



Jennifer Davis
Executive Director

Christine E. Root
729 Sunset Lane
East Lansing, MI 48823

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Dear Christine E. Root:

As I write this letter there are thousands of political prisoners in South African prison cells. Some are personal friends and I can't help thinking of them through the night.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu's office has just appealed to us on behalf of one of these prisoners, Nomaindia Meeketo, a nursing mother who is now in prison for the second time.

Last year she was imprisoned for nine months, and never charged with any crime. She was only released for the funeral of her oldest son who was killed in a bus crash on the way to a Christian Students convention.

The police came for her again in the early morning hours of September 21st. Since then she has been held in Cape Town's notorious Pollsmoor Prison together with her six month old son Bonele. When her mother saw her last month, Nomaindia told her that she was getting so little to eat that she couldn't adequately nurse her baby.

Nomaindia is not unique. There are thousands more like her, in prison without even the formality of a trial, simply because they dared to raise their voices against apartheid. Many have been brutally beaten. Others died in prison or just "disappeared."



Simon Voko was taken to Security Police headquarters and forced to beat his son Mlungisi with a whip. He was told that otherwise Mlungisi would be locked up and never complete his education. "I began to beat my son until I could stand the cries of my child no longer and threw the quirt to the side of the room."



Mkhosi Sizani has testified that he saw three community leaders in police custody four months after they "disappeared." He said the authorities offered to pay him not to reveal what he had seen.



The police say Benedict Moshoke hung himself in his prison cell. When his mother Rose went to identify his body she found that his right eye was protruding out of its socket, there was a cut on his forehead and his face was swollen, but there were no marks on his neck. The last time she saw Benedict alive he told her that "members of the Security Branch had been waking him up at 5 a.m. and had taken him to Houtkop Prison for the express purpose of torturing him."

In desperation a group of political prisoners wrote to the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa "to enlist the active support of you and your government in pressuring the South African authorities to release all detainees."

The Reagan Administration has turned a virtual deaf ear to their plea. And unfortunately Americans may never hear about the Nomandia Meeketos, the Simon Vokos or the Benedict Moshokes because the TV networks have decided that South Africa isn't news any more.

So it has been left to The Africa Fund to break through this wall of silence and speak out for these forgotten people:

* We are sponsoring a ground breaking new TV news magazine show, "South Africa Now," which exposes the detentions, disappearances, and murders that the rest of the media ignores. It is being shown on PBS in New York and on cable stations throughout the country.

* We alerted over 6,000 people to the case of the Sharpeville Six, innocent people who have been sentenced to hang for a crime they didn't commit. International protests saved the lives of these young black South Africans.

* In the past year we have dumped over 100,000 keys at South Africa's consulates and embassy as a concrete way of demanding that the prisoners be freed. We are sending 1,000 keys a week to South African President P.W. Botha.

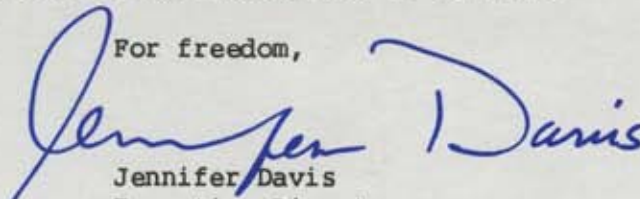
* We have sent over \$200,000 to help support South African families whose breadwinner is in prison for opposing apartheid.

But even writing this letter reminds me of how much more we need to do. Some of these courageous people may well die or "disappear" unless we can reach many more Americans and increase the pressure on the apartheid government.

As you prepare to celebrate this holiday season please pause for a moment to think of the prisoners of apartheid. I hope you will give as generously as you possibly can to help us work to set them free.

I want you to know how much your contributions mean to us. They make all our work possible. But most of all, they let us know that you care about the people of South Africa who are struggling to be free.

For freedom,



Jennifer Davis
Executive Director

P.S. Messages of support to political prisoners and their families are especially important at this holiday season. If you would like to end a message, we would be happy to forward it to the appropriate people.

