President Ronald Reagan  
The White House  
Washington, DC  20500  

Dear Mr President:

Reports from South Africa give increasingly revolting descriptions of the treatment of people held in incommunicado detention by the South African Police. Today's WASHINGTON POST identifies five detainees who have been taken to hospital; three at least have been placed in psychiatric wards.

Thozamile Gqweta, president of the South African Allied Workers Union, was arrested by security police on 8 December 1981. His brother was permitted to visit the prominent trade union leader in hospital and according to THE POST he 'was suffering from a severe headache and loss of memory and had difficulty talking...(he) seemed depressed and anxious and cried at one point. He was unrecognizable. I had been allowed to see him in detention two weeks ago and the change was remarkable.' The brother said that another visit yesterday showed Mr Gqweta seemed improved and he said he had not been tortured. Two policemen were in the room. Also in psychiatric wards are Ms Esther Levitan, a woman in her mid-50s, a member of the Black Sash women's organization and an employee of the Zionist Federation in Johannesburg, who has been held incommunicado since 5 January this year; and Dr Elizabeth Floyd, medical doctor and union organizer, detained since 26 November last year.

Ms Helen Suzman, member of the South African Parliament, three days ago read out on the floor of that legislative body a letter smuggled out of prison wherein a detainee detailed some of the treatment meted out by the security police to Neil Aggett, a medical doctor and trade union official. Aggett, who was naked, 'was made to do push-ups - a substantial number. He was hit either with a belt or a rolled up newspaper while doing them.' The police say Dr Aggett was found hanging in his cell on 5 February - after two and a half months in detention - and indicated that he had committed suicide. Ms Suzman stated: 'Whatever the findings of the post-mortem are on Dr Aggett...it was Section 6 of the Terrorism Act that killed Neil Aggett.' The general secretary of Dr Aggett's union, the African Food and Canning Workers, was blunt in his eulogy at Neil Aggett's funeral: 'When they speak of suicide, we say he was killed. We put the blame where it lies, with the Government of the country and with the security police who do its dirty work for it.'

On 11 November 1981, Tshifhiwa Isaac Muofhe, 28-year-old Lutheran Church lay preacher was detained by police in South Africa's Venda bantustan. Two days later Mr Muofhe was dead. He had been beaten mercilessly.
President Reagan  

19 February 1982

Last Friday, 12 February, two Lutheran pastors in Venda, the Rev P. Phosiwa and the Rev M. Phaswane, were brought to court charged with murder and terrorism. An official observer from the Evangelical Church in Germany heard them say they had been given shock treatment on their genitals and one showed injuries on his head and his hands. They had been in incommunicado detention since last November. The dean of the Lutheran Church in that region, the Very Rev T. S. Farisani, has been in hospital after being badly tortured, and is still held incommunicado.

Johannesburg's RAND DAILY MAIL reported on 3 February 1982: 'Up to 620 people are known to have been detained in South Africa, including Transkei, Ciskei and Venda, between January 9 and December 31 last year. Of these, 95 were released, 226 were charged, 180 are in detention, and 297 are unaccounted for.' These statistics and the few instances of the treatment of detainees noted above are but the latest in a chronicle of horror extending over years.

Mr President, you have hailed those people, black and white, in South Africa who are trying to remove apartheid. Those now held in detention, some for many months under conditions of physical and psychological torment, are just such people: black and white trade union leaders, professionals, students, churchpeople. They share a vision of a South Africa cleansed of apartheid and police repression. These are the South Africans you should be supporting.

We ask you to condemn publicly the arbitrary detention and the deaths in detention in South Africa and in South African occupied Namibia, and to call for the immediate release of all detainees held by the Pretoria regime.

Very sincerely yours,

William Johnston
President