



## Congress Reacts to Biko's Death

*"Our preparedness to take upon ourselves the cudgels of the struggle will see us through. We must completely remove from our vocabulary the concept of fear. The White man has always nourished his greed on this basic fear that manifests itself in the Black community... We have to take off our coats, be prepared to lose our comfort and security, our jobs, and our positions of prestige, our families... A struggle without casualties is not worth its salt."*

Steve Biko

The death of Steve Biko in a Pretoria jail has sparked new interest in Congress about the fate of political prisoners in South Africa and its implications for U.S. policy.

Today, three weeks after Biko's death, the following actions have been taken:

◆ Edward Markey (D-Mass.), Thomas Downey (D-N.Y.), and Andrew Maguire (D-N.J.) introduced House Concurrent Resolution 364 (printed on reverse) calling on President Carter to request the South African government to allow an impartial international organization to investigate Steve Biko's death, investigate the conditions of all South African political prisoners, and report on South Africa's laws permitting detention of political prisoners. It will soon be re-introduced with additional co-sponsors. The resolution will be referred to the International Relations Committee's Africa Subcommittee, chaired by Congressman Diggs. It is not yet clear whether there will be time for the House to act on the resolution before the end of the session (sometime between mid-October and mid-November).

◆ An Ad Hoc Monitoring Group has been formed in the House to work on the cases of individual political prisoners in South Africa. Fifteen members have already joined, including Parren Mitchell, Chairman of the Black Caucus. The first case they are taking on is that of Peter Jones, the Publicity Secretary of the Black Peoples Convention (of which Biko was honorary president) who was arrested with Biko.

◆ Eleven members of the House met with South African Ambassador Sole urging a judicial inquiry into Biko's death, and South African co-operation with an impartial inquiry by the International Red Cross. The members who attended the September 23rd meeting are Downey, Maguire and Markey and Don Edwards (D-Calif.), Berkley Bedell (D-Iowa), John Anderson (R-Ill.), David Bonoir (D-Mich.), Richard Nolan (D-Minn.), Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.), Edward Pattison (D-N.Y.), and Peter Kostmayer (D-Pa.).

These actions are important and should be supported. Biko's death has brought a renewed surge of international criticism of the South African regime, and South Africa will do little to make even the smallest reforms unless international pressure continues. Members of Congress who haven't been involved in work on southern Africa before are giving energy to these new efforts. If we are to move successfully on other legislative issues affecting the "guts" of U.S. policy with South Africa during the next several years, we need to work with all members of Congress who will take an interest in the injustices in southern Africa.

## What we can do:

◆ Express appreciation to those members of Congress who are condemning the South African government for its treatment of Biko and other political prisoners.

◆ Urge your Representative to co-sponsor and vote for H. Con. Res. 364. Also write to Congressman Diggs asking him to bring it up quickly in the Africa Subcommittee and try to bring it to the floor before the end of the session so it will have maximum impact on the South African government.

◆ Encourage your Representative to join the Ad Hoc Monitoring Group on South African political prisoners. Urge the group to call for the release of all South African political prisoners.

◆ Encourage members who are expressing concern about South Africa's treatment of political prisoners to begin to consider seriously how U.S. policy toward South Africa should change. The U.S. should not give any support to a regime which has shot 1000 students in the streets and killed 20 political prisoners in jail during the last 18 months.

As Congresswoman Cardiss Collins (D-Ill.), a member of the Africa Subcommittee and the Black Caucus, said on September 14th upon hearing of Biko's death:

*"For the sake of human rights, it is hard to see why our Government continues to maintain normal diplomatic and economic relations with the South African regime... At the very least the administration should reevaluate the agreement for co-operation under which the United States continues to assist South Africa with the development of an independent nuclear capability. In addition, the administration should seriously reconsider the extent to which economic relations with South Africa should continue to be conducted as 'business as usual'."*

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## H. Con. Res. 364

Whereas, the circumstances surrounding the death of Steven Biko have shocked the American public and the world community at large; and

Whereas, the South African Government to date has not released all relevant facts and data based on medical examinations on the cause of his death; and

Whereas, numerous and persistent reports of torture and inhuman treatment of persons in detention can no longer be ignored; and

Whereas, international law, in particular the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of life, torture, and cruel and inhuman treatment of persons;

Therefore be it resolved, that it is the sense of the U.S. Congress that the President should directly request the South African Government to permit an impartial international organization to investigate the particular circumstances surrounding the death of Steven Biko;

Be it further resolved, that this organization be empowered to investigate also the circumstances and conditions of all South Africans currently being held under the provisions of the Terrorism Act and the Internal Security Act to ensure that their human rights are not being violated;

Be it further resolved, that this organization should review and report upon the entire question of the nature and application of South African laws relating to the detention of political prisoners.

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