

Stop The Torture!

'South Africa's Children are being jailed and tortured. A Holocaust is now unfolding'

By BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS, Jr.

THE MEDIA images are familiar unarmed South African youths running away from armed police firing tear gas and bullets at them. But what we cannot see on the front pages of our newspapers are the overwhelming numbers of youngsters now being detained without trial in South Africa's jails. It is this information that that country's government, with its repressive measures and extensive censorship of the domestic and foreign media, foolishly hopes to hide from the eyes of the world. What is now unfolding in South Africa is tantamount to a holocaust.

There are as many as 40,000 Black South Africans in detention, and of that number perhaps 16,000 are under 17, with some even as young as 8. Hoping to extinguish the growing rage that the detentions have incurred, the government has forbidden any actions that would publicize or seek release of those now detained, including signing petitions, wearing T-shirts with sympathetic slogans or even praying for those behind bars.

In South Africa detention has frightening connotations — it is synonymous with beatings, torture, even death. According to South Africa and American human-rights groups, children are being subjected to horrible abuse. One book, "The War Against Children: South Africa's Youngest Victims" (published by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, New York City), tells of Joseph, 14, whose fingernails are twisted and blackened from electric-shock treatments inflicted



while he was in detention, whose leg still bears a scar where he was cut by police with a broken soft-drink bottle

In 1985 another source, Dr Wendy Orr, a white South African then a district surgeon responsible for examining detainees, filed affidavits regarding the physical condition of the detainees, half of whom were under 18. She had found welts, bruising and blisters "over their backs, arms and on the palms of their hands. Some had lacerated lips, and the skin over their cheekbones was split. Several had their eardrums perforated."

Children languish in prison for months at a time and are denied visits from parents or lawyers. One such child, Fanie Goduka, was accused of throwing stones at two unoccupied vehicles. He was eventually acquitted of the charges, but he was denied bail and was in jail for 57 days because, the police said, they feared the 11-year-old would interfere with witnesses in the case!

Those children not jailed are subjected to a pattern meant to terrorize them: Soldiers pick them up from the streets,

load them into armoured vehicles where they are held for several hours, and threaten and beat them; they are finally released far from home and left to find their way back.

Though the brutality takes its toll on the children, it is also unbearable for their parents. Relatives often know only that their children have been abducted by the police, torture they are being forced to endure or how long the terror will last. Parents are deliberately made to feel powerless and degraded in an attempt to break their spirit, as well as their children's spirits.

Idle words of so-called shock from the Reagan administration are not a sufficient response. We 30 million African-Americans have a profound responsibility to the people of South Africa. We must organize and apply all possible pressure directly on the Reagan administration to change its present policy of "constructive engagement" and support of the racist apartheid regime of South Africa.

One way to do this is to contact all members of Congress to encourage their support for stronger sanctions against South Africa. A bill now being debated in Congress (H.R. 1580/S.556, introduced by Representative Ronald Dillums and Senator Alan Cranston, both of California) would require a total embargo and disinvestment by U.S. corporations from South Africa and Namibia (a country illegally occupied by South Africa).

We should also be more

supportive of several national organizations that are leading the anti-apartheid campaign in this country: the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Trans-Africa, the Washington Office on Africa and the National Black Leadership Roundtable, all based in Washington, D.C.

I intend to do all of the

above, but also go on step further, I am no longer going to whisper the name of the African National Congress (ANC), as if mention of direct support for that organization would bring retribution from the powers that be. From now on, everywhere I speak and preach I will be calling for direct

financial contributions to the ANC. The handwriting is on the wall. The torture of African children will be stopped only by the victory of the ANC and SWAPO (the liberation movement of Namibia) and by the victory of all the peoples of southern Africa over the forces of oppression.

The Reverend Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., is executive director

of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice in

New York City.

Copyright (c) 1987 by Essence Communications, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

PROFILE OF A RAVING PEOPLE'S THEOLOGIAN

BORN 37 years ago in Soweto, Frank is the second in a family of seven. His father is a minister of the Apostolic Faith Mission. He matriculated at Orlando High School in 1971 with a first class pass after passing his junior certificate with distinction at Musi Secondary. At the time he was an active member of the Students Christian Movement.

In 1972 he went to Turfloop's University of the North for a degree in science. It was at this time that his religious life experienced a fundamental metamorphosis from a spiritual reductionism to a broader faith embracing social and political concerns. Impressed by student leaders like Abram Tiro and Aubrey Mokoena, his political formation matured and it was not long before he became a leader of SCM at Turfloop. During this period the foundations were shaken by Abram Tiro's shattering graduation address followed by the mass walkout of students from Turfloop. Student militancy had reached such heights that being a Christian was tantamount to being a collaborator or traitor.



As a leader of the Christian Movement during this time, Frank campaigned for a form of relevant faith that sought not to moralize but also to conscientize students and by 1974 SCM had gained its revered credibility. During this time he teamed up with Ishmael Mkhabela (present Azapo President), Lybon Mabaso (past Azapo President) and Cyril Ramaphosa (present General Secretary for NUM). As fate would have it his studies were once more interrupted following the Viva Frelimo Rally and the subsequent crackdown on student leadership.

Back at home Frank taught

privately at Morris Isaacson in 1975 before joining the ministry of the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1976. He served his probation at Kagiso during which time he worked at the University of Witwatersrand as laboratory assistant until his ordination in 1980. When pastor of Kagiso parish, he founded an Interdenominational Youth Christian Council (IYCC) which strives to bring together the youth of different denominations and encourage them in programmes of social responsibility and action. In the cause of the inseparable relationship between the youth and the community to which they belong, Frank saw IYCC's role in its social welfare development and resulting in the Kustal Self-Help Scheme consisting of various community projects such as women's sewing and knitting clubs, blind care, care, housing, and educational cumbursary fund. Both IYCC and the Self-Help Scheme are still active to the present day. His ministry came to a halt in 1981 when his District Council suspended him.