South African Family Mourns Son Who 'Disappeared'

By CHRISTOPHER S. WREN

Special to The New York Times

MAMELODI, South Africa, Oct. 23 — A gentle man wearing his best Sunday suit and the look of personal tragedy, Matome Bopape wondered today about the whereabouts of his oldest son, Stanza.

"I and his mother and our whole family believe we are not with him in this world," he said. "We believe he has left this world, not in God's way but in the police's way."

Johannes Maisha Bopape, as his son was formally christened, had been active in the anti-apartheid movement of this poor black township outside the capital of Pretoria. He was detained by the police four and a half months ago under South Africa's emergency declaration, which is still in effect. Two days later, he vanished.

The police say that Mr. Bopape, who would be 28 years old, escaped while being transferred at night to another prison and that he was still being sought.

Death in Custody Suspected

Mr. Bopape's family and friends, among them a white Member of Parliament, charge there are serious discrepancies in the official account and suspect that he died in police custody. But they admit they do not know what really happened, though the mystery has prompted some to draw parallels with the death in 1977 of Steven Biko, the young black leader commemorated in the film "Cry Freedom."

Their questions were raised anew today at a long memorial service in Mamelodi's brick Y.M.C.A. hall:

How could Stanza Bopape, held in manacles and leg irons, have run away from three armed policemen?

Why did it take the police three weeks to notify his family of the disappearance?

And why did the authorities not bother to visit the family home to see if he had turned up?

"Normally they come to your home looking for you before you have escaped," quipped Jan Van Eck, an independent Member of Parliament from Cape Town who has pushed without success for a formal inquiry.

Attendance Is Sparse

Three truckloads of armed paratroopers in combat gear had thrown up roadblocks and searched incoming cars. As a result, attendance was sparse at the memorial service, where diplomats, foreign journalists and white civil rights supporters nearly outnumbered local residents.

The Rev. Nico Smith, a Dutch Reformed pastor who preached at the service, said army patrols had also been walking the dirt streets of the township that morning. "People are afraid," Mr. Smith said. "They see the soldiers and they know it's risky." Three years ago, at least 13 residents were killed in Mamelodi when soldiers opened fire.

Stanza Bopape had been secretary of the Mamelodi Civic Association, a citizens' group created as a counterweight to the township's official government.

Keith Coleman, who worked with Mr. Bopape in the Community Resource and Information Center, another anti-apartheid organization, estimated that about 1,300 South Africans, most of them black, remain detained without formal charges under the state of emergency. He named half a dozen others who had disappeared.

Police Tell of Escape

On July 4, the South African police informed Mr. Bopape's lawyers and family that he had escaped on June 12 while the policemen escorting him to prison in Vereeniging had stopped to change a flat tire. They said Mr. Bopape reached over the front seat, picked the keys to his chains out of a policeman's jacket and ran off.

Mr. Bopape's father said he had told the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan J. Vlok, that he did not believe it. "I know a car," said Matome Bopape, who works as a clerk at an automotive factory. "When a tire is flat, it takes one person to change it."

Moreover, friends said today, the first place that searchers would have sought Stanza Bopape was in Mamelodi. "Contrary to usual police procedure, the police never came to look for Stanza at his family's home," Mr. Van Eck said.

Instead, said the legislator, the authorities waited three weeks before notifying the family of his disappearance. "During those weeks, the police communicated with the lawyers on three occasions, and on none of those occasions did the police say he had escaped," Mr. Van Eck said.

A Fate Worse Than Death

The Law and Order Ministry has explained that prompt notification would have jeopardized a police investigation into terrorist activities of the outlawed African National Congress, whose guerrillas have been blamed for some recent bombings in South Africa. It did not reveal how Mr. Bopape's case was related to the congress.

"They say there is no fate worse than death, but there is," Mr. Coleman said.

"It is to disappear or be disappeared."

We know in our hearts that he is dead, but we have no proof. So there is a doubt in the back of our minds that he may be alive."

The senior Mr. Bopape said he was asking the authorities only to resolve the uncertainty, which he said had broken his family's hearts. "In our culture, when a person has passed away, we bury him, we mourn for him, then we continue with our lives," the father said.