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CALL TO WHITES

Information Sheet

REPRESSION

HAS THE STATE OF EMERGENCY REALLY ENDED?

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The official State of Emergency was ended on March 7 1986. Yet in that month more people died than at any other time during the State of Emergency.

- * Nine people were killed on March 25 when police opened fire on a crowd outside a beer hall in Port Elizabeth.
- * On March 26, 11 people were killed when Bophuthatswana police opened fire on a crowd at a soccer field in Winterveld near Pretoria.
- * And in April three people died in detention in the Northern Transvaal, among them Peter Nchabaleng, President of the United Democratic Front in the Northern Transvaal region. In Alexandra, Johannesburg, eight people were killed on April 22.

These and numerous other examples have heightened the fears of many South Africans that an informal State of Emergency persists in our country. For most South Africans the declaration of the Emergency on July 21, 1985 merely represented the official recognition of a campaign of repression that had been going on for many months.

Before that date the army and the police were present in the townships. Reports of security force harassment, limited though they were, painted a horrifying picture of indiscriminate violence and brutality.

THE EFFECT OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY:

The imposition of the State of Emergency saw this picture grow worse. Meetings of organisations were banned. Popular leaders were forced into hiding for fear of arrest, harassment and assassination. Thousands of people were detained or arrested on charges of "public violence". General raids on communities and house-to-house searches occurred. Mass funerals for the victims of the S.A.D.F. and S.A.P. bullets became weekly events. And, increasingly, restrictions were placed on the flow of information.

In a press statement released shortly after the lifting of the State of Emergency, the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) and Detainees' Support Committee

(DESCOM) expressed their concern that the lifting of the Emergency would not signify the end of harsh repression. This concern is based on a survey conducted by the DPSC/DESCOM in 12 Transvaal and two Northern Cape communities. The survey revealed strong similarities in detention patterns, restrictions on political activities and deaths and injuries in Emergency and non-Emergency areas.

DETENTIONS:

The 14 areas, of which six were Emergency areas, reported a total of 10 921 known detentions under the Internal Security, Public Safety and Criminal Procedure Acts. Of these, 2 290 people were held under Section 3 of the Public Safety Act. Of those held under this Act, over 5 000 were arrested in non-Emergency areas.

Between 40 and 60 percent of those arrested or detained were under the age of 18 years. 11 out of the 14 areas reported that the majority of those detained or arrested were allegedly tortured, assaulted or raped.

TORTURE AND ASSAULT:

Reports of torture and assault are given further substance by the testimony of Dr Wendy Orr, who said that in 153 cases of detainees she had seen, their injuries could not have been inflicted lawfully. A study of torture by Cape Town academics revealed that 83 percent of the detainees studied had suffered some form of physical abuse.

This evidence of widespread torture and assault, together with evidence presented in court interdicts throughout the country, have pointed to the negative effects which the indemnity granted by State of Emergency regulations against prosecution had on the actions of security forces in both Emergency and non-Emergency areas.

According to DESCOM and the DPSC, this indemnity appears to have engendered a feeling of the right to act without restraint in the security forces. Also, the widespread allegations of torture and assault point to the punitive and intimidatory nature of arrests and detentions. This is especially so when one considers that in the majority of cases, arrests and detentions did not lead to either prosecutions or convictions.

PUBLIC VIOLENCE:

Ten out of 14 areas reported that over 50 percent of those arrested were charged with public violence, however it appears that on average less than 20 percent of those charged were convicted. Six areas reported they had difficulty receiving bail or were faced with a situation where bail was fixed too high for the family of the accused to afford.

This suggests that awaiting trial imprisonment is used as a detention provision to keep large number of people "out of circulation". Many of these people are under 18 years of age and are in fact entitled to be released on "free bail" into the care of their parents, teacher or priest.

Thirteen of the 14 areas reported that many of those arrested on Public Violence charges were arrested at hospitals where they had gone for treatment for gunshot, sjambok or pellet wounds. These wounds are regarded by the police as evidence that the wounded person had been involved in "Public Violence". These areas said that the hospitals were like "jails", and that injured people would rather remain at home without treatment than risk going to hospital.

This led to the absurd situation where resident who fall victim to security force action, whether in the course of their daily activities, or through being caught in the "cross fire", or through actually being involved in clashes with the police and SADF risk arrest on arriving at hospital for treatment. The onus has now fallen on the wounded to prove that they did not sustain their wounds in the course of anti-apartheid protests.

RESTRICTIONS ON MEETINGS AND FUNERALS:

All 14 areas surveyed reported restrictions on meetings and funerals. 13 Areas said that meetings had been banned and 12 areas said that bans had been imposed on the communities, while a further five communities reported that "undeclared" curfews had existed.

BANTUSTAN REPRESSION:

Since the lifting of the formal State of Emergency, there have been more and more reports of increasing and intensifying abuses of the human rights in our country. These have spread to include the so-called "self-governing homelands". Most prominent is the situation in Lebowa where three men died in detention in April 1986. Their deaths have taken place against a background of reports of widespread police harassment including sjambokking and bomb and grenade attacks directed at people opposed to the Lebowa authorities.

DPSC and DESCOM have stated that the government's attempts to smash people's resistance to unjust and inhuman laws and regulations have backfired. They do not believe that new security laws will bring about the peace and stability which the Internal Security Act and Public Safety Act have failed to do.

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There can only be an end to conflict and violence in our country when the basic demands of South Africa's majority are met.

These demands include:

- * The release of all detainees and political prisoners
- * The withdrawal of troops from the townships
- * The scrapping of the Internal Security Act
- * The lifting of all bans on individuals, organisations and gatherings.

Prepared by the Johannesburg Detainees' Support Committee.

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