



A campaign  
initiated by  
The Africa Fund.

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**FREE NELSON MANDELA  
AND  
ALL SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL PRISONERS AND DETAINEES**

July 18th marks the 70th birthday of jailed African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela, but there will be no celebration. Mandela has served almost 25 years of a life sentence for treason and is a symbol of the aspirations and determination of South Africa's people to end apartheid and establish a democratic state.

Mandela is one of the 21 long term political prisoners serving sentences in apartheid's jails. Hundreds of others have been convicted of "crimes against the security of the State," and the government has 2,000 more currently in detention under its sweeping emergency regulations. Taken as a whole, South Africa's prison population is among the highest in the world.

**POLITICAL TRIALS**

Mandela and his ANC compatriots were involved in one of the most internationally renowned treason trials in South African history. However, there are numerous political cases in which many "unknowns" are tried because of their anti-apartheid activities. According to South Africa's Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 37 political trials involving 112 accused were completed between December 1987 and March 1988. Of those charged, 58 were convicted, 47 were acquitted or had charges against them withdrawn and seven are on appeal.

There are currently 62 ongoing political trials involving 691 accused, including five treason trials with 50 accused. Included in those involved in lengthy political trials are:

- \*Trade unionist Moses Mayekiso and four co-defendants accused of treason stemming from their grassroots organizing in Alexandra township;

- \*The Sharpeville Six - one woman and five men - accused of having "common purpose" with the unknown killers of Lekoa town councillor and Deputy Mayor K.J. Dlamini in September 1984; and

- \*The Uppington 25 - two women and 23 men - also accused of having "common purpose" with the unknown killers of police officer Lucas Sethwala.

**CAPITAL PUNISHMENT UNDER APARTHEID**

South Africa boasts one of the highest execution rates in the world. A letter written by Robert McBride, a South African political activist on death row, speaks to apartheid's inhumane judicial practices as they are illustrated by capital punishment. McBride stated: "A government that has to hang so many people to maintain 'law and order' should be ashamed of itself."

A May 1988 report puts the number of people on death row at 274, of which 244 are Black. Of the 274, 53 or nearly one-fifth of the total death row population are facing death because of political crimes.

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In 1987, 164 people were executed, setting a new record for South Africans to die by the hangman's noose. Between January and May 1988, 59 people had been hanged - an average of about one execution every two days. Of the 59 prisoners who have been executed during 1988, all but one were Black.

#### DETENTIONS CONTINUE

Detainees, unlike long-term political prisoners and those engaged in political trials, are incarcerated without charge or trial. Since June 1986, 30,000 people have been detained for varying periods of time. Of this 30,000, approximately 40% were reportedly 18 years of age or younger. Human rights monitoring groups in South Africa told The Africa Fund in late June that between 2,000 and 2,500 people are currently in detention, with about 200 held under provisions of the Internal Security Act (allows the State to detain individuals for activities viewed as illegal or threatening to apartheid's status quo).

Organizations inside South Africa are growing increasingly concerned about the long term detainees. Of those presently in detention, approximately 500 have been held for at least six months and 1,000 for one year or more. Church and human rights groups have attempted to focus attention specifically on these detainees during the months of June and July.

Police and security force detentions this June appeared to be focusing in part on students and young people involved in organizing school boycotts and protests to mark the June 16 anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Many reports of electric shock torture, assault and other forms of brutality have emerged in the last few weeks. Despite government denials, human rights monitors in South Africa report that children are still being detained daily.

The government is beginning to charge some of those detained. A December 1987 report of South Africa's Detainees Parents' Support Committee (DPSC), a human rights organization which monitors detentions, approximately 25% of the more than 30,000 detained since June 1986 had been charged. These former detainees include one 13 year old, six 14 year olds and eleven 15 year olds. Charges varied from murder to "terrorism" and subversion, intimidation and possession of banned literature. An additional ten children were known to be held under security legislation.

#### CONDITIONS IN PRISON

Prisoners are often subjected to harsh and unhygienic prison conditions, seriously overcrowded cells, assaults by warders and subsequent deaths. According to one report, some South African jails are operating at 300% of maximum capacity. Toilet facilities are often nothing more than a filthy bucket on the floor, and detainees are often denied food for days at a time. Many are forced to sleep on thin, lice ridden mattresses placed on the floor with no blankets or sheets.

Recently, 11 treason trialists launched a hunger strike because the Blacks among them are denied privileges granted to the whites. The striking prisoners are unable to accept that, although involved in the same trial, apartheid's policies allow the trialists to be separated by race.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

In this the 25th year of his incarceration, it is important that the international community continue to work for the unconditional release of Mandela and the other political prisoners and detainees held in apartheid's jails. South Africans have called on the international community to organize events to commemorate Nelson Mandela's birthday and to demand freedom for Mandela and all other political prisoners and detainees.

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