RELIGIOUS ACTION NETWORK
for justice and peace in southern Africa

a project of the American Committee on Africa

ONE MORE MASSACRE
by Aleah Bacquie

"It seemed so absolutely unnecessary. If this is a taste of things to come, then God help us all." -John Hall, Chairperson Peace Committee

God help us all indeed. Soldiers firing on unarmed peaceful demonstrators with no warning whatsoever is nothing new under the South African sun. (It was only last month that I wrote to you about the Boipatong Massacre.) Now, twenty-eight more are dead, 200 more wounded. The only fresh, but twisted slant comes from the "Gorbachevian" De Klerk, escort of the "New South Africa". You know the appalling statistics by now, nearly 8,000 people dead due to political violence since the "reformist" De Klerk began his bloody reign of terror, with tens of thousands more wounded, driven from their homes, gripped by hopelessness and fear.

Complete denial of any South African governmental responsibility was expected, even though the soldiers who fired were under the command of a South African Defense Force Brigadier on loan to the "bantustan" Ciskei government. The South African government has long contended that the Black "bantustans" are independent governments, although they are not recognized by any other government, including the U.S.

However, with hard evidence of government complicity mounting, De Klerk tried a new tactic, blaming the victim. He somehow mustered the gall to assert that the massacre of ANC supporters is the fault of the ANC! According to this disturbed logic, those Blacks who dared to exercise their right of peaceful assembly and protest are to blame because they should have known that Pretoria's puppet, Oupa Gqozo, would fire on the marchers. The U.S State Department Spokesperson Richard Boucher, chimed in on cue with a statement that "those who prompted the demonstration should carefully reconsider future actions...that expose innocent supporters to violence." Of course this analysis is not new to US civil rights veterans who were themselves blamed for the dogs, water hoses, batons, bullets, and nooses that were used on them when exercising similar rights.

I urge you to send a telegram to both George Bush and Bill Clinton and urge them to speak out publicly against the continuing slaughter in South Africa. Ask them to openly endorse Senate Resolution 301 which addresses the violence in South Africa. Encourage them to do everything in their power to STOP APARTHIED'S VIOLENCE and support South Africa's people in their struggle for one-person, one vote democracy in a non-racial, non-sexist unified South Africa.

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Democracy vs. Dictator in Apartheid’s ‘Homeland’

By BILL KELLER
Special to The New York Times

BISHO, South Africa, Sept. 9 — The make-believe country of Ciskei has a shiny “international” airport capable of landing a Boeing 747, in case one ever attempts to visit this curious figment of apartheid.

It has 846,000 inhabitants who were not consulted in 1981 when they were stripped of their South African citizenship and gerrymandered into one of 10 tribal homelands to protect white control of the wealthy remainder of the country.

Ciskei has a foreign service with a single ambassadorial posting, to the only country that recognizes its sovereignty, South Africa.

It has its capital here, a miniature pastel metropolis with a three-block downtown, a hotel-casino complex where South Africans can enjoy the blackjack tables forbidden a mile away in their own country, and high-walled compounds where government ministers and business executives dwell in luxurious isolation from Ciskei’s wretched poverty.

It has its own development bank, its own army and its own diminutive military dictator, Brigadier Oupa J. Gqozo, who boils with rage when he is ridiculed as a puppet of South Africa.

“I need some help to make the world realize that I am a very serious leader,” Brigadier Gqozo pleaded during an interview last Friday.

Three days later his army fired a seemingly interminable machine-gun fusillade at protesters marching on his capital, killing at least 28 and convincing many that if he is not a serious leader, he is at least part of a serious problem.

South Africa is struggling to fit homelands like Ciskei, where at least 28 people were killed Monday, into the eventual post-apartheid order.

But as the brigadier served bloody notice on Monday, there is explosive disagreement about where these homelands fit in the post-apartheid order.

The African National Congress demands that homeland leaders it regards as inimical to democracy be replaced by impartial caretakers until elections can be held. The South African Government insists it is “not in the business of replacing governments,” as a spokesman put it.

The killings left Ciskei extremely volatile. Police and soldiers conducted door-to-door searches today, and were said to be arresting and beating participants in Monday’s march. In the Ciskeian townships southwest of Bisho, residents burned the homes of Ciskei soldiers.

The African National Congress marched today against the tiny homeland of Qwa Qwa, which is about 200 miles south of Johannesburg, on the northern border of Lesotho.

More ominously, its leaders said they were contemplating action against KwaZulu, the Zulu homeland and the domain of the A.N.C.’s bitterest and most powerful black political rival, Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi.

The Clearest Border:
Where the Poor Are

A visitor driving through the rolling pasture and voluptuous mountains of Ciskei finds no border posts to mark the frequent passage across the “international” border with South Africa.

