DAVID DINKINS CALLS FAST FOR SOUTH AFRICAN DETAINEES
PRESSES FOR QUICK ACTION ON CITY SANCTIONS BILL

NEW YORK, NY.....Borough President David Dinkins announced today he would start a one day fast tomorrow in support of the approximately 100 detainees on hunger strike in South Africa. Standing on the steps of city hall flanked by prominent New York City elected officials, labor and religious leaders, civil rights and community activists, Dinkins announced he would also lobby for tightening loop holes in city anti-apartheid laws.

City Comptroller Harrison Goldin, City Councilwoman Ruth Messinger, and Trade Union leader Stanley Hill, Executive Director of District Council 37 announced they would join the Borough President in his action. "I weigh more than they do," said Stanley Hill, "so I may go for two days."

Also joining the fast were City Councilmembers Mary Pinkett and Carol Maloney and Harlem Minister Calvin Butts who announced that he would call on his entire congregation to join the action on Easter Sunday.

President Carter Sends Message

President Jimmy Carter issued a message in response to the New York action expressing special concern for the hunger strikers. "I reiterate my call for the unconditional release of all remaining political prisoners, some of whom have been imprisoned for close to three years."

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The city leaders were quick to point out, however, that fasting wasn't enough. "To fast for a day is light stuff compared to what is happening down there," said the Borough President. "But people from South Africa have told us that it helps. They are detaining children, without charge, people are dying--it's little enough that we can do."

Pointing out that it was nearly thirty years since South African police shot down 69 unarmed demonstrators in Sharpeville, South Africa, the Borough President also announced that he and the other assembled leaders would be pressing for quick action on legislation to strengthen city laws banning purchases from corporations involved in South Africa.

"Businesses that continue to profit from apartheid should not receive contracts with the city when there are comparable goods available from socially responsible firms. Those who have chosen, through subterfuge and deceit, to place profit over justice should not be rewarded with city contracts. I join you in urging the swift passage of Intro 1137," the Borough President told the assembled crowd.

Speaking in support of the stronger city purchasing legislation, Intro 1137, City Comptroller Harrison Golden specifically criticized corporations that claim to have disengaged from South Africa while continuing to engage in franchise and licensing agreements. "This is a change in form, not in substance," said the Comptroller.

The push for stronger city legislation was also endorsed by City Councilmembers Samuel Horwitz, who sits on the government operations committee that is currently holding hearings on the bill and Brooklyn Councilwoman Susan D. Alter. Councilwoman Alter noted that Monday was Purim, when those of the Jewish faith around the world fast because of an oppression two thousand years ago. "It is entirely appropriate and
especially important in this light that we endorse this modern day protest against oppression.

Sonia Ivany, speaking for Local 1199 of the Health and Hospital Workers Union pledged her union's support for the move to tighten restrictions on city purchases, Elombe Brath of the Patrice Lumumba Coalition and Timothy Smith of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility specifically listed corporations that the city needed to target. "IBM has a choice to make, has to decide whether they want to do business with New York or with apartheid South Africa," said Tim Smith.

Also attending the press conference in support of the legislation were David Dyson of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the New York Area Labor Committee Against Apartheid and a range of local trade union, civic and anti-apartheid leaders.

"The New York press conference comes at a time when actions in support of the South African detainees are escalating around the country," said Africa Fund Executive Director Jennifer Davis. "On March 12, thousands of Americans around the country responded to the The Africa Fund's call for solidarity protests." High School students in Westchester County fasted for particular detainees, an entire church congregation marched through downtown Brooklyn and others participating in the protest included a local chapter of the NAACP in Pittsburgh, the Congregational United Church of Christ in Iowa City, IA and the South Florida Coalition Against Apartheid.

United Autoworker President Owen Bieber fasted for two days in mid-February to support the hunger strikers. Since then, a new UAW member or official has gone on a 48-hour fast every two days and the union has vowed to have someone fasting at all times until detainees are released or at least until their mid-June convention.

Concerned about the imminent threat to the lives of the hunger strikers, on March 21 the Massachusetts based Physicians for Human Rights issued a statement appealing to the South African government to either charge or release all those on hunger strike. "If the South African government refuses to take this step, it would, in effect, be participating in the almost certain death of these detainees," the physicians said.

For more information or interviews with former detainees, profiles of those on hunger strike or updated information on those jailed in South Africa contact The Africa Fund, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038.