



Human Rights Campaign  
for South Africa  
**ACTION ALERT**  
May 1991



**POLITICAL PRISONERS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST  
GOVERNMENT'S VIOLATION OF RELEASE AGREEMENT**

In talks with the African National Congress last year, the South African government agreed to release all political prisoners by April 30, 1991. But when the deadline passed, some 2,200 political prisoners remained in jail.

The situation has become increasingly desperate. As of May 1, over 360 political prisoners in six prisons had vowed to refuse food until the government released them — or until they died. Some were refusing water as well as food. The political prisoners in Pretoria's New Local Prison wrote: "We, like all other political prisoners in the country, have had high hopes of being reunited with our families, and high hopes of being able to contribute towards reconstruction and reconciliation .... These hopes have now been dashed."

As of May 15, it was reported that some hospitalized hunger strikers had been chained to their beds and were being denied access to doctors and lawyers of their own choosing — a condition the government had agreed to. Because the hunger strike has created little protest or media attention in South Africa and abroad, some prisoners had ended their hunger strike rather than die needlessly. A dozen or so of the original group of strikers had been released, but 190 prisoners remained on hunger strike.

The government has placed a number of roadblocks in the

process by which political prisoners apply for release:

- In the past, some prisoners have had to resort to hunger strikes simply to get copies of the application for release.
- Some prisoners who filed applications in November and December 1990 have received no response from the Justice Department or President de Klerk.
- Contrary to its agreement with the ANC, the government has insisted that a court must commute the sentences of prisoners on death row before they can be released.

Meanwhile, new political arrests and trials continue, and police continue to treat detainees with brutality. President de Klerk has threatened to reimpose the State of Emergency, which would allow even more extensive "preventive" detention of anti-apartheid activists, and further press censorship.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Your urgent response is needed to persuade the South African government to honor its commitment to release all political prisoners — NOW! The hunger strikers need our support and our action.

*Please write immediately to the following South African officials, asking for the immediate release of all political prisoners:*

Mr. F.W. de Klerk  
State President  
Private Bag X83  
Pretoria 0001  
South Africa

Ambassador Harry Schwarz  
Embassy of South Africa  
3051 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20008

According to the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, the US Congress and President Bush may not lift economic sanctions against South Africa until all political prisoners are released.

*Please phone or fax President Bush, urging him to demand that President de Klerk release all political prisoners immediately:*

Telephone (202) 456-1111  
Fax (202) 456-2461

*If possible, please send copies of your letters to the **Human Rights Campaign for South Africa, Mobilization for Survival, 11 Garden Street, Cambridge MA 02138.***

For more information on this Action Alert, or to receive future Action Alerts on a monthly basis, please call (617) 354-0008.

*Sources for this Action Alert:* The Africa Fund; Lawyers for Human Rights (South Africa); press release by political prisoners at New Local Prison, Pretoria.