But the boundaries are easily deduced from the standard of living. The cozy 19th-century English colonial towns, Queenstown, Fort Beaufort,
King William's Town, are in South Africa. The sprawling townships and the barren rural settlements, Zwellatala, Thornhill - these are in Ciskei. The Indian Ocean, west of East London, is South Africa's southernmost point and the neighboring slum of Mdimantsane is Ciskei.

The brigadier readily admits that in economic terms, his republic is anything but independent. South Africa underwrites the budget that pays for the 20,000-member civil service and its perks, including the black bulletproof Range Rover that the brigadier favors and the fleet of Mercedes Benz cars, which the South African Defense Force trained and equipped the army - assisted by such a large contingent of Israelis that for a time the Pick n Pay supermarket in Bisho had a kosher section.

South Africans - many retired or seconded from the South African government and military - still make up more than half the brigadier's cabinet and the leadership of his military and intelligence services. The commander of the South African military, who trained the troops, has access to the information of his agents in South Africa and it is blacked out for the white Government as political foes of the black liberation movement.

The homelands - four of them "independent," the other two "self governed" - have gradually taken sides, either to the A.N.C., others to the Government.

According to Gert Hugo, a former South African military intelligence officer who was Brigadier Gqozo's intelligence adviser for a year, until July 1991, Ciskei has been a covert battleground in the white Government's "divide and rule" approach.

The homeland leaders hope to keep power after their territories are reconstituted, their provinces enriched by addition of prime South African territory.

When a Town Dies, A Stereotype Is Left

Almost inevitably the homelands have tended to confirm all the worst prejudices of white South Africans about black rule.

Inspired by the mapmakers of their assets, burdened with millions of impoverished blacks forcibly resettled from other areas and saddled in many cases with ruthless and corrupt rulers, they have deteriorated into wretched poverty and political frustration, hardly relieved by some spectacular scenes.

"You do admire the place when you see it," said Jeanette Malborne, acknowledging the scenic mountains that surround the hometown of Seymour in central Ciskei. "If you could just throw it with a bit of life..."

Seymour, a farming center of about 10,000, is a part of the barren rural settlements, Zwelitsha, King William's Town, are in South Africa. South African Army. He resigned in 1989, citing the brutality of black rule. The tobacco farms that were the economic mainstay were sold cheap, locals say, either to absentee black landlords with the right connections or to subsistence farmers who use them to graze goats.

The Kat River tunnels mill closed. Ciskei's leader of the brigadier's cabinet, Lonetno Sebe, Brigadier Gqozo at first courted the congress. He's a farm boy who grew up under the discipline of the white man says law, said Steve Tshwete, a leader of the African National Congress who grew up in King William's Town and once considered Brigadier Gqozo a friend.

Elevated to power in 1990 by military officers who overthrew the previous cabinet, the brigadier, and revised Lennox Sebe, Brigadier Gqozo at the congress.

The congress helped contain the rioting, police use of tear gas. The brigadier, in turn, hired human rights lawyers to write a bill of rights, abolished the tribal authorities, who a President Sebe had used as an instrument of control and vowed to bring Ciskei back into South Africa.

After a few months, the honeymoon ended abruptly.

Mr. Hugo, whose account is backed by other former intelligence officers, said that the most audacious maneuver was staging a phony coup attempt. He said South Africa assisted. Mr. Ciskei's former security chief, Charles Sebe, back from exile in Transkei with a promise that mutinous army officers would hand him the presidency. Mr. Sebe and a collaborator walked into the trap and were killed.

The congress did its share to embitter the brigadier, making a mistake the whites in Pretoria did not: they insulted his pride.

After the brigadier dismissed striking civil servants, the A.N.C. organized rallies where he was denounced in scathing terms. Keith Mathee, a law professor, said that the most audacious maneuver was staging a phony coup attempt. He said South Africa assisted. Mr. Sebe and a collaborator walked into the trap and were killed.

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They are filthy," he said. "They are terrible. They are thugs. And they are dangerous."

"I'm not a small boy," he added, when asked about the plans to march on his capital. "I'm going to show them that with me, no is no, as the leader of a country. If they don't believe it, they will see on Monday that I am not intimidated."

The Mystery Of Survival

But even before the killings on Monday, the brigadier seemed to have little public support. Basie Oosthuysen, the 28-year-old leader of the brigadier's secretive political party, the African Democratic Movement, said the brigadier has "not much chance" of winning an election.

There can only be two answers to the question of why Gqozo remains in power, said Mr. Matthee, the former minister. "One is that he is kept there by the de Klerk Government because he is very convenient in the fight against the A.N.C. The other is that he has nowhere to go."

"Here is a man who in a normal country might be a major or colonel in the army, making a bigger salary than de Klerk, with a man who is in the army. In a new disposition, he might well find himself put on trial for murder."

