Kingdom and Ireland

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