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TOP-LEVEL REVIEW SEEN IN ASYLUM REQUEST BY SOUTH AFRICAN POET HERE

Exiled South African poet Dennis Brutus has been assured that a personal review of his political asylum application will be undertaken by the government's highest human rights officer. The assurance came in the form of letters to Prof. Brutus' supporters by a State Department spokesperson who said Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Elliott Abrams "will personally review the Department's advisory opinion" on his application.

"We are encouraged by this high-level State Department attention to the case," said a spokesperson for the Dennis Brutus Defense Committee. "The State Department can only advise the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) on what action the INS should take. However, the amount of high governmental concern about the case should itself increase INS awareness that Prof. Brutus' application requires the most serious consideration."

Prof. Brutus gained international attention when in 1963 he was sentenced to South Africa's maximum security prison for actions protesting racism in South African sport. Released from prison in 1965, and exiled in 1966, he travelled widely and for the past eleven years has taught in several United States universities. He has also published several volumes of poetry. The INS in 1980 cited technical problems with his visa and has asked for his deportation.

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Follow-Up on the News

Poet in Exile

After living peacefully in exile in this country for 10 years, Dennis Brutus, the South African poet and scholar, faced deportation last January because of questions about the legality of his visa. A Federal judge in Chicago, after hearing that Mr. Brutus might be a target of assassination in his country because of long opposition to apartheid, gave the poet 20 days to apply for political asylum.

Mr. Brutus, now a visiting professor of literature at Amherst College, says he applied Feb. 3. His case was referred to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The service asked the State Department for an opinion.

"I'm still waiting," Mr. Brutus says.

In Washington, a State Department official notes that the case must meet "the United Nations definition of political asylum."

"It's fairly complicated," he says, "in that he was resident in the United Kingdom before he came here. So there's a question of whether or not he was firmly resettled there, or whether or not he has the right to go back there."

"We don't have any great desire to kick Dennis Brutus out," the official adds. "We want to reach a favorable determination in this case if we can."