November, 1986

My Dear Friend:

We shall overcome.

As the song I've sung with so many American friends goes on, I tell you today -- we shall overcome against the heresy of apartheid, and I am convinced that day will come soon.

But when we do, what will be left to us? What kind of South Africa will we inherit?

My family and I need your help to ensure that South Africa will be governable and strong when apartheid crumbles, as it must, and majority rule reigns, as it will.

The sad fact is that thousands of the finest minds and strongest spirits of South Africa are being forced into exile by the Pretoria government. These are the next generation of leaders for my country. They are precious lives whose hearts and hands will be needed most when we finally beat apartheid.

At last count, there were 30,000 fewer of them in South Africa. Today, those 30,000 are refugees -- and victims. Their numbers increase every day as the South African government increases its pressure on dissent.

They have been caught in the random and heartless fire storm that is apartheid. The "offenses" that drove them into exile and fear are freedoms that are guaranteed in your great Constitution. Freedoms that are anathema to apartheid.

The South African refugee of today is a young woman or man who dared to meet in a public place, to speak out in peaceful protest, or was brave enough to distribute a political handbill.

If I were not a Nobel Prize winner and a Bishop in a position of authority, my penchant for speaking my mind (and encouraging others to do the same) would almost certainly have landed me in the same difficulties as today's refugees.

(over, please)
Instead, I watch and I weep at the exodus of South Africa's brave and talented daughters and sons.

There go our next, best hope. There goes our future. Please help us take care of them and prepare them to come back.

Many fine organizations are hard at work in the fight against apartheid. Their political, economic, and media activities are an integral part of our consuming struggle for freedom.

But no matter how much you've done, no matter how much you've given, to bring about political change in South Africa -- please consider apartheid's victims.

Today, I am writing to you to tell you of a special project that my daughter Naomi and I have launched. It is called THE BISHOP TUTU REFUGEE FUND, and it is one of the best ways I know to help the generation of South Africans who will be the next to lead my nation.

Put a human face to the crisis I describe. Imagine our best young people, our most promising students -- the future engineers and the scientists and the farmers who will make South Africa work under majority rule.

But today, these South Africans cannot learn, train or work in South Africa. They are refugees in camps in neighboring countries, living in fear of South African retribution, and in fear for their futures.

To address the growing refugee crisis, we need to move past the ad hoc, stopgap measures of the past. We need an organized, concerted, and well-funded effort.

Only this Fund is chartered solely to meet the day-to-day and long-term needs of apartheid's victims.

I apologize for putting the situation so bluntly, but this is not a time for subtlety.
The fact is that your dollars can save South African lives. Today, I'm asking you to make these people your first concern.

Let me tell you how I first became involved in this campaign. It was the ninth anniversary of the massacre at Soweto. My daughter Naomi was in an American church, attending a meeting that the congregants had called to commemorate the events of 1976.

As the stories of the suffering were told, as the events that began our current struggle were remembered, Naomi wished to add only one thought.

"Please," she said, "don't forget the refugees. Do everything you can to change American policy towards South Africa -- but do not abandon those who have been forced to leave."

"Don't forget," Naomi said, "the shortages, the medical emergencies, and the overcrowding in the refugee camps. Don't turn away from the organizations and governments -- groups like the United Nations, the Lutheran Church, and the Botswana Council on Refugees -- who can no longer afford to maintain refugee centers on their own. Their efforts and resources are stretched past the breaking point in just trying to meet the short term needs of the refugees."

Prayer, Naomi said, was not enough. What was needed, she said, was action. Something concrete. Something new.

When this American community asked her how they could help, the answer came to my daughter quickly. Saying it was simple. Acting on its promise was a different matter.

Contribute to the refugees, Naomi told the church members. And that night the small congregation gave $216. Start a Refugee Fund, Naomi told me that evening, on the phone from America.

(over, please)
"Start a Fund," my daughter said, "and I will run it. I will devote myself to the refugees."

