



DESCOM BULLETIN.

P.O. BOX 18441

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No. 1

Making it known

The Durban Detainee Support Committee launches this monthly bulletin to keep its supporters, and many organisation in the area, informed about detainees. For nearly a year now Descom in Durban has concerned itself with the care and rights of nearly 50 detainees and awaiting trial prisoners. It is also involved in the ongoing national issue and crisis of detentions and deaths in detention.

We are taking a number of new initiatives. At our recent workshop in Durban forty members discussed programmes for education and publicity work which would both increase our own specialised knowledge about detention, but also provide the wider community with resources - speakers, information and research.

We want to have more up-to-date and accurate information on detainees, awaiting-trial prisoners and former detainees. To find more effective ways of serving them and their families and developing a more focussed lobby for medical and legal rights for detainees and the rooting out of the detention laws.

Ukuze kwaziwe

I-Durban Detainee Support Committee ikhipha lelibhukwana elizophuma zinyanga zonke ukuze lazise abelekeleli balelikomidi, kanye nezinye izinhlangano eziningi kulesifunda ngesimo sabantu abagqunywe ezitokisini amaphoyisa ezomoya.

Esikhathini esithi asibe unyaka manje, i-Descom lapha e-Thekwini izinike ukukhathazeka ngokuphathwa namalungelo ababoshwa bezomoya abasondela ku 50 neziboshwa ezisezitokisini ezilindele amacala. Ngokunjalo futhi i-Descom iyelekelela kuloludaba okukhulunywa ngalo sizwe lonke nasekugqunyweni kwabantu amaphoyisa ezomoya okushaqisayo nokufa okubavelelayo.

Kunezinto eziningana ezintsha esesiqalile ukuzenza. Emhlanganweni obukhona muva nje, amalunga angamashumi amane axoxa ngezinhlelo zokufundisa nokwazi-sa abantu okuyiyona ndlela eyothuthukisa ulwazi lwethu oluqondene nokuvalelwa kwabantu amaphoyisa ezomoya, kodwa futhi nomphakathi uthole ulwazi - izikhulumi, izincazelo kanye nokuphenya isimo.

Sifuna ukuthola ulwazi oluphelele noluyiqiniso ngabantu abavalelwa abezomoya, neziboshwa ezisatokile nalabo asebadedelwa abezomoya. Sifuna ukuthola izindlela ezingasebenza kahle ekusizeni labantu kanye nezihlobo zabo sibuye sigqugquzele umkhankaso wamalungelo okwelashwa nowabameli ukuze bavikeleke laba ababoshiwe. Futhi sifuna imithetho yokugquma abantu ngaphandle kokubekwa icala iphele nva.

The Press and the new Act

Some of the effects of the new Protection and Information Act are already being felt in the newsrooms of the Natal Mercury and Daily News. From interviews with senior journalists we found changes in editorial policy which puts the security police in control of information about detainees.

Journalists pointed out that the effects of this were that it would no longer be possible to report the whereabouts of a detainee. They disclosed that:

the March reporting that detainee Pravin Gordhan had been admitted to Durban's St Augustine's hospital, would no longer be possible. Details of Pravin's detention and his wife Pravina's treatment by the security police, were freely published in both the Mercury and Daily News.



Firstly, all stories concerning detentions have to be confirmed or commented upon by the security police, before the editors will allow them to be published. One of the implications of this procedure is that journalists will become a potentially useful source of information for the security police. Secondly, security police in Durban only communicate with police-accredited journalists (usually the crime reporter); this means that all other journalists have only the police P.R.O. in Pretoria to deal with.

This situation in the newsrooms must be seen against a background of increased security police control over the media since March 1982. The first concerted attempt to curtail press reporting of detentions came in May, when security police insisted that the full names and addresses of detainees be given before they could confirm detentions. The spurious reason given for this by them was that "the police could be sued for libel by citizens with the same name". This action was followed in June by an erroneous police directive preventing Natal papers from publishing the names of 3 detainees. This directive was issued in terms of an already repealed section of the Police Act. The newspapers complied with the police ruling, even though it was wrong in law. The Police Act has since been replaced by the wider-reaching Protection of Information and Internal Security Acts.

Even though the Protection Act is vague, and has yet to be tested in a court of law, editors have adopted a policy of extreme caution on matters concerning detentions. The journalists revealed also that a number of reporters have been pressured into disclosing their sources of information after covering stories on detentions. The slender thread of protection that detainees are afforded by other publicising the fact of their detention has been cut. The way is now open to a new wave of terror.... people could just go "missing".

The Durban Conference

About 200 delegates attended the historic two-day conference on detentions and security legislation held in Durban at the beginning of September. The first of its kind in South Africa, it was aimed mainly at members of the legal and medical professions. The many papers presented - and soon to be available in book form - offered new insights into the implications of security legislation and the effects on detainees of solitary confinement. A highlight was the talk delivered by American professor Louis West, in which he outlined some of the findings of his research on American prisoners of war in Korea.

The proceedings ended with the passing of a resolution, which included a re-statement of the original aims of the conference: to focus public attention on the arbitrary and unjust nature of South African security legislation and to encourage changes in attitude; to re-examine the responsibilities of the legal and medical professions; to consider ways in which the hardships inflicted on those who are subjected to the provisions of this legislation can be alleviated. It was also decided that the conference organising committee would remain constituted, in order to look into ways of facilitating contact with lawyers and doctors concerned with detention in the future.

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