

## INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK OF AFRICA WATCH

1989 was a year of dramatic political developments in Africa which were reflected, in a more modest way, in the work of Africa Watch. This was Africa Watch's first full year of operation. In 1988, we had chosen southern Africa and the Horn of Africa as our two areas of priority, a choice which was vindicated by events in each region.

In southern Africa there were serious moves towards regional peace, culminating in early 1990 in concessions by the South African Government - the unbanning of nationalist organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela - which held out the prospect of genuine political change. Other regional developments received less attention in international circles but were equally significant. In November Namibia successfully held elections for a constituent assembly under United Nations supervision and seemed set to become independent in early 1990. Peace negotiations between the parties to the Angolan civil war did not proceed as fast as some had hoped when rebel leader Jonas Savimbi met President Jose Eduardo dos Santos in Gbadolite, Zaire, in June. But by the end of the year there were again hopes of an end to the conflict in the wake of the Namibian settlement.

Even more unexpectedly, there were serious hopes of an end to the armed conflict in Mozambique. Peace talks under the sponsorship of Presidents Moi of Kenya and Mugabe of Zimbabwe progressed slowly. However, political changes in South Africa raised the possibility that it would finally withdraw support for the right-wing RENAMO rebels. The government of President Joaquim Chissano introduced constitutional changes which improved protection of human rights and appeared to make a political settlement more likely.

However, the generally optimistic picture in Africa's southern cone is offset by further deterioration in the Horn and East Africa. During 1989 the Somali Government's brutal war in the north extended throughout most of the country. In July government troops engaged in a campaign of political killings in the capital, Mogadishu. The Ethiopian Government clung desperately to power in the face of internal opposition and advances by rebel nationalist movements. An attempted coup in May was followed by widespread political detentions. The government continued to use control of food supplies as a means of exerting political control over large areas of the country.

Hopes of an end to the civil war in Sudan were dashed when the army seized power in June. The new government detained hundreds of critics in Khartoum, including members of the overthrown elected government, suppressed public criticism and reintroduced draconian Islamic punishments administered by summary military tribunals. In Kenya the release of political detainees in June was welcomed. However, the general pattern of autocratic rule continued unchanged. In April the government banned a critical news magazine and the press continued to be kept under tight control. Towards the end of the year the government launched a discriminatory screening exercise against citizens of ethnic Somali origin.

Detailed coverage of these and other developments was provided in three major Africa Watch reports on Angola, South Africa and Zimbabwe, followed by another in early 1990 on Somalia. However,

the principal means of publishing rapid information on human rights developments was the News from Africa Watch newsletter, of which 28 were published between March and the end of the year. In some countries, such as Somalia, Sudan and Malawi, these newsletters became the principal source of information on human rights developments, and were widely quoted in the international press.

The flexibility of the newsletter format also enabled Africa Watch to report on developments in countries where it had not yet undertaken sustained work, including Mauritania, Liberia, Ghana and Tanzania.

The collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe will have potentially important consequences in Africa. The reform of the Mozambican constitution and, to a lesser extent, the new openness of the Angolan Government owe much to changes in the Communist world. In Zimbabwe, where the government proposes to move towards a one-party state, Africa Watch has published a report and engaged in a dialogue with the government on human rights protection. The increased mood of East-West cooperation is already bearing fruit in southern Africa. Similar progress is possible in the Horn, particularly in light of the dramatic scaling down of U.S. assistance to Somalia on human rights grounds and the fact that the Soviet Union appears to be pressing Ethiopia to adopt political solutions to the national conflicts which have wracked the country for 30 years.

Africa Watch testified before congressional committees on Somalia, Sudan, Liberia and Kenya, all of them important US allies in Africa, as well as Angola. Africa Watch urged an end to US aid to the Angolan rebel group UNITA, which was shown to have engaged in systematic abuses against the civilian population.

In 1989 much effort had to be devoted to consolidating the organization of Africa Watch. The London office was opened and a governing committee was formed. Africa Watch was granted observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was established under the Organization of African Unity's African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to investigate allegations of abuse. Aside from its work on individual countries, Africa Watch also attempted to stimulate debate in academic, legal and government circles on such issues as the appropriate means for government investigations of human rights violations and the punishment of human rights offenders.

The weakness of domestic human rights monitoring organizations in Africa increases the importance of a continent-wide human rights monitor. However, the need to defend individual human rights monitors faced with persecution has never been greater. This was a central focus of Africa Watch's work in 1989. In Sudan the author of a report on human rights abuses was arrested in July and still detained at the end of the year. An exiled Malawian journalist who had reported on human rights abuses was assassinated in a firebomb attack on his home in Zambia. In Ghana two senior Bar Association officials were detained when they tried to organize a seminar marking the seventh anniversary of the government-sponsored murder of three High Court judges. Later in the year the Ghanaian government banned an African Bar Association conference in Accra

on human rights. These cases exemplify the problems faced by African human rights monitors; all were the subject of Africa Watch action. Africa Watch's August report on South Africa documented the role of the churches in human rights monitoring and the repression they suffer as a result. A series of newsletters throughout the year drew attention to the little-reported persecution of human rights monitors in the South African "homelands."

