

PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 13, 1984

CONTACT: Southern Africa Project
(202) 371-1212

NAMIBIANS DETAINED WHILE CELEBRATING RELEASE OF CASSINGA CAPTIVES

On June 9, 1984, the South African Special Task Force arrested and detained 37 people during a barbecue celebrating the release of 55 captives from the military detention camp at Cassinga where they had been held incommunicado for six years. About 100 people attended the peaceful celebration near Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. Most of those arrested were leaders of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) based in Namibia and include SWAPO foreign affairs secretary Niko Bessinger. Others arrested include Frans Kambangula, Immanuel Ngatjizeko and Gregor Makgone of the Namibian Council of Churches. Two lawyers were also arrested and detained: Anton Lubowski, a white member of SWAPO, and Hartmut Ruppel, an attorney with Lorentz and Bone, the law firm which brought and defended the application for the release of the Cassinga captives. Both lawyers are members of the Namibian Supreme Court Bar.

The 37 arrested are being held pursuant to Proclamation AG 9, which provides for indefinite detention without trial. The use of the Proclamation in these circumstances was described as "an extraordinary and drastic measure" by the Windhoek Bar Council and denounced by the Council as "highly undesirable." The only reason given by the head of the security police for the arrests was that a "possible transgression" of the Prohibition and Notification of Meetings Act was being investigated.

In gross violation of international norms of due process, the detainees are being held incommunicado, denied access to relatives, lawyers and friends. Another attorney from the firm of Lorentz and Bone, who probably escaped arrest only because he happened to be away at the time, finds the detention without trial to be "absolutely preposterous," and stated that it exceeded even the previous abuses of the detention provision by South African authorities, particularly because it has been extended to justify detention of officers of the Namibian Supreme Court.

The release of the 55 Cassinga captives that occasioned the celebration came as the result of a lawsuit filed by correspondent attorneys in Namibia of the Washington-based Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Unfortunately, at least 100 other persons remain in detention at the Cassinga camp. On

(MORE)

- 2 -

Monday, May 28th, those correspondent attorneys presented arguments before the Namibian Supreme Court contesting the continuing captivity of the remaining survivors of Cassinga, despite an April 27th order issued by the South African Minister of Justice Coetsee purportedly rescinding that court's jurisdiction to hear the application for release of the detainees. The court's judgment in the matter should be announced shortly.

Cables or telegrams protesting the new detentions and calling for their release, as well as for the release of the captives who remain in Cassinga, should be addressed to:

H.E. Marais Viljoen
State President of South Africa
"Presidensia"
Bryntirion
Pretoria, South Africa

Hon. George Shultz
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

The Southern Africa Project would appreciate receiving a copy for its records and for its correspondent attorneys in Namibia.

(END)

(MORE)