



# Who Cannot Take Sides?

Sisters and brothers,

This is a solemn occasion.

No journey is more important than to come here to Harare, to participate in this conference on Children, Repression and the Law in apartheid South Africa.

Throughout my entire adult life I have experienced how oppression by the racist regime in South Africa against the majority of the population has cast its deadly shadow around the world — even to our own country far up in the northern hemisphere.

When my husband Olof Palme was murdered by violence one and a half-years ago, he had worked for 40 years against the cruel, insane policy of apartheid. He began as a young student by giving blood to collect money for scholarships for young people — students in South Africa — who had been driven out from their education because of the colour of their skin. Again and again he spoke and demonstrated against the apartheid regime's atrocious oppression.

In 1964, in a speech to the Youth Congress of our Social Democratic Party in Sweden, Olof talked about how the past years had brought both triumphs and disappointments for the idea of human dignity. Hitler's terrorism and Stalin's slave labour camps belonged to history. But in South Africa, Olof said, people were being driven together, they were being deprived of the possibility for work and development, they were being forbidden to move around freely because their skin was dark, or because they had begun to demand their rights.

Already more than 20

STATEMENT BY MRS LISBET PALME AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN, REPRESSION AND LAW IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, HARARE, 24TH SEPTEMBER, 1987.

years ago our friend Oliver Tambo came to us in Sweden to demonstrate against racism together with Olof. At that time we could not even imagine that the racist system in South Africa would continue and expand over more than 20 years to come. We did not know that 20 years later I would have to make my first public speech, in Paris, at the UN Conference on sanctions against racist South Africa, on the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising in June 1986. I was to speak in Olof's spirit. I talked there about the unspeakable violence against children and young people in South Africa and about the death of more than 200 children — through the "indiscriminate use of tear gas, bird shot, metal tipped wips, rubber bullets and live ammunition", to quote the New York based Lawyers' Committee For Human Rights.

In his foreword to that report, the Nobel Peace Prize Winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu urges us to force ourselves to read it because he hopes that we will 'be galvanized into action that will topple apartheid and help establish a dispensation which is just, stable, democratic and safe for all our children, black and white.'

I ended, in Paris, with what Olof said at the People's Parliament Against Apartheid one week before he himself was murdered by violence: "A system like apartheid cannot be reformed it can only be abolished. It is by taking joint responsibility that we can contribute towards abolishing the apart-

heid system. This system can live on because it gets support from outside. If the support is pulled away and turned into resistance, apartheid cannot endure. If the world decides to abolish apartheid, apartheid will disappear."

South Africa was for Olof a question of peace. It was a question of how to achieve justice and prevent war — a civil war throughout South Africa or an even wider conflict.

I am now here in Harare to represent the Swedish National Committee for UNICEF. The UN's Children's Fund has as its task to support children's development wherever in the world it is threatened. UNICEF's projects for spreading knowledge about and implementing programs for mother's and children's health and for water and sanitation are well known in Africa.

UNICEF has also another task: To promote the rights of children. To free children from oppression is the ultimate purpose of UNICEF's advocacy for children. UNICEF has investigated and described circumstances which threaten the lives and health of children — conditions such as those created by the apartheid regime in South Africa. These conditions are also a threat to children throughout the front Line States. The situation for the 15 million children in these countries who are under the age of five is getting worse.

In Angola and Mozambique, the two most affected countries, infant and child mortality rates are now estimated to be the highest



*'The Mangled Remains of the Black CHILD WHO wanted only to play in the Sun'.*

in the world. Last year, approximately 140 000 Angolan and Mozambican children under the age of five died as a consequence of war and destabilization. These shocking facts speak for themselves.

UNICEF's report "Children in the Front Line — the Impact of Apartheid, Destabilisation and Warfare on Children in Southern and South Africa", is one of the devastating reports which is referred to in the list of documents for this conference.

Even to read the titles of the reference list — and I have studied many of these reports — is afflicting to the point of despair. I have read about murdered children, big and small, girls and boys, shot from behind, I have read about the tortured children whose mutilated bodies can often never recover, and whose souls are incurably wounded.

I have read reports which are based on children's own evidence of the assaults against them by police and guards and soldiers — all legal representatives of racist South Africa. It is an unimaginable society which emerges from the children's accounts. The children's way of recounting these horrors is a sign of their own human dignity, but what they are recounting is an abyss. The children relate what they have experienced.

They try to describe something which cannot be understood. They have answered questions under interrogation. They have explained themselves and they have been met by unexpected assault and unexplainable punishment. Children with dignity have met adult oppressors and sadists. — It should not be difficult to take a stand.

Three days ago during the official visit of President Chissano to Sweden I learnt

of yet another shattering evidence of the policies of destabilization in Mozambique. Small boys between 8—10 years were recruited by the bandits. They were trained for bestial acts — even to kill children and women. How can children performing these acts ever grow up to human beings? What can be a deeper degradation of human dignity?

The message of this conference — on outrages against the majority in South Africa, where even children have become a target for oppression — has gone out across the world. Yesterday, in my own country, the Swedish Social Democratic Party interrupted its congress to go out in the streets and squares of Stockholm to demonstrate its solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa. Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, his cabinet and all the delegates took part in handing out



*CDE Mugabe arrives at the Conference Centre where he opened the conference on children under apartheid. With him are the ANC president, Cde Oliver Tambo, and the wife of the late Swedish prime minister, Mrs Lisbet Palme.*

leaflets and collecting money in support of the victims of apartheid.

On Saturday morning, I will myself take the message from this conference in Harare to a conference in Stockholm, organized by doctors, psychologists, engineers, lawyers, journalists, researchers, teachers, meteorologists and architects against nuclear weapons.

The Conference is called "From Arms Race to Disarmament". I will tell the delegates about how we travelled from different parts of the world to Harare to bear witness to the testimony of assault against black children in South Africa. My subject will be: "Arms Race, Children and the Future". How could I not talk of you, of the children of South Africa?

Important elements of the Swedish Government's policy against apartheid is the humanitarian assistance to ANC and SWAPO, to the victims and opponents of apartheid as well as development assistance to South

Africa's neighbours, the Front Line States. This assistance has increased substantially in recent years. Today it constitutes close to 50 per cent of the Government's total appropriations for bilateral assistance. Only last week the Government allocated 33 millions US Dollars in extra emergency assistance to Mozambique.

The Government's humanitarian assistance to the victims of apartheid is geared to children who are forced to leave their country, and thus given a chance to a reasonable way of living. The large number of children and youth, who are detained today, are also receiving assistance for legal defence. This support is imperative so as to give children a chance in the inhuman legal system of today's South Africa. Economic and social support is furthermore appropriated for children whose parents are detained. Yet another area is the support of alternative educational methods — methods beyond the bantu education system.

My husband Olof Palme

has been awarded, posthumously, the Albert Einstein Peace Prize in the United States, and the Jawaharlal Nehru Peace Prize in India.

Our family has decided that the prize money will be used for children and young people in South Africa who are victims of the apartheid system: Children who have lost their parents, children, children and young people who have not been able to study because of their colour, children who have been wounded, and who suffer from the consequences of the violence we have heard about today.

A group of people in South Africa have come together to form a committee which will be called "Olof Palme Children's Trust". They will be part of the work for the children's future in South Africa.

So will we, all of us, who have been here in Harare, and who will return to our countries, bear a message which we can never forget and I keep asking: "Who can not take a stand?"