

PETITION FROM GAOL

“We, the undersigned, being prisoners held in Capetown Gaol, Roeland Street, Capetown, under the emergency regulations, do hereby petition the Honourable the Minister of Justice, as follows:

1. *We have been imprisoned now for periods of up to a month and more. Yet no person has to date told us of the reason for our arrest or confronted us with any charges or allegations or informed us of the period of our confinement.*

2. *All of us were arrested without warrant. We have been denied legal representation and the right to test the legality of our arrests in court. We have not appeared before any tribunal.*

We have no knowledge of any legal machinery whereby we may exercise the elementary right of bringing our cases on review or appeal, or even of obtaining an interview with the competent authorities.

3. *We have been refused access to the emergency regulations under which we are alleged to be held, and have thus deliberately been kept in ignorance of our rights as prisoners.*

We are refused permission to discuss aspects of our cases even with members of our families who visit us.

We are thus deliberately prevented in all possible ways from taking effective steps to obtain our release.

4. *We were torn away, at a moment's notice and in circumstances of the utmost harshness and injustice, from our homes, our wives and children, from our offices, professions and occupations.*

Our families as well as ourselves, and in some cases our employees, are in a state of desperate uncertainty about the future. Not only are our livelihoods being ruined and our careers placed in jeopardy, but our entire lives have been disrupted.

Many of us have young children who now face insecurity and fear because their father or mother, and in some cases both parents, have been taken away from them without reason.

5. *We submit that these circumstances—namely our arbitrary arrest, the complete denial of access to the courts and the law of the land, the failure to prefer charges or allow us to answer allegations, the veil of*

mystery and secrecy shrouding our imprisonment, the fantastic restrictions by which we are cordoned off from the outside world and refused news of events that take place beyond the prison walls, the limitations placed on us in conversations with visitors—represent not only grievous discriminations in matters which are considered the ordinary rights of suspected and convicted criminals, but a reversion to medieval techniques and procedures that have long ago disappeared from all civilized communities.

6. *For the above reasons we ask that we should be brought to trial without delay if it is alleged that we have committed any crime. Failing this, humanity and common justice demand that we should be immediately released.*”

The above petition, dated May 1st, bears the names of Jack Barnett, well-known Capetown architect, Harry Bloom, advocate and author, Brian Bunting, editor and journalist, and H. J. Simons, Associate Professor of Native Law and Administration at the University of Capetown, among the twelve signatories. Harry Bloom, Brian Bunting and Professor Simons have contributed frequently to the pages of *'Africa South'*, while Jack Barnett has drawn many of the maps we have published. Three of the twelve names have not yet been publicly disclosed, as they do not feature in the list of detainees tabled in the South African Parliament by the Minister of Justice.