

South Africa:

HUNGER IN A LAND OF PLENTY

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Nurse and malnourished child in KwaZulu, South Africa.

"All over the country, children with matchstick legs sit or lie staring blankly into space, their joints and sometimes their stomachs swollen and their growth slowed. Their muscles have begun to waste away and in some cases they suffer from brain damage."¹

South Africa is unique. Many governments limit political rights and keep their people impoverished, but nowhere is the disparity in wealth or the brutality of repression so extreme as in South Africa. It is the only country that constitutionally denies political rights to the majority of its citizens because of the color of their skin.

The white minority government boasts that South Africa is among the top seven food exporting nations in the world. South Africa annually exports over \$1 billion dollars worth of agricultural products, including grain, beef, vegetables and fruits. Yet an average of **136 black children die every day from the effects of malnutrition.**² The extent of hunger is so incriminating that since 1966 the government has prohibited public agencies from publishing or even collecting data on malnutrition among blacks.

South Africa has a good climate and ample farmland. The hunger that plagues millions of South Africans is caused by a human-made tragedy—apartheid.

Apartheid keeps political power in the hands of the white minority—only 16 percent of the population. Blacks cannot vote or even decide where to live. Apartheid impoverishes blacks by enforcing low wages, keeping unemployment high, and prohibiting blacks from owning land in the 87 percent of South Africa reserved for whites.

Over the past few years, drought and economic recession have hit black South Africans the hardest. A nutrition expert at the University of Stellenbosch reports: "Approximately every third black child under the age of 15 in South Africa is malnourished."³ But the current level of hunger in South Africa is built on a centuries-old process of deliberate impoverishment.

A History of Dispossession

When the Dutch East India Company first established a food and fuel station in South Africa in 1652, African peoples had inhabited

the area for centuries, some since 8,000 BC.

The San, often referred to as "Bushmen," were hunters and gatherers who roamed the western Cape. The Khoi-Khoi, sometimes given the derogatory name "Hottentots," herded sheep and cattle. The white settlers soon began taking land from the Africans, pressing them into service and later bringing in slaves from Mozambique, Madagascar, West Africa, and the Dutch East Indies.

In 1795 the British seized control of the strategic food and fuel station at Cape Town, and in 1834 they declared an end to slavery. In response, Dutch settlers trekked inland, seizing the resources of African peoples already settled there. Not only did the white settlers take land and cattle, they also began controlling the Africans themselves.

As white farmers grew increasingly dependent on black workers, the government devised ways to force blacks off their own farms and into wage labor for whites. Imposing taxes on African land, homes, and even dogs meant Africans had to work for whites in order to pay the taxes. African workers were forced to carry an identity document ("passbook"), making it easier for the government to control their movements.

When the 1913 Land Act legalized the racial division of land, whites already monopolized the best farmland. Blacks were no longer permitted to purchase land in most of the country. This prevented Africans from buying farms and competing with white producers. The law left thousands of African families landless, forcing them to work for whites or move to one of the reserves which the government had designated for blacks.

Bantustans: Underdevelopment As Policy

The reserves, barren land of no interest to the whites, became the bantustans of today. The white government has crowded more than half the country's 23 million Africans onto less than 13 percent of the land. The overcrowding of the bantustans has led to deforestation, overgrazing, and severe soil erosion.

The government has been removing "black spots"—remaining sections of black-owned land in the white areas—by bulldozing churches, schools, and stores. Between 1960 and 1982 the government forcibly moved 3.5 million Africans from "white South Africa" to the bantustans: **the largest forced migration ever in peacetime.**⁴

The ten bantustans ("homelands" in government jargon) lack significant industry or natural resources. And black farms are crippled by the fact that blacks can legally own no more than 4 acres of land, too small to support a family.⁵ (Compare this to white farms, which average 3,000 acres.)

The bantustans serve a dual purpose. First, they rob blacks of their South African citizenship by making them citizens of fragmented

"nations," not recognized by any other government in the world. The clearest historical precedent is the 1941 Nazi law that "denationalized" German Jews.⁶

Apartheid: A System of Labor Control

The bantustans also act as labor reserves from which African workers can be drawn when needed for white industry. As the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reports: "Control of labor is the clue to this system; control over land is the mechanism providing control over labor. It is the smallness, overcrowding, and unproductiveness of these reserves which guarantee an unending source of cheap labor to the industrial centers."⁷

With extremely high unemployment rates—over 50 percent in many areas of the bantustans—men are forced to leave their families and migrate to urban areas in search of work. Migrants who find work in the white areas are only permitted to visit their families for a few weeks each year. The breaking up of black families not only causes social and emotional damage, it has also been shown to exacerbate malnutrition.⁸

The few who can find work in the bantustans receive wages as low as \$8 per week.⁹ Low wages, high unemployment, and lack of government services have produced shocking levels of poverty in the bantustans. In Ciskei, for example, 89 percent of the children suffer from malnutrition.¹⁰

While infant mortality for South African whites is only 12 per 1,000—among the best in the world—the infant mortality rate for rural blacks is more than 23 times higher, 282 per 1,000.¹¹ The British medical journal *Lancet* reported that "60 percent of infant mortality among rural blacks was attributable to malnutrition."¹²

While the government was driving Africans off their land and depriving them of resources, it lavished agricultural subsidies and development programs on the white farmers. The Land Bank was established in 1912 to provide credit for white farmers. The government developed a wide array of aid to white farms, including price support subsidies, marketing and storage facilities, various types of technical assistance, and financial aid for buying fuel, fertilizer, and water. Most important, however, have been government programs to provide white farms with cheap African labor.

