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AFSC Statement on South Africa

The sudden and sweeping crackdown by the South African government against nonviolent opposition to apartheid and racial oppression within its borders has cast the world into shock and sorrow and has cornered the government itself in a self-imposed state of political siege on the eve of a national election.

The American Friends Service Committee, which is committed to promoting the concepts of racial equality and democratic rule, unites in whole-hearted sympathy with those already victimized in South Africa and those who will subsequently share their fate. We appeal to the consciences of the rulers of South Africa to rescind their unacceptable actions and indeed repudiate their policy of apartheid. We believe that they have acted in panic out of a demonstrated inability to respond calmly to the democratic criticisms of the press and the petitions of their courageous critics who have sought to persuade the government to a reasonable course of social, political and economic change.

We grieve at the fact, recognized by the American government, press and public, that South Africa, in an act of desperate blindness, has determined to close off the available nonviolent channels for democratic efforts to correct the oppressive posture of the government and its white minority backers. We share the spreading sense of alarm that South Africa has maximized, not minimized, the likelihood of underground resistance surely leading the government to more bloodshed, if it can not be firmly persuaded to change course.

We believe that Americans, hopefully in concert with other countries, should take action that will expose the government of South Africa to external non-violent pressure, so that the opponents of the regime within South Africa will not be left alone, seeking desperate means to reverse the situation.

We urge the U.S. President and Congress to take prompt steps to back up their protestations with action, including support for initiatives in the United Nations. We believe the President should at once review all official assistance and support of South Africa to determine what relationships can be immediately suspended. We urge the over 400 American banks and corporations doing business in South Africa to suspend any new loans on investments and to initiate an immediate review to determine what other business activities, investments and loans can be quickly suspended and we ask the President and Congress to do likewise. We call upon our government to increase aid to South African refugees in Botswana, Zambia and Tanzania. We urge all religious congregations to pray for the moral sustenance of the victims and for a change of heart among the rulers of South Africa. As a specific step we ask religious bodies to examine any holdings they may have in South Africa or in firms doing business there, to challenge those firms which refuse to suspend business relations with South Africa, and to consider withdrawing such investments.

This is not a time for tokenism or symbolism. There have been too many responses that have been too little and too late. If South Africa is not to careen into widening repression, bloodshed and violence to add to its dismal record of racial oppression, those who do not want to see her precious black and white people pushed into intolerable choices must act without equivocation or delay.

We speak out with heavy hearts but with the faith that those who believe in a process of redemption can initiate actions leading to a reasonable and humanitarian resolution of the present impossible situation. There is no time to waste.

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