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The following is a press release by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law, Washington, D.C., concerning the four resolutions.

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PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. CONGRESS ACTS ON SOUTH AFRICA

On September 18, 1984, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed four resolutions concerning South Africa. Each piece of legislation passed the House by a voice vote under suspension of the rules. By approving all four resolutions without a dissenting vote, the U.S. House of Representatives sent a strong message of condemnation to South Africa and its system of apartheid.

The first resolution, introduced by Rep. William H. Gray III (D-PA), calls on South Africa to release all detainees held without charge or trial since 1978 in the Marienlat detention camp in Namibia. The detainees have been captured and held incommunicado since May 1978 when South Africa attacked the Cassinga refugee camp in Angola. This legislation, House Concurrent Resolution 298, came in response to the South African government's quashing of a court action, sponsored by the Southern Africa Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, which sought the release of the Cassinga detainees. The court action was filed on March 5, 1984 in the Supreme Court of Namibia. On April 27, 1984, in an unprecedented move, the South African government issued a certificate rescinding the Namibian Supreme Court's jurisdiction to hear the case. Due to international reaction over this interference in the judicial process, the South African government later released some 55 of the detainees; however, many detainees still remain in the detention camp without access to legal representation. H. Con. Res. 298 expresses the sense of Congress that South Africa should release all detainees and denounces South Africa's rescission of the Namibian Supreme Court's jurisdiction in the case for the release of the detainees. The Namibian Supreme Court subsequently heard arguments on the validity of the certificate and held that the certificate was lawfully issued and declared that the Cassinga detentions were also lawful. The Southern Africa Project's correspondent attorneys in Namibia are appealing this decision.

The second resolution, House Resolution 430, introduced by Rep. George Crockett (D-MI), calls on the South African government to free Nelson Mandela, leader of the South African freedom movement, who has been imprisoned for over twenty years for seeking to end the racist apartheid system. The resolution also calls for the release of his wife, Winnie Mandela, who has been held under banning orders in South Africa for most of the last twenty years. Her banning order prevents her from meeting with more than one person at a time, prevents her from being quoted in South Africa, and confines her to her home during evenings and weekends. This resolution calls on the President of the United States to secure the release and freedom of the Mandelas. A similar resolution has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Carl Levin.

The third resolution, introduced by Rep. Robert Mrazek (D-NY), condemns South Africa's "forced removal" policy which was resulted in the denationalization of nearly 8 million Africans. This South African policy relocates by force black South Africans from "black spots," predominantly black-owned areas in white strongholds, to rural "homeland" areas. Rep. Mrazek stated, "These 'homelands,' a misnomer if ever one existed, are basically isolated pockets of poverty, disease, starvation and repression." The legislation calls upon the government of South Africa to "comply with all internationally recognized human rights standards, the U.N. Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by ending the 'black spot policy.'" A similar resolution has been introduced in the Senate.

The fourth resolution, introduced by Rep. William Coyne (D-PA), calls for the U.S. Department of State to refuse to approve the opening of honorary South African consulates within the United States and calls for the Secretary of State to rescind the approval granted for the establishment of the honorary South African consulate in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This sense of the Congress resolution calls for the Secretary of State to reassess the purpose and need for existing South African consulates within the United States.

In addition, on the Senate side, Senate Concurrent Resolution 139 submitted by Senators Roth and Tsongas was reported out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. This resolution condemns the actions of the South African government in arresting and detaining some 200 leaders and activists in the election boycott movement, who reject the new constitutional arrangement that totally excludes Blacks and gives limited participation to Coloureds and Asians. Negotiations are taking place to bring this resolution to the Senate floor for a vote.

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