SOUTH AFRICA - POLICE MURDERS OF DETAINES

'Well, there's no question about our repugnance for apartheid. We're also aware that a great many people in South Africa feel the same way and have been trying and striving for years to - to do something about it.'

'Those detained under South Africa's security legislation were held in the most favourable conditions.'

Two young men have been killed in the wake of security police terror in South Africa.

On 2 February 1982, the South African Police announced that the body of Dr Neil Aggett had been found that morning hanging in his cell at John Vorster Square headquarters. The 27-year-old medical doctor and trade union official had been in detention since his arrest on 27 November in one of last year's widespread security police sweeps.

News of Mr Muofhe's death leaked out of the backwater bantustan which Pretoria has declared to be the independent state of Venda. Efforts to ascertain another reported death in detention and to reach the score of other detainees have been unsuccessful. Lutheran Bishop Solomon Serote was refused admittance to Venda to officiate at Mr Muofhe's funeral. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, was expelled from Venda when he tried to visit churchmen held incommunicado. Detainees' families have retained a Johannesburg attorney.

Reaction to Dr Aggett's death 'apparently a suicide', said the police - was instantaneous. He was among the 180 people held in solitary confinement by security police under terms of section 6 of the Terrorism Act. Most of them are black trade union leaders and white academics and activists. A multi-racial Parents Support Committee had been formed, has been holding public demonstrations in front of Johannesburg court buildings and was demanding the unconditional release of all political detainees and the abolition of legislation which allows detentions. The PSC asked why detainees would want to harm themselves 'if it were not because of lengthy detention in solitary confinement, intolerable pressure of interrogation under bullying, threatening and even blackmail conditions, without any recourse to outside help' and whether a suicide under such conditions could be seen as 'anything other than murder'. A trade union official commented that Aggett 'was a remarkably stable kind of guy. Either he was submitted to pressure beyond belief, or he was killed.'

Tshifhiwa Muofhe and Neil Aggett were of the younger generation of South Africans who across the racial barriers imposed by Pretoria stand for the future South Africa now so agonizingly but inevitably coming into being. Black-white cooperation is considered 'the political and moral subversion of the white man' by the apartheid regime. Pretoria responds brutally. A series of show trials is soon to be held in South Africa. In the docket will be the very people who have been - in Ronald Reagan's words - 'striving for years' to do something about apartheid. Present in spirit will be Neil Aggett, Tshifhiwa Muofhe and the hundreds and hundreds of others who have been tortured, banned, banished, driven into exile and murdered in the cause of a free South Africa.

The reaction of the United States government to the Muofhe and Aggett murders at the hands of officials of its South African ally has been silence. When pressed, the State Department will express regret at the deaths and say it is watching what the Pretoria regime will do. There will be no public condemnation. If the matter is brought up with South African regime representatives this will be done 'privately'.

- Call on President Ronald Reagan to condemn South African police murders and detentions of political dissidents.
- Urge your Representatives and Senators to do the same.
- State Department official. Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Room 6236, Washington, DC 20520 PHONE: 1-202-632-2530