

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 10 June 1992

ESOUTH AFRICA: @ABUSES BY POLICE AND MILITARY THREATEN POLITICAL REFORMS

The political reform process in South Africa could break down unless the government takes steps to safeguard human rights, Amnesty International said today, publishing a report implicating the police and military in political killings.

"The reforms of the past two years have brought some sweeping changes in South Africa, but as far as the security forces are concerned, it's business as usual," said the organization. "And all too often that means taking part in political killings or standing by while others massacre political opponents."

In the 100-page report, Amnesty International documents evidence of a systematic pattern of police and military involvement in torture and assassinations during the past two years. "Despite government promises to take the police out of politics, the fact is they have continued their war against the African National Congress (ANC) and allied organisations - and the government has been slow to react despite the mounting evidence against the police," said Amnesty International.

In the township violence which has cost 7,000 lives since early 1990, the police have continued the fight against those they see as "the enemy". The report details some of the many incidents in which police participated directly or stood back and allowed massacres to occur:

- 80 people killed during an onslaught by thousands of armed Inkatha supporters on Pietermaritzburg townships March 1990;
- 80 people killed in two days of attacks by Inkatha supporters and masked white men on Phola Park squatter camp east of Johannesburg September 1990;
- 29 killed when 1,000 Inkatha supporters with active police involvement invaded Swanieville squatter camp west of Johannesburg on 12 May 1991;
- 18 residents of Bruntville township, Natal, killed during attacks by hundreds of Inkatha supporters on the night of 3 December 1991, with the police in unmarked vehicles raiding residents' homes for weapons which they might have used to defend themselves;
- 18 people killed by armed Inkatha supporters and police in a dawn attack on 13 March 1992 on "Uganda" squatter camp outside Durban.

In only one of these cases have the attackers been prosecuted for murder and in only one case has the conduct of the police been subject to independent inquiry.

When there have been official inquiries, they have been hampered by violence and marked by official failure to act on their conclusions. During an investigation into torture, killings of detainees and extrajudicial executions by the police in the Western Transvaal, witnesses and human rights monitors were harassed, threatened and shot at by the police. In 1990 and 1991 high profile judicial inquiries into military and police "death squads" found evidence of murder, poisoning, kidnapping, arson, perjury and destruction of evidence by members of the police and military. Not a single prosecution followed.

"The government of South Africa has, at best, been grossly negligent," said Amnesty International. "They have failed to act against all but a tiny proportion of human rights violators within the police and the military. This can only serve to give the security forces the impression that they can get away with anything, even murder. They must be held to account."

"Reform is dependent on human rights being respected. As well as welcoming political changes in South Africa, the world must be alert to what is happening to human rights at the grass roots level."

"Nearly all the human rights violations in the report have happened since Nelson Mandela was freed," said Amnesty International. "Political assassinations and other violations are not a thing of the past, as the government claims. They have not been stopped by the reform process."

"The government must act now to make the police and military uphold the law, not undermine it. Otherwise hopes for a new South Africa will founder."

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE 1982