Once in early 1991, the brigadier confirmed in an interview, the South African Foreign Minister, Roelof F. Botha, urged him to take a three-month "vacation." The brigadier, assuming he was being asked to step down, declined, and Botha did not insist.

"They cannot touch me," the brigadier said. "The minute they do that with me, no is no, as the leader of a country. If they don't believe it, they will see on Monday that I am not intimidated."
ANC President Nelson Mandela’s Statement on the Bisho Massacre.

The tragic events in Bisho are yet another grim reminder of the profound illness that afflicts our country. South Africa is a country traumatised by centuries of violence and the most brutal exploitation. It requires immense courage, tempered by patience and sensitivity to address this condition and apply the therapy that will assist us to heal.

Each one of the people who lost their lives at Bisho yesterday, 7th September, was a unique human being. The daughter or the son of some mother; the father or mother to some child; a person linked to a home, to a community of relatives and friends who had loved, cherished and nurtured her or him for many years in the hope of a continuing and shared future.

Thousands marched full of hope for a better tomorrow. Dozens did not return.

Those fateful four minutes of gunfire, that reverberated through the length and breadth of South Africa, snuffed out those lives as if they were of no consequence. The staccato of those automatic weapons added one more grisly episode to the already bloodstained annals of twentieth century South Africa.

The facts of what occurred have been established by the international media and eyewitnesses representing local and international agencies whose reputations are beyond reproach. The shootings were unprovoked and were not preceded by any warning. Lethal force was employed as the first option of the Ciskei Security Forces in circumstances that did not even remotely warrant its use.

We condemn these killings in the strongest possible terms!

To the bereaved families; to the relatives and friends who have lost their loved ones we offer our heartfelt condolences. The words of comfort and sympathy we pronounce can however do nothing to restore the lives that have been so brutally cut short. We can but hope that these few tokens of our deep concern will lend them the support to alleviate their sorrow.

We mourn with the communities of the Border region that continue to bleed even while our country makes its troubled transition from the autocracy of apartheid to democracy.

From this day, Bisho will rank alongside Boipatong on that roll call of infamy that recounts the past two years of F.W. de Klerk’s incumbency. The authors of yesterday’s massacre already stand condemned in the eyes of the nation and the world for their criminal actions.

While we wipe away the tears, let us today reflect on what we as a South African nation need to do so that we can all go beyond our present pain. Let us learn from the tragedies that still besiege the hopes on which to build our future.

Those who still wish to cling to a discredited past had their say yesterday. It is evident that they have nothing to offer our country other than continuing violence, conflict and bloodshed.

The deceitful attempt to attribute responsibility for the massacre to those who sought to secure rights that millions throughout the
world take for granted betrays a deep-seated contempt for the people of this country. It also tells us how lacking they are in a commitment to democracy. The crude apportioning of blame and disinformation about who shot first has not helped us obtain a clear picture of what occurred.

Those with a capacity to map our country's way forward are all the political formations and movements that share a common allegiance to basic democratic values. The times demand that we now translate our commitment into a common will and a determination to create, within the boundaries of South Africa, the institutions that will ensure that South Africa makes a decisive break with its past. The people want to enjoy their rightful heritage of peace and prosperity.

The Bisho Massacre should alert all South Africans. De Klerk's continued emphasis on strong regional government, outside of the democratic process and within the context of the homelands, has given a signal to the repressive structures built up over the years by the apartheid regime that they can do what they like to entrench their authoritarian rule. It has also served to re-emphasise how fragile the very fabric of our society is.

What all peace-loving people are asking for is an end to violence and intimidation, in the first instance by the state and by various political organisations. Critical to this is the creation of a climate for free political activity. That means recognition of the right of all political organisations to mobilise freely and without fear. To address this the ANC submits the following proposals:

1. That there be a full, independent investigation into the massacre and the circumstances that led to it.

2. That Brigadier Gqozo be removed as head of state and an interim administration, acceptable to all parties and determined in full consultation with all representative bodies in the Ciskei, be established immediately.

3. Section 43 of the Ciskei National Security Act, which prohibits the free activity of any political organisation, should be repealed.

4. South African Military Intelligence officials be removed from Ciskei, as should the Peace Force security company which has been involved in training and arming vigilante forces. Similar initiatives to bring about peace and democracy must be urgently undertaken in all areas where no free political activity is possible. An enormous responsibility rests with the South African government. Such actions, coupled with visible movement on the outstanding matters placed before it by the ANC, would help create the climate so essential for the resumption of meaningful negotiations.

We also want to say loudly and clearly: we have travelled too far along the road to freedom to turn back now. We shall not be deterred by the threats or the actions of the forces of the past. Our people have the right to hope, the right to a future, the right to life itself. No power on this earth can destroy the thirst for human dignity. Our land cries out for peace. We will only achieve it through adherence to democratic principles and respect for the rights of all. This is the challenge that faces all South Africans.

We dare not fail.