

Ban on Political Activity Most Sweeping in Decade

By David Crary

SOUTH AFRICA — The government's crackdown on militant Black political groups is intended to reassure ultraconservative whites and convince Blacks that tough opposition tactics will not work.

The government banned political activity by 18 opposition groups, including South Africa's largest anti-apartheid organization and its biggest union federation. It was the most sweeping crackdown in a decade.

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Organizations affected by the ban have been unwavering in their rejection of President P.W. Botha's efforts to install cooperative Black local officials and to draw moderate Blacks into power-sharing negotiations aimed at preserving white political power.

Now the groups cannot, for example, campaign for Black-majority rule or organize a boycott of Black municipal elections planned for October.

"Every single peaceful action we can take has now been criminalized," said the Rev. Allan Boesak, a co-founder of the United Democratic Front, a coalition of more than 600 groups.

The front, with more than 2 million members the largest Black political organization, and 16 other groups are forbidden from any activity except book-keeping and court action.

Boesak said the restrictions were part of a bid "to lure a certain section of the Black community into the government camp" before the municipal elections.

He said the government "wanted to create conditions in which, with no boycott, it would appear that its plans and its candidates had generally been accepted."

By imposing the regulations a week before two parliamentary by-elections, Botha also appeared to be trying to blunt criticism from the extreme-right Conservative Party.

The Conservatives are favored to win both contests over candidates from Botha's National Party and have campaigned on a platform accusing the government of caving in to Black pressure.

served with notices barring them from further work with their organization.

The Conservatives complained that the restrictions, which anti-apartheid groups termed a "declaration of war," were not enough.

The restrictions follow a series of tough government statements and act against politically hostile neighboring countries. Among those actions are South Africa's military intervention in the Angolan civil war and threats of "hot pursuit" raids into Zimbabwe against guerrillas who cross the border to stage attacks in South Africa.

Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu said the regulations were "a vicious and provocative act by a government which has become a serious threat to southern Africa."

"Where do we go from here?" asked the Black Sash civil rights group in a statement. "Into absolute totalitarianism, with the government and its right wing competing for the spoils."

If the ban proves effective, the ranks of opposition groups could be thinned drastically. Among the survivors, for the moment, are white-led groups such as the Black Sash and church-related groups such as the South African Council of Churches.

The government's orders allow the militant Congress of South African Trade Unions, the main Black labor federation, to remain in operation but bar it from political activity. The general-secretary of the congress, Jay Naidoo, said the regulations, plus pending legislation to curtail strikes, would be tantamount to an outright ban of the group's existence.

Inkatha, with 1.5 million members the second-largest Black political group after the United Democratic Front, was not affected by the new regulations. The president of the organization, Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, considers himself a foe of apartheid but opposes the militant strategies espoused by the front.

More than 400 people have been killed in the past year in a power struggle between the front and Inkatha in Natal province. Several United Democratic Front leaders involved in efforts to begin peace talks were

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