

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Hunger Strike

20 May 1991

SOUTH AFRICA: Approximately 190 political prisoners in Pollsmoor Maximum Prison, Cape Town, and other prisons, including the following:

Gordon WEBSTER	)	Absalom MDLUDI	)
Muhammad Rafiq ROHAN	) (Robben Island	Elphus MABILU	)
Atty Attazaxes PHIRI	) (prisoners in	Jacob MATHEMANE	) (Barberton
Chris MOFOKENG	) Somerset Hospital)	Albert MGOMANE	) Prison)
Vusumuzi Peter KHUBE	)	Rodney MAGOLOANE	)
Bafana Charles TLHAPANE)		Petrus SHABANGU	)
		Moses NKOSI	)

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On 1 May 1991 dozens of political prisoners held in various prisons in different parts of South Africa went on hunger-strike in protest at the failure of the government to release them by the 30 April deadline agreed to in its negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC). By 15 May approximately 190 prisoners were on hunger-strike, with the largest numbers involved being at Pollsmoor Maximum prison (after being transferred from Robben Island after the hunger-strike started); Goedemoed Prison near Bloemfontein; Leeuwkop Prison in the western Transvaal and Baviaanspoort Prison west of Pretoria. At least six of the prisoners, who are now receiving treatment in Somerset Hospital in Cape Town, are critically ill and Amnesty International is concerned at reports from various parts of the country that hunger-strikers have been denied proper medical care as well as visits from their lawyers and family members, and have been subjected to other forms of ill-treatment by the prison authorities.

The government's review of cases of political prisoners to assess which ones qualify for indemnity and pardon has been an unexpectedly prolonged one. Lawyers have allegedly been obstructed by the authorities in their work of processing cases. 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 Muhammad Rafiq Rohan, a 37-year-old journalist from Durban who was sentenced in April 1990 to 15 years' imprisonment on Robben Island for sabotage. He is in the 20th day of his hunger-strike and has already suffered permanent kidney damage. He and five other prisoners from Robben Island were, until 12 May, chained to their hospital beds at Somerset Hospital. After protests from medical and human rights organizations, the authorities removed the chains. The authorities continued to deny access to these six prisoners and 12 others on hunger-strike on Robben Island during the first two weeks of their hunger-strike. On 14 and 15 May the authorities transferred all remaining political prisoners from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Maximum Prison. On 16 May the Pollsmoor authorities finally agreed to requests from lawyers for permission to visit the prisoners. At Barberton Prison particularly serious allegations have been made regarding the treatment of seven people on hunger-strike there. Twenty-two prisoners began a hunger-strike on 2 May. The authorities pressured many of them to abandon their strike by reportedly taking them into a mortuary and threatening to leave them there to freeze. Two of the seven prisoners who are still on hunger-strike were taken to Barbeton Hospital on 10 May and reportedly kept in handcuffs and leg irons while being feed intravenously. They were returned to the prison on the same day. Allegations have also been made that the prison medical officer is refusing to assist the hunger-strikers unless they abandon their

hunger-strike. Reports from other prisons in the country include allegations of hunger-strikers being denied access to drinking water, toilet facilities and warm bedding. Two hunger-strikers at Groenpunt Prison in the Orange Free State alleged that they were assaulted by a prison warder and have laid charges against him.

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

- expressing concern at reports that political prisoners on hunger-strike in different parts of the country 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, both during their hunger-strike and thereafter, and to prompt hospital treatment if recommended;
- urging that all prisoners on hunger strike be allowed regular access to their lawyers and relatives;
- urging that the government complete its review of cases of political prisoners speedily, in order to prevent further suffering to prisoners and their families.

**APPEALS TO**

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**COPIES TO at least one of the following (all in South Africa):**

- The Editor, Cape Times, PO Box 11, Cape Town 8000
- The Editor, South, PO Box 13094, Sir Rowry Road, Cape Town 7900
- The Editor, Beeld, POB 5425, Johannesburg 2000
- The Editor, New Nation, PO Box 10674, Johannesburg 2000
- The Editor, The Star, POB 1014, Johannesburg 2000
- Hunger-Strike Support Committee, care/of Human Rights Commission, PO Box 32723, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg
- The African National Congress, Legal and Constitutional Affairs Department, PO Box 61884, Marshalltown 2307, Johannesburg

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 30 June 1991.