



June 3, 1991

Mr. Herman Cohen
Assistant Secretary of State
The State Department
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Cohen:

Our Task Force on Southern Africa requests your immediate assistance on behalf of the Group 4 community of approximately 24,000 people of Thornhill in the northern Ciskei. The only nourishment many residents receive is through an Operation Hunger feeding program. It is not sufficient, and men, women and children continue to die each day of malnutrition. People in Thornhill are thus starving as a direct result of apartheid.

The Thornhill community left Herschel shortly before Transkei independence in 1976, specifically because they wished to retain land and residence in South Africa. Unfortunately, the transit camp where they were placed was soon incorporated into the Ciskei. As early as April, 1975 Mr. Uys, the Deputy-Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development, promised compensatory land to the people of Thornhill. The promises were never kept, and 15 years later the people of Thornhill are still waiting for the South African government to fulfill both its promises and its responsibilities to them.

In January of this year, after the Deputy-Minister of Education and Development Aid visited the community, he stated that the South African government would accept responsibility. At a subsequent meeting in March, however, he retreated from his earlier position and suggested that perhaps no compensatory land had ever been promised. The residents of Thornhill are not only distressed by the government's lack of good faith, but are desperate for food. All they have asked over the past decade and a half is some land to cultivate in order to sustain themselves. Even this has been

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The Rev. Elaine J. W. Stanovsky
President-Director

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denied them by the apartheid regime. If the de Klerk government is trying to win friends abroad by contending that apartheid is dead, let that government prove it by providing basic land and adequate resources for its own people. Thornhill is the perfect place to start before it is too late.

As you can see, this is a life-and-death matter that requires your immediate attention. Our United States government cannot permit the people of Thornhill or any other people to starve to death. We implore you to use whatever means are necessary to see that the South African government fulfills its promises to the people of Thornhill. Rest assured that, in the meantime, we will redouble our efforts to have the United States Congress intensify sanctions against the apartheid regime.

Thank you for what we anticipate will be a vigorous humanitarian response on your part. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Prince, Chair
Task Force on Southern Africa

cc: Rev. Elaine Stanovsky
Honorable George Mitchell
Honorable Claiborne Pell
Honorable Brock Adams
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17 May 1991

The State President
Parliament of the Republic of South Africa
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FAX: SA-21-461 4987

Dear Sir

THORNHILL COMMUNITY

We act on behalf of the Group 4 community of approximately 20 000 people at Thornhill in the northern Ciskei.

Some of the history and present circumstances of the community will be apparent from the correspondence and documents attached to this letter.

In short, the Thornhill community left Herschel shortly before the Transkei gained independence in October 1976 in order to avoid incorporation into Transkei. They were resettled at the Thornhill transit camp near Whittlesea. Following the independence of the Ciskei, the community was incorporated into that country. Promises of compensatory land made by Mr Uys, the Deputy-Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development, to members of the Group 4 community (amongst others) in April 1975 were never fulfilled. Today, 15 years later, the community is still living in a transit camp.

Despite extensive negotiations with both the South African and Ciskeian governments over the last 15 years, there appears to be little prospect of resolving the issue.


In January this year the Deputy-Minister of Education and Development Aid visited the community and stated that the South African government would accept responsibility for the community and expressed the hope that the problems facing the community would be speedily resolved.

The hopes of the Thornhill residents were raised by this development. However, at a subsequent meeting in March, the Deputy-Minister expressed doubt over whether compensatory land had in fact been promised to Thornhill residents. As the minutes of the meeting at which these promises were made had been sent to the Deputy-Minister's department, the community representatives thereafter lost faith in the Deputy-Minister's ability to resolve the dispute.

The situation in Thornhill is desperate. As is apparent from the press reports attached to this letter, the fragile survival networks established in the area are breaking down and people are starving to death.

We appeal to you to intervene personally in the matter and to meet with representatives of the community as a matter of urgency. We are aware of the demands on your time and do not make this request lightly, but we can see no other way forward out of the present deadlock.

Yours faithfully
LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE


P. Hathorn