FOUR OUT OF FIVE DETAINEES TORTURED, STUDY SAYS

[AN] *Scholars at the University of Cape Town have released the preliminary report of a study on "Detention and Torture in South Africa." According to the document, the physical and psychological abuse of political detainees is widespread and on the increase. The two-and-a-half-year study calls detention without trial a key element in government efforts to cripple democratic opposition to the ruling white minority regime. The report says the number of persons detained under security measures in the first eight months of 1985 was already double the total for 1984, with more than 2,400 held under emergency regulations and more than 300 under permanent statutory measures.*

Funded by the Ford Foundation, the report was co-authored by Don Foster and Diane Sandler of the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cape Town. Their work details the conditions and after-effects of detention as revealed through interviews with former detainees living in or near the urban centers of Johannesburg, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Institute director D. Van Zyl Smit says the study's methods are "impeccably scientific" and that "the objectivity of the research techniques cannot be doubted."

In addition to analyzing the data, the report critiques the performance of magistrates, physicians and psychologists in their role as guardians of detainee rights and presents a list of recommended policies to curb the incidence of torture in South African jails. But the researchers conclude that the prospects for a fair system of criminal justice are virtually non-existent within the "fundamentally unjust" context of apartheid. Excerpts from the report follow.

On Security Legislation: The history of detention in South Africa demonstrates that it is not simply an authoritarian aberration on the part of an otherwise benign state. On the contrary, detention is directly linked with political events as a central device to control and supress democratic black opposition to white domination. ...

The contemporary era of detention legislation was ushered in by the Rabie Commission, which was appointed in 1979 to investigate all aspects of security legislation. The report of this commission formed the basis for the Internal Security Act of 1982. Despite the grim revelations of detention conditions revealed by the inquests following the death of Steven Biko and other security detainees, particularly during 1976 and 1977, the Rabie Commission failed to take evidence from former security detainees. In some respects the present study constitutes an attempt to correct this serious defect. ...

On Who Is Detained: Involvement in certain areas of work predisposes people to the possibility of detention to a greater extent than for other types of involvement. In recent years certainly black students' organizations have comprised the most vulnerable work. Casting the net wider, it is clear that involvement in student, youth and education-related aspects is associated with the highest rates of detention (53.2% of former detainees surveyed), followed by trade union-related activity (14.5%), community work (12.2%), and political organization (8.7%). ...

On Forms of Torture: [Some] 83% [of former detainees interviewed] reported some form of physical torture during detention. The most frequent form of torture (75%) was beating, which included punching, hitting, kicking and slapping, as well as beating and whipping with a variety of implements and other forms of assault. The next three most frequently reported forms of physical abuse were forced standing (50%), maintaining abnormal body positions (34%) and forced gymnasium type exercises (28%). In addition, 25% reported having been subjected to electric shock, 18% to strangulation either by hand or by means of a cloth or towel, and 14% to suspension in various forms.

Other forms of physical torture were reported by 27% of cases. Analysis of these other descriptions revealed the following most frequent forms of abuse: manacles, including handcuffs, legs constantly chained and chains placed round the neck (15%); pulling out or burning hair or beard (5%); genital abuse (3%), and falanga, which involves beating the soles of the feet with some implement. ...

On Race snd Sex: The following general patterns are apparent:

- The frequency of females claiming physical torture was generally lower than those of males for all forms, with the exceptions of forced standing and excess heat and cold.
- Whites made notably fewer claims regarding physical torture than did blacks. While 69% of whites claimed no form of physical torture, only 7% of African and 17% of Indian respondents reported no torture. Higher frequencies for blacks of virtually every particular form of torture were evidenced.
- Results show that the youngest age group, below the age of 20, were apparently the most heavily tortured, only 7% claiming no physical torture.
- Results by region show that physical abuse of detainees was most severe in the Eastern Cape and Border, only 5% and 9% respectively claiming no torture. Respondents from the Western Cape region claimed the least frequency of physical abuse (56% claimed no torture). ...

On Psychological Torture: Psychological forms of abuse have been recognized as torture by ... international bodies concerned with legal, medical and criminological ethics and aspects of human rights. ...

A high proportion of the sample claimed to have been subjected to various forms of psychological abuse. No cases reported an entire lack of psychological abuse. Over half of the cases reported having been subjected to the following forms: false accusations (83%), solitary confinement (79%), verbal abuse (71%), threats of violence to self (64%), contradictory styles of interrogation (57%), and being given misleading information (51%).

There is a tendency for females to report greater frequencies than males in a number of psychological forms—solitary, threats, rewards, blindfolding, sleep deprivation, prolonged interrogation and others—although the differences are not particularly substantial. Whereas blacks received sytematically more severe physical torture, the differences were less substantial regarding psychological forms. In certain forms such as knowledge of abuse of family, threats of prolonged detention and sleep deprivation, whites' responses were marginally more frequent. In categories such as violence and verbal abuse, however, blacks were apparently somewhat worse treated.

Conclusions: Viewed overall, the findings show quite clearly that torture in both physical and psychological forms has been practiced systematically on a widespread basis as a part of the coercive treatment of security-law detention in South Africa. ...

It is recommended that the whole system of detention in terms of the Security Laws should be abolished forthwith and that South Africa revert

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lated by six Democratic members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The House Africa subcommittee also held hearings both on Angola and Namibia.

Coincidently, a high-level economic delegation from Angola has been visiting the U.S. seeking foreign investment and outlining recent changes in economic policy giving the private sector a larger role. The delegation, which has been to Atlanta, Washington, Boston, Los Angeles, and New York for meetings with American business executives, includes Minister for Foreign Trade Ismael Gospar-Martins, Herminio Esconcio, director general of the state oil company Sonangol, and Mario Pizarro, vice governor of the central bank.

In New York, President dos Santos also met with top business leaders at a dinner sponsored by Bankers Trust and Chevron, which last year acquired Gulf Oil, along with Gulf's sizeable stake in the Cabindan offshore oil fields in Angola. ■