

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

**AI Index: AFR 53/22/94  
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**UA 117/94      Use of excessive force/Medical concern**

**24 March 1994**

**SOUTH AFRICA:      Injured prisoners include: Prisoners injured at Pollsmoor Prison, Western Cape and more than 60 prisoners injured at Boksburg Prison, East of Johannesburg**

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Amnesty International is concerned that security personnel responding to violent protests in several prisons have resorted to arbitrary or abusive use of force resulting in scores of injuries. In the past week there has been an upsurge of tension and violence in South Africa's prisons following calls by prisoners for the right to vote in South Africa's first all-race elections scheduled for 26/27/28 April 1994. South Africa's Transitional Executive Council (TEC) announced late on 22 March that all prisoners will be allowed to vote, but have not yet addressed additional demands by prisoners. Human rights workers and prisoners' relatives remain concerned for the safety and well-being of prisoners. They fear that prisoners are not being granted access to adequate, independent medical care for injuries sustained when prison staff and police responded to prisoners' protests with, in some cases, an excessive degree of force during several days of violent disturbances. There is concern too that further reprisals against prisoners could occur.

Disturbances broke out at Pollsmoor Prison on 18 March following an announcement by the TEC that certain categories of prisoners would not be allowed to vote. Some prisoners barricaded themselves into their cells and set light to bedding. The protest spread to other parts of the prison, and prison staff fired teargas into locked cells and also assaulted prisoners with batons. Injuries inflicted on prisoners included open wounds and broken ribs. For example, according to fellow-prisoners, Ebrahim October was assaulted and suffered head injuries, but was denied medical care. There has been no independent medical access to the prisoners since these assaults and relatives fear that those injured are still being denied adequate medical care. Visitor access has been reduced since the disturbances.

At Boksburg Prison on the East Rand, more than 60 prisoners were reportedly injured on 18 March after officers of the Internal Stability Unit (ISU) of the South African Police assisted prison staff in securing the release of two prison warders taken hostage by prisoners. After the warders had been released unharmed, members of the ISU reportedly lined up prisoners and beat them with batons. A representative of the South African Prisoners' Organization for Human Rights told journalists that he had visited the prison and seen 44 prisoners with bruises and cuts on their heads, faces and hands. The Department of Correctional Services and the police are reported to have said that these events were under investigation. Amnesty International is concerned that officers charged with the care of prisoners should, despite difficult circumstances, act in accordance with internationally accepted standards for the use of force, and should grant prompt access to independent medical assessment and treatment when injuries have occurred.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Disturbances were also reported at other prisons around the country including at Queenstown Prison on 21 March where 21 prisoners died as a result of a fire in their cell. Initial reports suggest they barricaded themselves into the cell and set light to the bedding and that prison staff were unable to reach them.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- calling for prompt, impartial and effective investigations into reports of the use of arbitrary and abusive force by security personnel acting to resolve recent violent disturbances at South Africa's prisons, in particular Pollsmoor Prison and Boksburg Prison, where prison staff (and in the case of Boksburg Prison, the Internal Stability Unit of the South African Police) reportedly acted with deliberate violence against prisoners who were not at the time posing a risk to prison staff;
- noting that the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials states: *"Government shall ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials is punished as a criminal offence under their law."*
- calling for security personnel suspected of using arbitrary or abusive force to be brought to justice and promptly and fairly tried;
- urging that all injured prisoners be granted immediate access to a medical doctor of their choice and to prompt medical treatment for their injuries. Independent medical examinations should also be conducted and the findings submitted to the investigating body;
- seeking assurances that prisoners will not be subjected to further arbitrary or abusive use of force and that they will be granted access to their lawyers particularly if they are required to make statements or face disciplinary measures as a result of the disturbances.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) Mr F W de Klerk  
State President  
State President's Office  
Private Bag X83  
Pretoria 0001  
South Africa

**Telegrams: President de Klerk, Pretoria, South Africa**

**Faxes: + 27 12 323 3982**

**Salutation: Dear President**

2) Mr A J Vlok  
Minister of Correctional Services  
Private Bag X136  
Pretoria 0001  
South Africa

**Telegrams: Correctional Services Minister, Pretoria, South Africa**

**Faxes: + 27 12 323 3304/5**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

3) General Willemse,  
Commissioner of Prisons,  
Prisons Department,  
Private Bag X136,  
Pretoria 0001  
South Africa

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Mr R P Meyer, Government Representative
  - Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, ANC Chief Representative
- BOTH AT: Transitional Executive Council, Saambou Building 227 Andries Street,

Pretoria 0001 **Faxes: +27 12 328 6646**

**and to**

- POPCRU, PO Box 8657, Johannesburg 2000
- Lawyers for Human Rights, 713 Van Erkom Building, Pretorius Street, Pretoria 0002
- The Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture, Cowley House, 126 Chapel Street, Cape Town 8001
- The Sunday Nation, PO Box 10674, Johannesburg 2000

and to diplomatic representatives of South Africa accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 May 1994.