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SOUTH AFRICA: LEARNING THE LESSONS OF THE BOPHUTHATSWANA CRISIS

The killing of as many as 100 black civilians in Bophuthatswana resulted from the failure of South African authorities to intervene effectively and promptly in the months' long crisis there, Amnesty International said today. In the province of KwaZulu/Natal, authorities have allowed a similar, but far greater human rights crisis to develop that has already claimed many more lives.

Amnesty International's report, South Africa: Securing the Peace; Issues of justice and accountability in the wake of the Bophuthatswana uprising, documents a pattern of organized killings and other human rights abuses that could have been prevented by timely government action. Amnesty International also questioned the will of the South African government to protect citizens who fear for their lives in the continuing unrest in KwaZulu/Natal.

During the turbulent week of 7 March 1994, civilians in Bophuthatswana died at the hands of white rightwing paramilitaries, the Bophuthatswana Police and the Internal Stability Unit of the South African Police. In the end, the intervention of the army became a desperately welcomed solution for thousands of black South Africans vulnerable to violent attack or human rights violations at the hands of the police.

In Bophuthatswana, frightened residents welcomed the 11 March deployment of the South African Defence Force (SADF) troops, following months of increasing repression and violence from the Bophuthatswana Police, the terror of the indiscriminate shooting by invading rightwing paramilitaries, and the "homeland's" descent into lawlessness. In its report Amnesty International noted that there were few complaints from residents regarding the conduct of the SADF members in their efforts to restore calm to the territory.

In contrast there were serious complaints against members of the South African police Internal Stability Unit (ISU) who appeared in Bophuthatswana from 10-13 March. Their methods of suppressing public disorder amounted, in some areas at least, to a shoot-to-kill policy. Amnesty International says in its report that members of the ISU were implicated in the deaths of 13 people in Mabopane, shot dead Thomas Leketo and others in Temba, injured scores of people in Mabopane and GaRankuwa townships, and assaulted people when searching their homes or arresting them in Temba and in Mafikeng and Mmabatho. It remains unclear at whose request and under what authority the ISU units were operating in Bophuthatswana.

These incidents, Amnesty International said, emphasize once again the urgent need for the repeal of remaining laws in South Africa that permit the security forces to use deadly force in situations where it is not strictly necessary to protect life. They highlight as well the repeatedly

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom

Tel: (44) (71) 413 5500 Telegrams: Amnesty London WC1 Telex: 28502 FAX: 956 1157

E-mail: (GeoNet) mcr1:amnesty-is, (GreenNet) amnestyis@gn.apc.org

noted and urgent need for the retraining of the ISU and other law enforcement agencies in methods of public order policing consistent with internationally recognized standards regarding the use of force and firearms.

In KwaZulu/Natal Province, an additional 800 ISU members have been reportedly deployed since 29 March, some apparently having been withdrawn earlier this year from the East Rand. There, as Amnesty International has detailed in a previous report, the ISU was implicated in arbitrary detentions, torture and extrajudicial executions of members of the African National Congress self defense units. In a few areas, such as the Durban township of Umlazi, the ISU are reported to have acted effectively and impartially to prevent bloodshed.

Amnesty International is concerned, however, that in KwaMashu township and other areas of the KwaZulu/Natal province where more than 100 people were killed in late March, ISU members failed to protect residents from armed attackers or failed to stop flagrant breaches of the Electoral Act when they had the capacity and duty to do so, creating suspicions of collusion in these incidents of violence.

In its report on the killings in Bophuthatswana, Amnesty International says extremist white paramilitaries contributed significantly to the death toll during the period of the uprising. The report documents incidents of unprovoked shootings by armed whites against local black residents from early 10 March, prior to the arrival of the several thousand Afrikaner Volksfront (AVF) members who occupied the Mmabatho airbase that night. The report also documents attacks by armed white men, including security guards with suspected Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) sympathies, against Bophuthatswana residents in GaRankuwa and Temba, north of Pretoria, between 10 and 13 March. The majority of these rightwing forces were present in the Bophuthatswana territory at the behest of its then President Lucas Mangope's government and the AVF leader, General Constand Viljoen.

In its report, Amnesty International called for the authorities, in the process of restoring order to the Bophuthatswana territory and establishing a climate conducive to the holding of free and fair elections, to urgently begin the task of training the local security forces in methods of public order policing consistent with internationally recognized standards regarding the use of force and firearms, and in the proper methods of treatment of all persons taken into custody.

At the same time the authorities should launch a full, independent investigation into the involvement of the security forces in unlawful killings resulting from the unjustified use of lethal force, extrajudicial executions, including of two AWB members, and acts of torture.

A lasting peace, Amnesty International said, has to be built on the basis of full accountability of the security forces, officials and others for the human rights violations they committed and some measure of justice for the victims of these violations.

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