As early as the mining boom of the late 1800s, white farmers feared that blacks would be drawn to higher paying jobs in the urban areas, leaving the white farms with an insufficient and costly workforce. The white farming community has used its considerable political clout to press for tight control over African labor.

The government established a system of labor bureaus in the bantustans to restrict movement of Africans to urban areas. Blacks over the age of 16 were forced to carry a passbook listing past and present employers, and other personal information. Blacks cannot enter or remain in the white 87 percent of South Africa without proof of current employment there. Today, **every three minutes a black man, woman, or child is arrested on a pass law violation.**¹³

The intent of all this control is 1) to provide exploitable labor for white farms and industry, and 2) to keep blacks divided and therefore easier to dominate politically. Of the many forms of government assistance to white farming, providing a coerced labor force has been the most important.

Conditions for blacks working on white farms are notoriously bad. The pay averages less than thirty dollars per month, lower than





Child labor on a South African farm.

in any other sector of the economy.¹⁴ Housing conditions are deplorable. Health and education facilities for farmworker families are either substandard or nonexistent. Brutality against black farmworkers, including beatings and even murder, is commonplace.¹⁵

Mechanization of white farms has eliminated hundreds of thousands of black farmworkers' jobs. Between 1968 and 1981 permanent employment on white farms fell by 50 percent and seasonal employment declined 70 percent. Seasonal workers can find employment for only two or three months each year, and a growing percentage of seasonal farmworkers are women and children.¹⁶

In recent years, drought and economic recession have caused even more rural unemployment. In 1983 alone, white farms laid off 250,000 black workers.

Increasing rural unemployment has led to growing malnutrition. "There is starvation," reports a Catholic priest doing relief work. "The workers can't get work and so they have only some porridge and a small cup of water, or some tea and sugar and a slice of bread maybe twice a week."¹⁷

Regional Destabilization

"South Africa is an international outlaw"

*The New York Times*¹⁸

Not only has the apartheid regime imposed hunger on South Africa's black majority, it has also reinforced hunger in neighboring countries.

South African military forces have attacked nine countries in the region. South Africa has also used its economic strength to sabotage development in neighboring countries.

This aggression has two objectives. One is to prevent neighboring black-ruled states from setting an example of democratic development that could inspire South African blacks. The other is to discourage neighbors from supporting the African National Congress (ANC), the main liberation movement in South Africa.

Upwards of 100,000 South African troops are permanently stationed in Namibia, in violation of international law. Decades of South African domination have brought economic ruin and civil war.

South African forces based in Namibia regularly make bombing sorties, commando raids, and full-scale invasions into Angola. South Africa also provides vital assistance to antigovernment rebels inside Angola. Regular attacks since 1975 have killed more than 10,000 people, forced several hundred thousand to flee their homes, and caused over \$10 billion in property damage.¹⁹

Africa News reports that in Mozambique "an estimated 2.5 million people are threatened by a famine that is spawned as much by war as bad weather."²⁰ South Africa has repeatedly invaded Mozambique and has provided years of training and material aid to the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), a terrorist group waging war against the Mozambican people. The U.S. Agency for International Development reports that MNR terrorist attacks have "disrupted agricultural production [and] severed lines of communication in all of Mozambique's ten provinces."²¹

Both Angola and Mozambique are well-endowed with arable land, good climate, and ample human resources. But until they can stop spending so much on defense, their vast

agricultural potential will remain untapped.

As long as apartheid exists, the white minority regime will feel threatened by neighboring black-ruled states and will seek to destabilize them. There can be no regional peace as long as apartheid endures.

The Struggle Against Apartheid

Black South Africans have fought continuously for their land ever since the arrival of the first Europeans. Today, groups such as the ANC and the United Democratic Front carry on this tradition of resistance.

For fifty years, the ANC waged nonviolent struggle. It demonstrated, petitioned, and pleaded with the white government, only to have its members jailed, forced into exile, and murdered. After the repeated failure of nonviolent tactics, the ANC had no choice but to take up arms.

In recent years internal opposition has escalated. A growing number of workers are joining unions opposed to apartheid. Hundreds of thousands of black school children protest apartheid by boycotting classes and staging mass demonstrations. Church groups across South Africa, led by Bishop Desmond Tutu and the South African Council of Churches, are taking a firm political stand. And more and more progressive whites are joining the anti-apartheid movement.

The white government has responded to this mass rejection of apartheid with more repression. In mid-July 1985 the government declared a state of emergency which gives the police and military even greater freedom to attack civilians, make mass arrests, and hold prisoners without trial.

