

WOMAN

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Struggle

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"FREE THEM PRESIDENT BOTHA"

An "Action Alert" called, "South Africa - Seasonal Appeal for the Release of Young People" sent out to Human Rights and Youth networks of the YWCA on December 1, 1986 yielded a world wide response.

19 national associations and 25 local associations responded by sending letters to President Botha asking for the release of the children with copies to the Human Rights Desk, Geneva. Many other associations and individuals are known to have responded. For example 300 letters were sent from the YWCA of Finland.

In the meantime the number of children detained has increased markedly since December according to the Detainee's Parents Support Committee in South Africa. Their most recent estimation, based on reports from children and families is that over 4000 people of 18 years and younger are being held in detention at this time. The prime target group of state repression being youth between 16 and 18 years old.

The only public response from the South African authorities has been to acknowledge, for the first time, the detention of 281 children under the age 15. The DPSC has described this as "the most cynical sleigh of hand". The group noted in a press release, however, that "the government is under pressure from the worldwide campaign to release the children. It is now in the government's interest to release figures which limit the damage to their credibility".

(Common Concern No.53, March 1987)

LONDON MEETING FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA STRUGGLES

An African National Congress delegation attended a two-day conference held in London focussing on solidarity with the women and peoples of South Africa, Namibia, the Frontline Status and neighbouring countries.

Mako Njobe, Project Co-ordinator of the ANC women's section in Lusaka said that the ANC's message to British women is to support the call for mandatory sanctions against the regime. She is quoted as saying "Apartheid is a very expensive business to run, and sanctions, if applied effectively would mean that South Africa would not have the strength to destabilize southern Africa and run a war inside South Africa".

(From ANC Women's Section in Spare Rib, No.176, March 1987

MENSTRUATING WOMEN BARRED FROM SMALL TOWN FUNERAL

Israeli government radio and television announced on February 2 that the rabbinical authorities in Migdal HaEmek, a small town near Nazareth, have issued a religious order forbidding women to participate in funerals in that town. The report also said that female members of the family of a woman buried the previous week were prevented from entering the ceremony by employees of the rabinnical burial services who blocked the funeral procession until all women left.

The chief Rabbi of Migdal HaEmek said that the order is based on the holy Zohar book which states that menstruating women mixing with men at funerals are the cause of disasters, and that some disasters had occurred in the town lately. He added that the order barring women from funerals was in effect 400 years ago, but had not been used in recent times. The order will apparently be in effect unless a higher religious figure cancels it.

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WOMEN IN POVERTY IN BRITAIN

Figures published in Britain reveal that hundreds of thousands of women are living in conditions described by a government report as "exceedingly squalid"

The report shows that 910,000 women live in 290,000 "bedsit" properties (House of Multiple Occupation) throughout England and Wales. 81% of these "HMO's" lack satisfactory fire escape means, 6 out of 10 are in disrepair and 1/3 of tenants share a bath with other tenants. In 1980 9 women died in a fire in one such hostel.

(Spare Rib No.176, March 1987)

KENYAN SUPPORT GROUP FOR PROSTITUTES

Mombasa women have come together to form a support group for prostitutes. Most (landless, jobless and with little opportunity for study or training) turn to prostitution merely to survive. In Mombasa the local hotel, restaurant and night-club industry has flourished around prostitution, bringing high profits to business owners. The police for their own profit making interests have double standards, while sailors and soldiers temporarily inhabit the town. Once they leave however, the police are likely to raid the main hotels, arrest the women and fine them heavily.

The newly formed group, Solwodi, is determined that this exploitation and hypocrisy will not go unchallenged. The group helps women with food, fines or other needs. They also run a women's centre which serves as a meeting place.

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CHILEAN WOMAN WINS AWARD

Paulina Matta, Chilean author of Album de Fotografias became the first woman to be awarded the Andreas Bellow Award for the work described as a collection of thoughts and feelings documented in spare moments over the years. At 47, Matta entered the literary world late - after raising and educating her two teenage children. The compilation of the book served as a process of self-realisation and self-assertion for Matta. She said she now understood that women can be authors of their own destiny. In her own words: 'Men are always doing things, they have a more or less important destiny. That's not so for women. We always underestimate ourselves and tend to take comfort in this. We confine ourselves to a narrow world. But it's a cop out. We have to break loose, we have to take risks and that's exactly what I did in writing and entering my work for the Andreas Bello Award', (quote from IPS Women's Feature Service.

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