In its first year of operation Africa Watch won wide praise for the accuracy and timeliness of its reporting. However, the greatest credit must go to Africa's beleaguered and unsung human rights monitors. They are in the front line.

Rakiya Omaar  
Executive Director  
Africa Watch  
MALAWI

In 1989 Malawi celebrated 25 years of independence. For all but the first few weeks of its independent existence, Malawi has been under the untrammelled and autocratic rule of Life-President Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Banda's regime has been marked by widespread political imprisonment, killings of political opponents and the suppression of free expression and intellectual life. Malawi has remained an extremely closed society - a sort of Central African Romania - about which little is known in the outside world. In April, President Banda initiated a wide-ranging purge of the government service to eliminate high-ranking officials from the north of the country. Banda, Cecilia Kadzamira, Banda's "hostess" and her uncle, John Tembo, the ruling triumvirate, are all Chewa-speakers from the Central Region and their rule has been characterized by periodic attacks on the Tumbuka-speakers from the northern region. A number of northerners who criticized these measures were arrested and detained without charge throughout the year. In April, we issued a News from Africa Watch documenting anti-northern discrimination, detentions and deaths of prisoners in custody. In May, Richard Carver published an article in the New Statesman and Society which highlighted the lack of political freedom and the price of Malawi's much-vaunted "stability": torture, imprisonment and ethnic discrimination. Also in May, Africa Watch wrote to the Pope urging him to raise human rights concerns during his forthcoming visit to Malawi.

September 1989 marked the second anniversary of the imprisonment of Jack Mapanje, Malawi's foremost poet. He was apparently detained because of the increasingly critical tone of his poetry, although he is not aligned with any of the exiled opposition groups. He remains imprisoned without charge at Mikuyu Prison. A News from Africa Watch in September reported his case in detail and sought to bring his case to international attention. The Congressional Friends of Human Rights Monitors protested his arrest and continued detention.

In October an exiled Malawian journalist in Zambia, Mkwapatira Mhango, was assassinated in a firebomb attack, along with several members of his family, including small children. It was widely believed that the Malawian Government was responsible. Mhango wrote critically on Malawi's human rights record for foreign

publications and was a member of an exiled opposition party. Another News from Africa Watch was published to discuss the case. In August Africa Watch approached the Malawian Government for its agreement to a mission visiting the country. The government eventually responded in December to say that Africa Watch could only visit if it was prepared to name the sources of its reports of human rights violations; Africa Watch replied that it would not breach that confidence under any circumstances. Earlier, President Banda denounced Africa Watch for "malicious reports" on Malawi.

#### SOMALIA

Somalia's deplorable human rights situation was a primary target of Africa Watch's effort in 1989. Widespread abuses by the government in the northern part of the country, which had been going on for years and increased dramatically when civil war broke out in May 1988, continued and spread to southern regions. Government forces committed a number of massacres of unarmed civilians in both the north and south, including an incident on July 14 in Mogadishu in which at least 450 were killed.

The Somali government, confronting a severe decline in foreign aid as a result of growing concern over its human rights record, launched a concerted campaign to improve its public image. The Prime Minister visited Washington in January. During a meeting with Aryeh Neier and Holly Burkhalter, he promised that the Somali government would grant permission for an Africa Watch mission; this promise was later rescinded. Shortly after this public relations blitz, the government announced a "reform" package, the only concrete measure of which has been the release of some 300 political prisoners between February and June. News From Africa Watch began publication with a discussion of the release of the first 21 prisoners. Additional editions of News From Africa Watch discussed such matters as women in prison; the findings of a report by the General Accounting Office, a Congressional watchdog on human rights in Somalia; the July massacre in Mogadishu; and a substantial update on human rights issues in September, through which Africa Watch was able to generate extensive international press coverage.

Holly Burkhalter testified on Somalia before Congress on three occasions; on February 7, before the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations; on March 9 before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa; and on June 20 she testified before the House Banking Subcommittee on International Development Institutions and Finance. In August, Burkhalter published an op-ed in The New York Times criticizing the Administration's request for funds in the wake of the July massacre.

In August, Rakiya Omaar visited Djibouti to interview refugees for a lengthy report on the war in the North. It was published in January 1990, detailing government atrocities as well as abuses by the rebel forces. She also conducted numerous interviews within the large refugee community in England and Wales.

Because the wars raging in Somalia have forced hundreds of thousands to flee the country and seek refuge elsewhere, the ill-treatment of Somali refugees in neighboring countries was of major concern to us throughout the year. Some 30-40,000 northern Somalis have gone to Djibouti since May 1988, but the Djibouti government

does not consider them "refugees," thereby denying them international protection. Ms. Omaar visited Djibouti in August and interviewed scores of refugees. We issued a lengthy newsletter protesting the harassment, detention under harsh conditions, deportation and expulsion of refugees. Somalis fleeing into Kenya from the south have been detained or forcibly returned to Somalia. Africa Watch published two newsletters condemning the abuses they have suffered at the hands of Kenyan authorities.

