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Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker,
Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
London,
SW1A 2AH.

9 February 1989.

I have recently received information on the South African detainees now on hunger strike in prisons in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. I a

The hunger strike began on 23 January 1989 when seven detainees at Diepkloof Prison near Soweto began refusing to take food. The numbers on hunger strike have now reached over two hundred and the prison authorities have resorted to forcibly drip feeding those who have been refusing food the longest. -

The British Government has stated on more than one occasion its opposition to detention without trial. I welcome your statement in the House yesterday in which you said that;

"A great deal would be achieved by the unconditional release of all political detainees"

I would therefore urge you as a minimum course of action to summon at once the South African Ambassador to the Foreign Office and demand the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees. In addition the British Ambassador to South Africa should forthwith lodge a demand with the State President in Pretoria for the unconditional release of all detainees.

The British Government should then take steps to initiate action in the EEC, the Commonwealth and the United Nations to bring pressure to bear on the South African Government unconditionally to release all detainees.

This I believe is the very minimum that the British Government should undertake if its policy of opposition to detention without trial is to have any credibility at all.

AL, AM

Geoffrey Bindman

Chair.

SATIS (Southern Africa - The Imprisoned Society) draws together representatives from Alliance of Radical Methodists, Anti-Apartheid Movement.

British Defence and Aid Fund, COSA WH, Haldane Society, International Defence and Aid Fund, Liberation, National League and Young Liberals.

National Union of Students. Namibian Support Committee, Pax Christi, Society of Black Lawyers, TASS, UNA Youth Council.

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STATEMENT BY HUNGER STRIKERS

We the detainees at Johannesburg prison have decided to embark on a hunger strike on individual voluntary basis to protest at our unjustified prolonged detention without trial and to demand our immediate unconditional release from detention. Many of us have spent more than 24 months in detention and everytime we are redetained we are supplied with 'new reasons' fabricated and spurred out of the heads of our captors.

Our protest action stems from our painful experience and deep conviction that the regime intends to keep us here indefinitely. We are effectively sentenced to long prison terms without meaningful recourse to courts of law to prove our innocence. We also believe that our continued detention stems from the regime's malicious intention to use us as a scape-goat for their failure to address fundamental issues of the land and national grievances of our people. Our detention cannot stop the struggle for freedom.

We have tried everything in our power to persuade the regime to release us. We have sent memoranda, petitions and representations to both the Minister of Law and Order Adrien Vlok and to the State President P.W. Botha; exhorting them to address themselves to our situation, but to no avail. Some detainees sought several court interdicts as a last resort to secure their release. The regime showed not the slightest concern, but instead proceeded to tighten up every knot and closed up whatever existing legal channel there was to secure our release. To add insult to injury, all campaigns and calls for the release of detainees were also declared illegal. All these inhuman measures have convinced us that the regime will not move on detentions. We are also convinced that we have exhausted all other means available to us. At the same time we insist that we have committed no crime and therefore do not deserve to be here. We shall go on with our hunger strike for as long as it takes to secure our release, whatever the consequences.

We see our action as the result of conscious, deliberate and voluntary personal choice. We hope it shall also reflect to both the national and the international community, varying cases of painful experiences, stress, hardship and torture borne by detainees at the various points of detention. Some of us may never recover from the effects of this long unjustified detention. Our action should disprove the regime's propaganda and distorted picture about detainees in South African prisons.

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We are detainees from all walks of life; workers, students, youth, teachers, trade unionists, Christians, parents etc., Amongst us there are breadwinners and children under age. We also have students whose future is deliberately wasted here. Schools have just re-opened whilst most students are still in detention, having already lost on one to two years of study. Few of us in detention do not even belong to Anti-Apartheid organisations and have never opposed apartheid in a self conscious way.

However, most of us are peace-loving democrats, respectable members of our democratic organisations who, throughout our opposition to unjust laws, practised consistently our peaceful methods of opposition and protest to apartheid. We are strongly committed to a democratic future for our country. We are fully aware of the risks and dangers involved in our action and the divisive tactics the regime might use to break our action, but we are determined to go on until everyone is released. We also demand the release of all other detainees held under the State of Emergency in South African prisons. Nothing save our total release shall dissuade us from our course of action.

Press release by the whole community of detainees not on hunger strike

We, the detainees, presently not on hunger strike at Johannesburg Prison, pledge our total and unreserved support for our comrades on hunger strike. We fully align ourselves with the demand for the release of all other detainees held under the State of Emergency in South African prisons. We support those on hunger strike morally and spiritually, furthermore, we also promise not to rest until we are all released. We also make an urgent plea to our people outside to persuade the regime to intervene before the situation deteriorates ever further. We insist that we have committed no crime and do not deserve to be here. We further demand the uplifting of the State of Emergency and the unbanning of our democratic organisations. We shall not rest until we are all released, whatever the consequences.

10 February 1989.

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DETAINEES' HUNGER STRIKE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Over two hundred detainees are now on hunger strike in South Africa. Seven detainees at Diepkloof Prison near Soweto began their hunger strike on 23 January 1989, and have since been joined by many others. At least 15 have been hospitalised and the prison authorities have now resorted to forcibly drip feeding those who have been refusing food the longest.

This hunger strike is the most significant of its kind ever to occur in South Africa and in its size and co-ordination we can see reflected the strength of mass democratic opposition to the State of Emergency, now in its third year, and to detention without trial. In support of the detainees at least 42 lawyers representing the fasting prisoners have stated they intended to fast for 48 hours in sympathy with the detainees.

In a statement the strikers declared;

"We the detainees at Johannesburg prison have decided to embark on a hunger strike to protest at our unjustified prolonged detention without trial and to demand our immediate unconditional release from detention."

Many of these detainees are now approaching one thousand days in detention. They have been neither charged with any offence nor brought to trial. They have sent numerous memoranda and letters to the Ministers of Law and Order and Justice and to the State President demanding they be released and stating why they believe that their continued detention is unjust.

Their continued incarceration in the face of these appeals has led many of those detained to the conclusion that the only way they will get out of prison is to deploy the use of the drastic weapon of a hunger strike: denying themselves food, even if this means jeopardising their health, even their lives.

In response SATIS calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the Diepkloof detainees and all other detainees held by the apartheid regime.

SATIS supporters are asked to act in solidarity with the hunger strikers and all detainees by writing to;

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British Defence and Aid Fund, COSA WR, Haldane Society, International Defence and Aid Fund
Liberation, National League of Young Liberals,

National Union of Students, Namibian Support Committee. Pax Christi. Society of Black Lawyers, TASS, UNA Youth Council.

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The State President,
Union Buildings,
PRETORIA 0001,
South Africa.

Letters should call for the immediate release of all those detained.

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Rt. Hon; Lynda Chalker,
Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
London, SW1A 2AH.

Letters should point out that the position of the British Government is to oppose detention without trial and therefore writers should ask what the British government is doing in relation to securing the release of those on hunger strike and all other detainees in South Africa.

C)

Letters of solidarity with the hunger strikers and all detainees in South Africa can be sent to the;

Humans Rights Commission,
PO Box 32723,
Braamfontein 2017,
Johannesburg,
South Africa.

Please find enclosed a copy of the statement written by the detainees of Diepkloof Prison in relation to the hunger strike.

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Yours sincerely,
Paul Brannen,
SATIS Convenor.