U.S. Complicity

Despite imposed hunger, regional destabilization, and increased repression, the Reagan administration has tried to shield South Africa from international pressure. Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement"—asserting that friendly treatment from Washington can coax South Africa to move toward democracy—has totally failed.

South Africa receives important capital and technology from several hundred U.S. banks and corporations. Americans have invested over \$14 billion in the apartheid economy, and the United States is South Africa's top trading partner.

In response to pressure from the anti-apartheid movement, some U.S. companies in South Africa have implemented workplace reforms such as the Sullivan Principles. But since U.S. firms in South Africa employ less than one percent of black workers, no amount of workplace reform will undermine apartheid.²²

WHAT WE CAN DO

Apartheid is the institutional cause of hunger in South Africa. Without its elimination, there can be no end to hunger.

The people of South Africa will overthrow apartheid. They are rising up like never before. Now is the time for us to sever the links between the South African elite and their U.S. allies who help keep them in power.

For people moved by African hunger, here is an opportunity to do more than just donate money. There are many ways to help end apartheid.

1. Educate yourself and others. The American Committee on Africa, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038 (212) 962-1210 distributes a wide variety of written material explaining apartheid and U.S. involvement in South Africa. The Washington Office on Africa, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002 (202) 546-7961, publishes an excellent quarterly newsletter and other useful materials. WOA also has an Anti-apartheid Hotline (202) 546-0408 for updates on U.S. policy toward South Africa. The ANC News Briefing—weekly clippings from the South African press—is available from the African National Congress of South Africa, Suite 405, 801 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017 (212) 490-3487. For a wide range of films and other audiovisual materials contact the Southern Africa Media Center, 630 Natoma Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 (415) 621-6196. Food First is distributing a book by our Issues Analyst Kevin Danaher, *In Whose Interest?: A Guide to U.S.-South Africa Relations*. We are also distributing a curriculum designed for high school and college use, *Strangers in Their Own Country: A Curriculum Guide on South Africa* by William Bigelow.

2. Many city and state governments, colleges, and other public institutions own stock in companies doing business in South Africa.

A growing citizens' movement is pressuring institutions to divest themselves of this stock. For names of divestment groups in your area or information on how to start such a group, contact the American Committee on Africa or the Washington Office on Africa.

3. The Free South Africa Movement has spearheaded anti-apartheid protests in Washington and many other cities. For a local affiliate contact the Free South Africa Movement, c/o TransAfrica, 545 8th St. SE, Washington, DC 20003 (202) 547-2550.

4. Support the Food First ad campaign on South Africa. We will send you free camera-ready ads on hunger in South Africa. With them are instructions for getting the ads placed in newspapers, church and school bulletins, and newsletters. For details, write South Africa Ad Campaign, Food First, 1885 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Notes

1. "Malnutrition stalks 2.9 million S. African children," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 August 1983, p. 8.
2. "The poverty of apartheid," *The Economist*, 2 June 1984, p. 73.
3. Quoted in "Malnutrition stalks . . ." *Christian Science Monitor*.
4. See *Relocations: The Churches' Report on Forced Removals in South Africa* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1984).
5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Land Tenure Conditions in South Africa* (New York: U.N. Centre Against Apartheid, 1976) p. 34.
6. For details on the ruling Afrikaners' connections to German Nazism, see Brian Bunting, *The Rise of*

the South African Reich (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964).

7. United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *Apartheid* (Rome: FAO, 1978) p. 7.
8. John Hansen, "Food and Nutrition with Relation to Poverty: The Child Malnutrition Problem in South Africa," Carnegie Conference Paper No. 205, SALDRU/University of Cape Town, 1984, p. 8.
9. Allister Sparks, "Starvation wages' in tribal homelands," *The Observer* (UK), 9 June 1985.
10. *The Star* (Johannesburg), 1 April 1985.
11. *World Development Forum*, vol. 2, #14, 15 August 1984, p. 1.
12. Cited in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Apartheid, Poverty and Malnutrition* (Rome: FAO, 1982) p. 88.
13. *The Star*, 16 March 1985.
14. "South Africa's Corn Belt: A Harvest of Bitterness," *New York Times*, 14 June 1985.
15. Rosalynde Ainslie, *Masters and Serfs: Farm Labour in South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977) p. 13.
16. Michael de Klerk, "Mechanizing Farming: Implications for Employment, Incomes and Population Distribution," Carnegie Conference Paper #27, SALDRU/Univ. of Cape Town, 1984.
17. "Malnutrition stalks . . ." *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 August 1983, p. 8.
18. *New York Times*, 22 June 1985, p. 20.
19. "South Africa's devastating war," *Intercontinental Press*, 26 December 1983; and Marga Holness, *Apartheid's War Against Angola* (New York: UN Centre Against Apartheid, 1983).
20. "War Worsens in Hungry Mozambique," *Africa News*, 3 June 1985.
21. *Ibid.*
22. See Chapter 2 of Kevin Danaher, *In Whose Interest?: A Guide to U.S.-South African Relations* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1984).
Written by Kevin Danaher
Designed by Gordon Smith

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