#### SOUTH AFRICA

Given the extent of international attention to South Africa compared to black Africa, we decided in 1988 to limit ourselves to areas that we felt needed more attention, principally the situation in the "independent" homelands and the protection of human rights monitors. In August, Africa Watch published a 145 page report about the human rights work of the activist churches in South Africa and the resulting confrontation with the state. The report documented the cases of more than 100 clergy and church workers who have been detained since 1980, some for more than two years, and some of them severely tortured. It also detailed attacks against outspoken churches; and it brought to light the wide range of services offered to the victims. Following the assassination of human rights activist David Webster, Africa Watch published a newsletter both about the killing and the death squads in South Africa, the subject David Webster had been researching at the time of his killing.

Repression in South Africa is most intense in the nominally "independent" homelands which are isolated and under the autocratic rule of leaders dependent on and accountable to South African authorities. Their remote location, and the intense hostilities against human rights monitors has made it difficult even for the strong network of human rights groups in South Africa to document abuses and to support the victims. The only institution which has been able to play this role has been the church. To bring to international attention the gravity of the situation, Africa Watch issued a number of comprehensive newsletters. In August, Africa Watch published a newsletter about mass arrests of church activists in Venda; and in September an issue was devoted to the crackdown against communities resisting incorporation in Bophuthatswana. Africa Watch worked closely with Congressional staff in an effort to protect church and other groups active in the homelands.

#### SUDAN

Civil war has been raging in southern Sudan since 1983, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent victims by slaughter or starvation as both sides to the conflict pursue their political objectives without regard for the welfare of civilians. Millions of others have been forced to flee their homes and live as displaced persons under harsh conditions. Holly Burkhalter testified in Congress three times in an effort to highlight the conduct of the war and to urge Congress to intensify the pressure on the Administration to change its policy of supporting the government. Africa Watch also emphasized the need for the United States to use its influence in the international development banks to encourage human rights improvements in Sudan.

Democratic political forces rallied to promote the cause of peace; by the time of the June coup, a cease-fire was in place and peace negotiations were underway. A coup on June 30 brought an abrupt end to the peace process. The Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation (RCC), headed by Lt.-Gen. Omar Hassan Ahmad al Bashir, purged the judiciary, the army and the civil service, banned trade unions and any form of protest, silenced the press and detained several hundred political prisoners, including lawyers, academics, doctors, politicians, journalists and trade unionists. Special courts characterized by the complete absence of due process were formed to try civilians. These developments aroused massive popular protest against the military government which in turn provoked severe government reprisals.

The June coup happened just as Africa Watch embarked on a major report on Sudan, greatly impeding the gathering of information. The government denied our request to visit. That has not deterred us from making every effort to collect information and to defend those in Sudan who are taking enormous risks to record abuses. Since August, Africa Watch has published eleven issues of News From Africa Watch devoted to the escalating crisis in Sudan. The newsletters have covered such topics as the crackdown on press freedom, the dissolution of the secular independent judiciary, the arrest and continued detention of political prisoners, the abuses committed by pro-government militias, the use of starvation as a weapon of war and the massacre in Jebelin. Africa Watch's comprehensive report on Sudan will be published in March 1990.

#### ZIMBABWE

In December 1989, the two principal political parties - the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union - held a joint congress, thus concluding a process of unification which had begun two years earlier. The unity agreement had led to the release of political detainees and an end to instability in Matabeleland, which had been the scene of serious abuses by both security forces and rebels. However, a number of members of the security forces imprisoned for human rights abuse were released under a presidential amnesty in 1988. In a comprehensive report published in October, Africa Watch criticized the government's failure to bring human rights violators to justice.

Richard Carver, visited Zimbabwe in April. He traveled to Matabeleland as well as to the eastern border area with Mozambique, where there have also been abuses by the Mozambique rebel group, RENAMO. He gathered evidence of illegal detention of Mozambicans by the Zimbabwean army. Carver met the Minister of Justice, Emerson Mnangagwa in Harare to express our concerns about the ill-treatment of Mozambican refugees. Later, Africa Watch engaged in correspondence with Home Affairs Minister Moven Mahachi about a number of security detainees; all but two had been released by year's end.

There was ferment of political debate in Zimbabwe in 1989, leading up to the party congress and general elections expected in early 1990. In April a new political party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), was formed, although its freedom of action was severely circumscribed. Party members were detained and public meetings

banned, and the government-owned newspapers, radio and television gave ZUM neither news coverage nor space for advertising. It appeared that President Mugabe intended to use the 1990 general elections as an effective referendum on the introduction of a one-party state. Africa Watch was concerned that if government muzzling of the opposition continued, there would not be a free election.

Throughout the year the government attempted to limit freedom of speech, including detaining a number of critics, breaking up a seminar at the university on government corruption and arresting student leaders. The leader of the national trade union federation was detained for six weeks after he issued a statement protesting the university closure. Africa Watch issued a series of newsletters throughout the year documenting and calling international attention to these developments.