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AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

211 East 43rd Street • New York, N. Y., 10017 • (212) TN 7-8733 • Cable AMCOMMAF

*W. J. Davis
for Africa*

October 13, 1964

Representative Charles C. Diggs, Jr.
House Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Congressman Diggs:

I am enclosing a memorandum which we issued just a few days ago about the case of three African leaders in South Africa who are presently condemned to die. I think that the enclosure gives the essential details in the case. It certainly is impossible to know at this distance exactly what the complicity of the three condemned men may have been in all of the actions with which they are charged. The one thing that is thoroughly clear is that as Africans they have had no opportunity of political expression or political involvement in the constitutional processes of their own country. Instead their activities have been banned and the government has refused to listen to the non-violent actions which have been taken by the African people over the last many years.

About the murder charge, Bishop Ambrose Reeves (formerly of Johannesburg) recently wrote:

While it is true that these three men were implicated in the murder insofar as it was discussed at a committee meeting at which they were present, as far as I can gather it has never been suggested by the prosecution that they actually took part in the murder of this man (who was to be a prosecution witness) who was regarded as a traitor to the organization of which all of them were members.

He goes on to comment:

The execution of these three men, all of whom are political leaders, can only lead to a serious worsening in relationships between the South African Government and the African people.

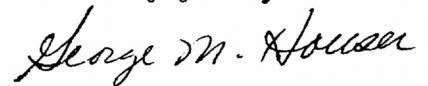
I realize that it is a delicate matter for the leaders of government in one country to raise questions or make protests to the leaders of another country. But in the case of South Africa it seems to me that because of the peculiar and extreme circumstances which exist there, that at least raising questions is valid.

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I would hope that you might wish to raise such questions yourself either with the President of South Africa, or urge the Secretary of State to quietly press for clemency.

If you need any further facts in this case I'd be happy to supply them.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George M. Houser". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

George M. Houser

(Dictated by Mr. Houser and signed in his absence)
GMH/jkb

Enc.

MEMO FROM: The American Committee on Africa
211 East 43rd. Street
New York, New York 10017

OCT 14 1964

TO: Concerned organizations and individuals

News has just come from South Africa that the appeal of three African National Congress (ANC) leaders who were sentenced to death as a result of their political activities was rejected by the Appellate Division (Supreme Court), Bloemfontein, on October 2.

The condemned men are Vuyisile Mini, Zinakele Kaba, and Wilson Khayingo. They were convicted on 17 counts of sabotage, propagating the aims of the banned ANC, recruiting members to be sent abroad for military training, and a count of murder - for which their responsibility, if it exists at all, seems to have been indirect. They were alleged to have been members of an underground "High Command" of the Spear of the Nation, which is supposed to have ordered the killing of a police informer slated to appear as a State witness.

One must use the expressions "alleged" and "supposed," in discussing the guilt of these men, because most of the witnesses in their case, apart from the police, were 90-day no-trial detainees, who themselves had been kept in solitary confinement and subjected to all forms of pressure, probably including torture, to induce them to make their statements.

Whatever the crimes that are alleged against these men, they have been for years amongst the foremost leaders of their people, struggling to bring about reforms which would improve the lot of their fellow Africans. If they have resorted to violence in furtherance of their aims, it is the inflexibility of a ruthless government which has driven them to finally abandon the non-violent forms of protest to which they adhered for so many years but which in the end bore so little fruit. Let it be remembered that for Africans in South Africa there is no form of direct or indirect representation in Parliament, the Provincial Council or City Council. There are no constitutional channels through which they can seek redress of their grievances.

Nothing now stands in the way of the execution of these three men except the possible exercise of the prerogative of mercy by the State President, Mr. C. R. Swart.

The American Committee on Africa feels that under the circumstances the execution of Mini, Kaba and Khayingo would enormously exacerbate racial hostility inside South Africa, and inflame antagonism of people of color throughout the world against the White Supremacists who rule in South Africa. Pardon or even the commutation of their sentences would at least be a gesture toward racial peace in South Africa and indeed the world.

We urge you, through your organization, to cable the State President of South Africa, Mr. C. R. Swart, Republic of South Africa, Pretoria, and appeal to him to exercise his prerogative of mercy in pardoning or, at the very least, preventing the execution of the three Africans mentioned above.

The accused should be mentioned by name in your cable, and please do cable, as a letter may come too late.

It would also be helpful to communicate with Secretary of State Dean Rusk urging that the U.S. make representation to the South African Government, even if quietly, to commute the death sentence of the three South African leaders.