

American Committee On Africa

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NEWS

New York, N.Y. Sept 16, 1977 ---Justice William H. Booth, president of the

American Committee on Africa (ACOA), released the text of a statement adopted by the 30 member executive board of ACOA concerning the death of South African black leader Steve Biko. Biko died in the hands of the South African security police allegedly of the effects of a week-long hunger strike, according to the white authorities in South Africa.

Mr. Booth, a judge of the New York State Supreme Court who has represented international juridical bodies at trials of political detainees in South Africa, termed the explanation for Biko's death "simply unbelievable --one does not die of a hunger strike after just one week."

"This is yet another in an unabated series of deaths of political prisoners in South Africa, mass arrests and torture." Booth said. "It is not enough for our government to express shock at this death. It is time for the Carter administration to cut off the continuing flow of hundreds of millions of dollars in credits and other assistance to South Africa, in protest against the gross violation of human rights."

Founded in 1953, the ACOA is devoted to supporting the African people in their struggle for independence from colonialism and apartheid. The ACOA executive board includes men and women active in academic, trade union, religious, legal, business and public life. ACOA will join a silent protest in Steve Biko's memory outside the offices of the South African mission to the U.N., Second Avenue at 42nd Street on Tuesday, September 20 between 12 noon and 2p.m.

The text of the ACOA statement follows:

Steve Biko

Steve Biko, the founder of the South African Student Organization (SASO), honorary president of the Black People's Convention (BPC) and a leading force in the current surge of organized resistance to apartheid in South Africa, died in detention Sept 12.

Biko is the 23rd political prisoner to die in the hands of South Africa's security police in the last 18 months. His death was the culmination of a long series of government arrests and bannings in an effort to neutralize his effective leadership of the black consciousness movement. The action of the South African government has demonstrated to the world that no matter how well known internationally an opponent might be, it will strike to eliminate any and all who dare to advocate black empowerment. The suspicious circumstances surrounding his death suggest that this was yet another act of murder by the racist regime.

His death demonstrates that it is no longer enough to label the Vosters government "illegitimate". In homage to the memory of this leader in the struggle, we must act to fulfill that which the black consciousness movement in South Africa has called upon the world to do: to end the massive economic and political collaboration that the U.S. corporations and government are lending to the apartheid regime.

To the family and companions of Steve Biko we extend our sincere condolences. But more than sympathy, we express our growing understanding and conviction that the people of South Africa, despite the vicious acts of the regime, will overthrow apartheid and exploitation. We send our solidarity in that struggle and pledge intensified work on our part to hasten the day of victory.