PRESS RELEASE

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TOP NAMIBIAN LABOR LEADERS TO TESTIFY ON BRUTALITY BY SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE

Two of the highest ranking labor leaders from Namibia are scheduled to arrive in Chicago to testify before delegates to a conference on Namibia sponsored by the United Nations Council for Namibia. The three-day conference will begin here in Chicago on July 23 and end on July 25th. Barnabas Tjizu, Chairman of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) and John Pandeni, General Secretary of the Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU), which is affiliated to the umbrella NUNW, are expected to provide eyewitness accounts of the escalating violence against Namibian citizens and union workers by South African directed police, known as Koevoet.

On May 28th of this year Koevoet officers fired upon a crowd of civilians and workers who were attending a picnic, leaving one person dead and two others wounded. Later that evening, workers again came under gunfire as they returned from work and attempted to enter a dwelling compound which houses workers from Northern Namibia. One person was fatally shot in the head and 70 others wounded.

On June 12th, less than three weeks following the attacks on workers and civilians in Katutura, the offices of NUNW were raided and documents seized by high-ranking Koevoet police commanded by Brigidaire Piet Fouche and chief inspector Jumbo Smit. Minutes of meetings, membership lists, information on union officials, union constitutions, and progress reports were taken away.
In the pre-dawn hours of Friday, July 3, 1987 a combined police and army unit attacked Namibian workers in their single men's hostel at the fishing port town of Luderitz in the southern part of the country. The Namibian Communications Center in London reports that the workers' compound was completely overrun and whips, clubs and guns with rubber bullets were used to drive the workers into the darkness. When townspeople from a surrounding seacoast community gathered at the scene, they too were set upon by the police and army using tear gas and blazing guns to disperse the onlookers. One worker was hit in the head by a rubber bullet and at last report was hospitalized in serious condition. Over two hundred others were detained.

Other reports of persons being struck and killed by South African army vehicles, women being raped by soldiers and civilians tortured by being roasted on open flames, are secretly leaking out of Namibia, on account of the banning of press coverage of police and army activities.

These recent incidents are viewed as part of a general campaign to terrorize the Namibian population into accepting the illegal occupation of their country which South Africa maintains in spite of rulings by the International Court of Justice and the 1978 adoption by the U.N. of Security Council Resolution 435. The resolution calls for South African withdrawal and a U.N.-supervised process of transition, which includes free elections, for bringing independence to Namibia.

The Chicago Conference on Namibia will be held at the Lutheran School of Theology located at 1100 East 55th Street. The public is invited. For further information call 899-1800