



THE
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ON AFRICA

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WASHINGTON OFFICE ON AFRICA PROTESTS SOUTH AFRICA DETENTIONS

The Washington Office on Africa, a twelve-year-old church and trade union-sponsored anti-apartheid lobby, today denounced the detention of thirty-five members of the United Democratic Front (UDF) by the South African government and called on President Reagan to condemn this heinous action. Among the members of the non-racial organization arrested on August 20 are UDF president Archie Gumede, publicity secretary Patrick Lekota, Natal Indian Congress vice-president and chairman of the Democratic Lawyers' Association N. J. Naidoo and lay minister Aubrey Mokoena. The UDF was founded August 20, 1983 to oppose changes in the South African constitution that provide for limited parliamentary representation for the country's 2.7 million "Colored" (mixed race) and 870,000 Indian citizens in a segregated, tricameral legislature. The over 20 million Blacks remain without parliamentary representation under the new system. The UDF attracted over 500 member and affiliate organizations in its first year and has led to mass opposition to elections for the new parliament, scheduled for August 22 and 29, 1984. While the UDF itself has not yet been banned, its leading members have faced increasing government harassment and its meetings have frequently been banned by the South African government.

Speaking on the arrests, Jean Sindab, Executive Director of the Washington Office on Africa, commented:

"These arrests are the firmest evidence yet that the so-called 'new constitutional dispensation' is nothing more than a sham. The South African government has taken this drastic step in response to the increasing opposition the UDF has been able to mobilize against the elections. The government recognizes the importance of the UDF and fears its following among the masses of South Africans denied their political rights. It has resorted to terrorist action to stifle dissent, just as on so many past occasions."

Despite the Reagan Administration's policy of "constructive engagement," which seeks to "dialogue" the forces of apartheid into change, there has been no significant change in South Africa. The new constitution provides no political rights for more than 20 million Africans. Inadequate education and overwhelming oppression have caused 40,000 Black students to boycott their classes in the last weeks. In addition, thousands of Black miners have walked out in protest of high accident and death rates on the job, starvation wages and unjust laws that force them to live apart from their families. Forced removals, arrests, detentions without trial and other brutal repression all continue at alarming rates. Given these developments, asks Sindab: "Where is the 'constructive' element in 'constructive engagement?'"

(more)

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"Perhaps this incident will provide the opportunity for the administration to finally use its influence in a truly constructive manner," continued Sindab. We respectfully call on the President in the strongest terms to use his good offices with the South African government to ensure the immediate release of these people. the US must put itself on the record as standing firmly behind its commitment to democratic ideals of free expression, freedom from government harassment and the legitimacy of dissent. Only by such a firm, positive response will the South African government be prevented from feeling it can do whatever it likes without repercussions. Only in such a way will it be dissuaded from taking the next logical step of banning the UDF outright and permanently removing its leadership from the scene."

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Cables and letters of protest may be sent to:

Prime Minister Pieter W. Botha
Union Buildings
Pretoria, SOUTH AFRICA

The Honorable George Shultz,
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520