

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of torture/legal concern

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SOUTH AFRICA

(Bophuthatswana): Sarah MEEROTHLE, a married woman aged 35

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Sarah Meerothle was arrested on 30 August 1990 and has been detained since then without charge under the state of emergency currently in force in the nominally-independent "homeland" of Bophuthatswana. She is reportedly held at Mmabatho police station. Amnesty International is concerned that she may be a prisoner of conscience, detained on account of non-violent political activities, and is urging the authorities to release Sarah Meerothle immediately if she is not to be charged promptly with a recognizably criminal offence.

Sarah Meerothle is a married woman with two young children. Her husband is currently serving a seven-year prison sentence in connection with a coup attempt in 1987 against the Bophuthatswana government. Sarah Meerothle has been active in the African National Congress (ANC) in the Mmabatho area in the wake of the unbanning of opposition organizations by State President De Klerk in February 1990. As a result of her husband's imprisonment and her current detention, their two children are without the care of either parent and concern has been expressed for their well-being.

The Bophuthatswana emergency legislation, like the regulations still in force in Natal Province, South Africa, permits any security force member to detain people without charge for an initial period of 30 days, thereafter renewable for a further five months on the authority of the Minister of Law and Order. The regulations also grant the security forces indemnity from prosecution for acts committed in "good faith" in the exercise of these powers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During 1990 the Bophuthatswana authorities have steadfastly resisted growing pressures to allow opposition organizations to operate freely and they are apparently fearful of a growing body of opinion in favour of the eventual reincorporation of the nominally-independent "homelands" into South Africa. The state of emergency legislation has been used to detain political activists, and as of 5 September 1990 30 people were reported to be held under this legislation in Bophuthatswana. There have been repeated reports in recent weeks of harassment and detention of ANC members in Bophuthatswana while activists have been attempting to set up ANC structures there.

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

- expressing concern that Sarah Meerothle is detained without charge under the state of emergency regulations;

- seeking assurances that she will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment in custody;

- urging that she be granted regular access to her lawyer, relatives, and a doctor of her choice;

- explaining that Amnesty International is concerned that Sarah Meerorthle may be a prisoner of conscience detained because of her non-violent political activities, and calling for her to be released immediately if she is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

Chief L M Mangope
President
Government Offices
Mmabatho
Bophuthatswana, South Africa

Telegrams: President Mangope, Bophuthatswana, South Africa

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
Telexes: 321695 SPLIB SA, 321890 PRES SA or 322158 PRES SA
Faxes: +27 12 323 3982

Mr Godfrey Mothibe
Minister of Justice
Department of Justice
Government Offices
Mmabatho
Bophuthatswana, South Africa

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Bophuthatswana, South Africa

Major-General P J Seleke
Commissioner of Police
Department of Police
P/Bag X2004
Mmabatho
Bophuthatswana, South Africa

Telegrams: Police Commissioner, Bophuthatswana, South Africa

COPIES TO:

- The Star, POB 1014, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa
- Vrye Weekblad, PO Box 42637, Fordsburg 2033, South Africa
- Mafikeng Anti-Repression Forum, Private Bag X9, Mmabatho, Bophuthatswana, South Africa
- South African Council of Churches, PO Box 4921, Johannesburg 2000, 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 19 October 1990.