Dear Friend:

Mass arrests and the fear or torture by the racist South African government have forced 60,000 Namibian refugees—many young mothers with children and elderly persons—to flee their homes and their country in southern Africa. They make their way to refugee camps set up by SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement, in neighboring Angola.

25,000 refugees are being cared for in a camp I visited recently. More people arrive daily. Sometimes there are so many of these new arrivals that people have to sleep on the ground; often there are not enough blankets; sometimes food and water run out. People are often very weak when they arrive, having walked hundreds of miles. They are very vulnerable to malaria and typhoid fever.

The refugees gave me harrowing descriptions of torture by the South African police. Rauna Nambinga, a young nurse, told of beatings and solitary confinement after she was arrested at the hospital where she worked. "The most terrible day I remember," she said in a small still voice, "was when I was taken to a small room...there were many pictures of dead people on the wall. They told me one was my brother, Usko Nambinga, so I must show them which one." Because she could not comply she was again beaten. "From there I was taken to a room where there were snakes and I was told that if I was not going to start telling the truth I was going to be bitten...I was in great panic." Later she was subjected to electric torture, prolonged hanging, and such severe beatings that a military doctor told her that she had serious head and kidney injuries and burst ear drums. When she was released after months of solitary confinement, she fled Namibia, afraid for her life.
Shortly before his death late last year, Bishop Colin Winter of the Namibia Peace Center wrote that "churches, schools and clinics have been destroyed by the South African 'defense forces'... A seminary and women's headquarters were blown up at night. Black priests and other Christians are being tortured along with workers, students, nurses, doctors—any who dare to oppose the regime."

In the refugee camp I was struck by the determined way tremendous difficulties were being tackled and overcome. Young and old came to walk with us, asking us questions, proudly pointing out new achievements—a new classroom, a large charcoal cooler they had made to store food. Often they talked about the importance of the help friends from outside had given them—seeing it not only in terms of physical needs, but also as an expression of human solidarity.

The camp is deliberately situated in an inaccessible area to protect it from South African attacks like the one that killed four hundred people at the Cassinga refugee camp in 1977. The refugees, mainly women and children, live in neatly organized tent villages, protected by the overhanging greenery of a coffee plantation.

There is a farm—but most of the food has to be trucked in from the outside over a road that is little more than a badly rutted track. Water has to be carried by hand from a nearby river, because there isn’t enough money to install a pumping system.

The camp is divided into sections and I visited both the school and hospital areas. When we arrived we were greeted by Nangolo Moumba, the young principal of the school, who had recently graduated from the University of Connecticut.

The camp school cares for at least 9000 children, with more coming daily. There are only about 60 teachers and although extra adults help with food preparation and the very young, the children are encouraged to take responsibility for one another. As I wandered around I constantly saw the older boys and girls reach out to help the smaller children.
It was Sunday, so no classes, usually held under the trees, were in session, but teachers were eager to talk about needs. There is a shortage of everything; exercise and textbooks, slates, chalk, blackboards. A map or globe is a luxury not to be dreamed of until each child has a pencil and paper. But no one seemed down hearted, the children are learning to read and write for the first time and when they talked about their hopes they seemed sure that ahead of them lay many possibilities, not just the narrow track of twenty years of unskilled labor.

The camp has a small, simple hospital, several small rooms filled with beds and very little else. But already there is a training program for nurses and Iyambo Indango, one of the first Namibians to qualify as a doctor, showed us the X-ray unit and the very basic surgical theatre. There are over 1,000 pregnant women in the camp, and at least 2,000 babies. These need special food and vitamin supplements and there are pitifully few resources to meet all the needs—not even enough diapers.
We have just airlifted over half a ton of penicillin to the Namibian refugees. Penicillin is urgently needed because so many of the refugees are suffering from infections when they arrive in the camps.

Over the past few years we have sent well over $60,000 worth of medicines and medical equipment to the Namibian refugees. We are preparing to ship medical equipment valued at $80,000, including stethoscopes, syringes, and oxygen masks. With your help we can do even more in the future.

Your individual tax deductible contributions make a difference. A $25 donation will cover the cost of air freighting antibiotics worth $140 to the Namibian refugees...$50 will help pay for 100 injections of streptomycin...$100 will purchase a portable dental kit.

I hope you will give as generously as you can.

Sincerely

Jennifer Davis
Executive Secretary

PS.: A complimentary set of 12 full-color South Africa Freedom posters will be sent to those contributing $25 or more.