

GW 55 F4-01, 02

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

LC/AB/FILE

May 24, 1984

Dear Colleague:

On May 23, 1984, we introduced House Concurrent Resolution 298, which expresses the sense of Congress that South Africa release all individuals held at the Mariental detention camp; that the United States reaffirm its policy of not recognizing South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia; and that South Africa recognize and follow the basic precepts of international law.

On April 27, 1984, South African Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee, rescinded the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Namibia over an American-sponsored application which sought the release of prisoners captured during a 1978 military attack on the Cassinga refugee settlement 150 miles within Angola. The South African Government's interference repudiates any notion that Pretoria subscribes to the concept of an independent judiciary or is committed to the rule of law.

During the Cassinga raid, South African defense forces killed over 600 Namibian refugees, many of whom were women and children. More than 100 of the survivors were forcibly removed from Angola and taken to a military internment camp near Mariental in Namibia, where they have been held for six years. South Africa initially denied the existence of the detainees, but, in response to international pressure, finally conceded it is holding survivors of the Cassinga raid.

No charges have ever been brought against the captives. There are reports that the detainees have been severely abused, subjected to harsh conditions, and hard labor. Although the International Red Cross and relatives of a few of the detainees were recently allowed restricted visits, the prisoners were held incommunicado for several years.

Namibian church leaders, friends and relatives of the detainees filed an urgent application in March 1984 in the Namibian Supreme Court urging that the court declare the detentions illegal and order the detainees released. It was this application that was suppressed by South African Minister of Justice Coetsee's action on April 27th.

The revocation of the court's jurisdiction over the case has elicited an outcry from human and legal rights organizations, including the Namibian Bar Council which deplored the action as "contrary to the practices of any civilized legal system."

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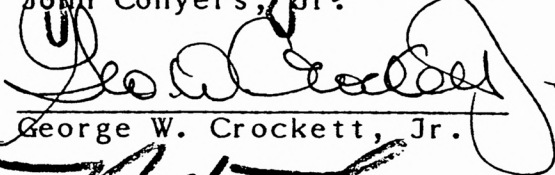
H. Con. Res. 298 unequivocally restates our country's continuing opposition to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, and urges the immediate release of the Mariental detainees. As a result of intense, but short-lived international attention, South Africa's Administrator General in Namibia announced on May 3, 1984 that he was prepared to release 54 prisoners. To date, however, no one has been released from the Mariental camp. We must continue to closely monitor this situation and to exert pressure on the Government of South Africa until all of the detainees are released.

Again, we urge you to join us as a cosponsor of House Concurrent Resolution 298 to reaffirm America's support for the basic precepts of international law and justice, and our attention to the challenge to those fragile standards posed by South Africa's policies in southern Africa.

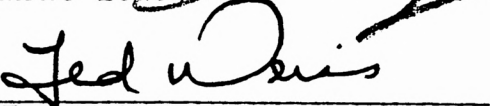
If you would like to join as a cosponsor of this legislation, please contact Mr. Johnnie Hemphill or Ms. Freda Evans at 5-4001.

Sincerely,

  
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John Conyers, Jr.

  
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George W. Crockett, Jr.

  
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Mike Lowry

  
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Ted Weiss

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William H. Gray, III

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Thomas J. Downey

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Stephen J. Solarz

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Howard Wolpe