Of course, I said yes. And in just over a year, Naomi and her husband, Corbin Seavers, have made a tremendous difference. With hundreds of individual calls to friends, charitable organizations, and ordinary Americans they have already raised thousands of dollars and put it to work in Southern Africa. When you hear of their work, I think you'll come to share my pride in my daughter.

Working closely with the established United Nations, religious, government and other refugee staffs in Southern Africa, we have helped fill some of the gaps in the immediate crisis and are beginning to address the longer term needs of these victims.

We are paying for food, clothing, counselors, and agricultural supplies for refugee camps. We're funding teacher and technical scholarships, and we're building new homes.

We're helping refugees plant crops, and build schools, and provide for their families -- but we're not doing enough. Not by a long shot.

Our work has just begun. For a few refugees, we have been lifesavers. But saving lives, solving the urgent crises of today, is only the beginning of our mandate.

Yes, we must help South African refugees survive -- but we must also help them prepare for the future.

The refugees need more teachers, more doctors. They need more scholarships to local vocational schools and more instruction in planting crops.

We've built some housing, but we haven't trained enough builders. Today's refugees can be the masons and engineers of tomorrow -- but only if we help them now.
And while it's difficult to do so, we must also help those who remain locked in apartheid's grip within South Africa.

For example, when scores of families were displaced in South Africa from their homes by the recent violence at Crossroads settlement, we assisted the churches who provided them sanctuary.

The South African Council of Churches has asked for our help in assisting displaced families in South Africa, and in providing sustenance for the families whose breadwinners have been forced to flee the country. I'm pleased that a few weeks ago, Naomi was able to present checks for $7,500 to the Council -- but that is a drop in the bucket.

With enough resources, we will begin literacy courses for the South Africans whose education has been so neglected under apartheid. We can find shelter for those whom violence has made homeless. We can feed the hungry, and encourage the spiritually desolate.

There is no limit to what we can do -- because our resolve is firm and our dedication is total. But our pocketbooks are thin today.

Won't you please help?

The clock is ticking towards the end of apartheid. But just as surely, time is running out for apartheid's latest victims -- the 30,000 refugees. Deprived of their homes, many of them may soon lose all hope, all ability to prepare for their future.

You and I can help them, and we can do it today.

$5 a day is all it takes to provide basic food, shelter and clothing for one refugee in the Kagisong refugee transit center we are helping.

With each $3,000, our Refugee Fund can provide one promising refugee student a full scholarship in Botswana.

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$5,000 raised by the Fund can provide $50,000 worth of lifesaving medical supplies to the refugee camps -- supplies that will assist thousands of people.

The South African Council of Churches needs $30,000 this year to assist the families of South African exiles, and the families who have been displaced inside South Africa by the recent violence.

The list of our priorities goes on because our need is so urgent.

Won't you please join us?

Please, make a special contribution to our Fund. Write a check today for $50, $100, $250, $1,000 or whatever you can afford. So many people are living on the margin between security and fear. So many lives are at stake.

As I ask you to play a part in the destruction of apartheid and the rebuilding of my country, I am reminded of something that Robert Kennedy said exactly twenty years ago, in Cape Town, during a courageous address to a black audience.

On June 6, 1966, Senator Kennedy told the world that no political battle, no moral struggle, was too great for any one individual. Calling on each of us to do our part to end apartheid -- and not to be discouraged if that task took a great while -- Robert Kennedy said:

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

(next, please)
The walls of apartheid will, as Robert Kennedy foresaw, come tumbling down. And when they do, I hope and pray that my countrymen will be ready to build a new nation.

Your generous support for the Bishop Tutu Refugee Fund will aid the birth of that new South Africa. And it will create a special bond between your community and mine -- a bond that will endure long after we have forgotten the governments that blocked our aspirations, the policies that looked backwards.

Please, help us today. You have my deepest thanks.

Desmond M.B. Tutu

P.S. I am deeply grateful for everything that so many Americans are doing to abolish the evil system of apartheid. But please, make sure that the refugees and the victims of apartheid who remain in South Africa are not forgotten during these turbulent and dramatic days. They need your help. Please send the Fund the most generous contribution you can afford, today.