



## PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER

"CRY FREEDOM" PREMIERE  
SYDNEY - 10 FEBRUARY 1988

As Australia celebrates its Bicentenary, "Cry Freedom" is a stark, powerful reminder that, in South Africa, a different kind of anniversary is in train: the fortieth anniversary of apartheid.

In these forty years, many former colonies throughout Africa, the Caribbean and in our own Asia-Pacific region have achieved nationhood with majority rule and independence. The concept of racial equality has become accepted as a basic fact in the international community as a whole. But in South Africa those four decades of Nationalist Party rule have seen only the development of an anti-democratic state built on discrimination, injustice and brutality.

Steve Biko's story as told by Sir Richard Attenborough in "Cry Freedom", forces us again to face the human tragedy of South Africa today. Steve Biko was obviously an exceptional individual in his courage and the force of his personality.

But tragically, in confronting an intransigent and inexorable police state, Biko's was not an isolated fate. It is typical of the experience shared by so many blacks in South Africa from leaders such as Nelson Mandela to unknown numbers of people, including even children.

The plight of children as victims of the apartheid system lends a special poignancy to this film and to this evening's Australian premiere.

I am particularly pleased that the proceeds of tonight's showing will go to UNICEF which does so much for children all around the world, including the many in South Africa who continue to be the brutal victims of apartheid.

"Cry Freedom" also highlights, in the story of Donald Woods, the troubles that await white South Africans who dare to support the cause of justice and freedom.

For millions of South African blacks, life under the now seemingly permanent provisions of the State of Emergency remains appalling.

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In the townships, poverty, ill-health, evictions and violence continue to prevail either unhindered or actively helped by the security forces.

In Australia we see less of this South African oppression these days because of the new censorship regulations, the purpose of which is to keep South Africa's shame from the world.

But trying to hide apartheid doesn't make it go away.

That official silence gives us the responsibility to ensure that we do not become immune to the horrors of apartheid or allow other, more immediate, tragedies and troubles to dissipate our sense of outrage and our determination to achieve peaceful change.

And the silence of censorship also makes it very important that "Cry Freedom" has been made. It is encouraging that this film will undoubtedly reach millions of ordinary people around the world. It frustrates the South African Government in its attempts to hide apartheid and keeps world attention focused on the enormity of the issue. It shows the tragic human reality behind the cold facts of the apartheid system and the methods used to enforce it.

There is encouraging evidence that the international community remains determined to keep up the pressure for change on the minority government of South Africa.

Within the Commonwealth, that concern has made Southern Africa the dominant political issue at the two most recent meetings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Nassau and Vancouver, and the subject of a special Commonwealth Summit in London in 1986.

In 1985, in response to an Australian initiative, the Commonwealth established the Eminent Person's Group, whose aim was to provide a basis for negotiations between the South African Government and representative black groups.

The EPG was co-chaired by Malcolm Fraser, and I take this opportunity once again to express my appreciation of his role both in Government and later with the EPG, in helping the international community to a proper understanding of the issues at stake in South Africa.

As well as helping to set up the EPG, Australia has also participated very fully, both in the Commonwealth and independently, in the imposition of economic and other measures designed to put pressure on the South African Government to come to its senses before it is too late. South African whites are feeling increasingly under pressure from such measures and, as their own Minister for Finance has acknowledged, the South African economy has been significantly affected.

My Government has also been concerned to do what we can to help the victims of apartheid. Last month, we announced an increase from \$55 million to \$100 million in our current three year aid program for Southern Africa.

A few days ago, Mr Hayden attended a meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in Lusaka, the aim of which was to push forward the Commonwealth's goals in Southern Africa.

I am pleased that an Australian proposal, which I had made at the Vancouver Commonwealth Conference, for a study of ways of limiting international financial links with the South African economy was enthusiastically endorsed by the Lusaka meeting.

Western nations, which have ignored the case for economic sanctions, citing as their justification that sanctions would only hurt the black majority, would do well to consider the views of Steve Biko, as quoted in a recent newspaper interview by Donald Woods:

"Steve Biko used to say you must always ask the victims what they want - not the non-victims."

Along with the overwhelming majority of representative South African black leaders, Steve Biko was strongly in favour of sanctions against South Africa.

Australia of course has not been free of its own racial problems - a fact which we acknowledge in particular during our Bicentennial as we review our history and look to the future. The question of black deaths in custody, which is an issue in "Cry Freedom", has been a subject of profound concern to my Government in recent months and the apparent scale of the problem has rightly caused anguish in our community.

Our public response to this situation and the actions taken by the Commonwealth and State governments in Australia to tackle it reflect the world of difference that exists between the nature of the problem here and in South Africa and between the political systems in Australia and South Africa.

We quickly mobilised Federal and State resources in the establishment of a Commonwealth/State Royal Commission, headed by Commissioner Muirhead to enquire into these deaths. We have sought the fullest participation of Aborigines in the Royal Commission processes. When, after the Royal Commission had been operating for some weeks, the number of deaths identified was found to be significantly larger than first thought, we took rapid steps to augment the Royal Commission, with the objective of seeing that answers are produced as quickly as possible.

This systematic, principled approach we have taken is aimed at unravelling the causes of the problem and identifying remedies. In South Africa, the authorities try to ignore or to conceal the truth of violent and illegal acts carried out by the police and the security apparatus and to do nothing to deal with the fundamental evils of the apartheid system and the human tragedies that flow from it.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is instructive to compare "Cry Freedom" with another of Sir Richard Attenborough's films, "Gandhi" - a film which also deals with the great themes of racial equality and political freedom, and non-violent political protest.

The oppression which Gandhi experienced in South Africa had a fundamental impact on his subsequent struggle in India and on the whole course of Indian history - indeed, it is no exaggeration to say, world history. The oppression and death of Steve Biko, decades later, continue to have an impact on the fight for freedom in South Africa, the outcome of which is yet to be determined.

But the outstanding difference between the two stories, and I believe it is a tragic one, is that, unlike Gandhi's cause, the cause in which Steve Biko risked and lost his life remains unachieved. The forces which destroyed him still prevail. His people remain in thrall to them. Their struggle goes on.

What we must realise is that time is running out. The wisdom, moderation and courage so fully possessed by Steve Biko is in limited supply. If the successors to Steve Biko fail to achieve the necessary reform, then they may be replaced by leaders with less wisdom, less moderation, less courage. The consequence for all South Africans, black and white, and for all of us who care about the future of South Africa, would be dire indeed.

I believe we all owe Sir Richard Attenborough a great debt for lending the weight of his talent and prestige to telling the inspiring but tragic story of Steve Biko.

"Cry Freedom" reminds us that the monstrous injustices of the apartheid system continue undiminished. The film enables us to feel directly the human dimensions of the tragedy of South Africa. I am sure that Sir Richard's film will play a major role in furthering public understanding of the great moral and political issues involved.