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World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners

Sponsored by: The Anti-Apartheid Movement

Hon Secretary: Jeremy Thorpe MP

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The World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners welcomes the Defence and Aid Fund campaign to expose conditions under which political opponents of the South African Government are imprisoned or detained without trial.

World Campaign itself has long campaigned for the release of political prisoners in terms of the October 1963 United Nations resolution which made this demand. It will also continue its demand that political prisoners should be categorised differently from criminal prisoners with better conditions and more privileges. It is further necessary to continue to press for an international commission to visit the political prisoners regularly in order to ensure that their conditions do not deteriorate.

Harold Strachan's brave exposure of jail conditions when he was released after serving three years, no doubt contributed to the improvement of the conditions of the White men at Pretoria Central. World Campaign protests no doubt also made an impact. This improvement in conditions was confirmed by Mrs. Helen Suzman in a report which she made to Parliament on October 14th when she said that during the last year or so she had visited some jails at the invitation of the former Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, now Prime Minister.

She reported that the numbers of visits and letters received have been increased and that the White male prisoners are leading a reasonably normal prison life in Pretoria. However, there are three or four who are still labouring under great difficulties - they are given nothing else to do all day long except to sew mail bags. She requested that the present Minister of Justice should visit these people. (It is known that among these people mentioned are Abram Fischer, serving a life term of imprisonment, Harold Strachan, serving 18 months for offences under the Prisons Act as a result of the exposure mentioned above, and Isaac Heymann, serving a five-year sentence under the Suppression of Communism Act).

She stated that the position of the White women was not as satisfactory as that of the main group of White men. They were doing laundry - washing the clothes of the other prisoners and they were all sharing one cell. She asked that they be given more constructive work to do.

Mrs. Suzman went on to say that she could not say that the conditions in the Non-White jails had improved. She said that those she had visited (and she makes no mention of Robben Island) are hopelessly overcrowded and that facilities are really primitive.

Defence and Aid is specifically dealing with Robben Island where a large number of long-term Non-White political prisoners are held. A key figure in their campaign is Dennis Brutus, teacher, poet and sportsman who served 16 of his 18 months sentence on Robben Island. Mr. Brutus is available to attend meetings - in fact he has already visited many parts of the United Kingdom and Scandinavia.

We ask all the people who have been responsible for carrying out our campaigns in the past to help in whatever way they can in this renewed effort for the demands outlined.

The demand for an international commission to visit the South African jails should be made to the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, with a copy of the letter to the Minister of Justice, Pretoria and one to World Campaign for our information. The facts contained above can be used, especially in regard to the Non-White political prisoners. We must demand

an improvement in the conditions of political prisoners, while at the same time demanding their release.

For Information :

November is the anniversary of two events in the history of South African political prisoners. On November 6th, 1964, Vuyisili Mini, Wilson Khayinga and Zinakile Mkaba were executed allegedly for ordering the death of an informer.

On November 11th, 1965 Abram Fischer was arrested after living for nearly eleven months in hiding. He is serving life imprisonment.

Lawyers Bill :

The Bill which will prevent "listed" members of the bar and side bar from continuing to practise in South Africa has once again been postponed. This and other controversial items of legislation were probably postponed because of South Africa's new Prime Minister taking office.

New Pamphlets :

'What I Did was Right' - Bram Fischer. His statement from the Dock in the Supreme Court, Pretoria on March 28, 1966. Copies are available at 1/- each.

'The Purge of the Eastern Cape'. Price 1/6d. This pamphlet has been prepared from Court records, newspaper reports, affidavits and personal experiences. The Security Police aim to purge the Eastern Cape of any support or loyalty for the African National Congress or the Pan-Africanist Congress. The methods they use to ensure this have to be read to be believed.
