

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Hunger-Strike

28 June 1991

SOUTH AFRICA: Approximately 50 political prisoners in Rooigrond Prison,
(Bophuthatswana), including the following:

Lawrence MAHILA, aged 44	Frans MOKOMANE, aged 29
Timothy PHIRI, aged 34	Patrick CEBISA, aged 23
Johannes SIMELANE, aged 33	Davis MATSHEGO, aged 30
Johannes MOLEFE, aged 30	Michael RANKU, aged 25
Zachariah SEABI, aged 28	Simon LEFAKANE, aged 27

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of the ill-treatment of prisoners on hunger-strike and the obstruction of their medical treatment by prison warders and other officials. Between 14 and 17 June 1991, some 159 political prisoners at Rooigrond Prison in the nominally independent "homeland" of Bophuthatswana began a hunger-strike. Since 1977, the South African government has recognized Bophuthatswana as an independent state, but no other government or international body, such as the United Nations, accepts this "homeland" as an independent country. As of 26 June 1991 some 53 prisoners at Rooigrond Prison were still on hunger-strike in protest at the authorities failure to consider their cases under the terms negotiated between the South African Government and the African National Congress (ANC) for the release of political prisoners. The majority of those on hunger-strike are members of the Bophuthatswana Defence Force or the banned Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), who are serving prison sentences following their conviction for treason in 1989. Their trial for treason arose out of an unsuccessful coup attempt against the "homeland" administration of President Lucas Mangope. The majority of the prisoners convicted of treason in 1989 subsequently joined the ANC. At least 17 of the hunger-strikers have been admitted to hospital and Amnesty International is concerned at reports that the hunger-strikers have been denied proper medical care and have been subjected to other forms of ill-treatment by the prison authorities.

The South African government's review of cases of political prisoners to assess which ones qualify for indemnity and pardon has been an unexpectedly prolonged one. Although there are some 160 political prisoners at Rooigrond, the South African government has apparently refused to consider their cases on the grounds that they are being held in a "neighbouring state". Amnesty International is concerned that the situation has caused confusion and anxiety among prisoners, with false hopes raised and uncertainty about their fate.

Among those on hunger-strike is Lawrence Mahila, a member of the banned PPP, who is serving a seven year sentence for treason. He joined the ANC while in prison along with 125 others convicted of treason in the same trial. Lawrence Mahila began his hunger-strike on 15 June 1991 and was admitted to hospital on 24 June. Patrick Cebisa and Johannes Simelane, both former Bophuthatswana Defence Force Soldiers serving seven and eight years respectively for treason, have been on hunger-strike since 15 June 1991. They have been admitted to hospital with kidney and other problems. Frans Mokomane, an ANC member convicted of possession of weapons in February 1991 and sentenced to seven years imprisonment, began his second hunger-strike on 15 June 1991. He had previously embarked on a hunger-strike on 1 May 1991 as a protest against his continuing imprisonment. The prison authorities placed him in solitary confinement and denied him access to visitors. The district surgeon (prison medical officer) reportedly refused to examine or treat Frans Mokomane during his first hunger-strike, which lasted for 23 days.

On 6 June 1991, during a country-wide hunger-strike by political prisoners, representatives of the South African government, medical and human rights organizations

and the ANC agreed on a protocol for the medical care of prisoners on hunger-strike. The agreement was reached in the wake of allegations that political prisoners on hunger-strike in various prisons were being denied medical care and were being subjected to other forms of ill-treatment (see AFR 53/15/91, UA 173/91; and AFR 53/17/91, *Further Information on UA 173/91*). The protocol included the right to medical care on an unconditional basis and the right to a second medical opinion from an independent doctor.

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During the initial stages of the mass hunger-strike at Rooigrond Prison, the prisoners reportedly were denied any or adequate medical care, were denied access to visitors and were subjected to various forms of ill-treatment, including being placed in isolation cells, by the prison authorities. During the second week of the hunger-strike, the Bophuthatswana authorities have apparently, under pressure, allowed independent doctors to have access to the hunger-strikers. However, Amnesty International is concerned at continuing reports that the prison authorities are obstructing access to the hunger-strikers by lawyers and family members; that certain prison officials are repeatedly refusing to give the hunger-strikers medications prescribed for them either for pre-existing medical conditions or for problems caused by being on hunger-strike; and, that hunger-strikers in an apparently critical condition were locked in the prison's sickbay, with intravenous drips inserted improperly in their arms and then left without anyone in attendance on them.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at reports that political prisoners on hunger-strike at Rooigrond Prison have been denied access to their lawyers and relatives, and in certain cases have been denied proper medical care and subjected to other forms of ill-treatment by prison staff;
- urging that all prisoners on hunger-strike be granted full access to a medical doctor of their choice and to the treatment prescribed by the doctor, both during their hunger-strike and thereafter, including hospital treatment if recommended;
- urging that all prisoners on hunger-strike be allowed regular access to their lawyers and relatives;
- urging that the South African government speedily complete its review of cases of all political prisoners, including those in the "homelands", in order to prevent further suffering to prisoners and their families.

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- African National Congress, Legal and Constitutional Affairs Department, PO Box 61884, Marshalltown 2307, Johannesburg, South Africa

and to diplomatic representatives of South Africa in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 August 1991.