

INTERNATIONAL

South African police racial abuse caught on tape

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — A videotape showing white police officers setting dogs on three black men, beating them and shouting racial slurs has outraged a nation ashamed of its apartheid past and sharpened debate on the pace of change.

The videotape, broadcast last Tuesday on state television, apparently was filmed two years ago by one of the policemen during the attack. The officers said the attack was staged as a training exercise for the dogs. News reports said the officers later showed the tape for entertainment.

Since the broadcast, South Africans have flooded newspapers with letters expressing outrage, some calling for the death penalty to be reinstated. The story has dominated South Africa's media, even overshadowing the undecided U.S. election.

Although most South Africans — black and white — have reacted by demanding

tough measures to root out police racism, a few wrote newspapers to support the policemen, underlining the deep divisions that remain in post-apartheid South Africa.

"We don't have a lot of time to solve these kind of problems. The event should be dealt with like a national emergency," Abdul Minty, deputy director-general of the Department of Foreign Affairs, told reporters Friday in Pretoria.

The six officers were charged with attempted murder Wednesday and remanded into custody until Nov. 17, when they are scheduled for a bail hearing.

Sally de Beer, a spokeswoman for Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi, said the black men in the attack were accused of being illegal immigrants.

The attack took place at a field northeast of Johannesburg, he said.

The videotape showed the officers punching the men

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when they tried to defend themselves. The bleeding victims, their clothes in tatters from the dog attacks, were then forced to stand in a line as some of the officers hit them.

Now, police aren't releasing any details about the victims.

Zizamele Cebekhulu, president of the Police and Prisoners Civil Rights Union, said racism had been institutionalized in the police service and it is very far from ending.

Although 58 percent of police officers are black, ac-

cording to official statistics, specialized squads — such as dog units — remain largely white, Cebekhulu said.

De Beer said there are several programs to deal with racism in the police force and that Selebi, after seeing the videotape, is considering more.

Since the broadcast, people have complained about police attacking them with dogs.

"The misuse of police dogs seems to be a regular occurrence in some dog units in the country," the Independent Complaints Directorate,

which investigates complaints against police, said in a statement Friday. It listed four incidents in which suspects were mauled by dogs dating to May 1999.

Tuesday's broadcast comes four months after two white police officers received suspended jail sentences for beating two black hijacking suspects and setting a dog on them.

The British Broadcast Corp. aired footage of that attack last year.

Such brutality, common during apartheid years, still occurs regularly, Cebekhulu said.

Amnesty International said Friday it "has continued to receive corroborated evidence ... of the torture and severe ill-treatment of individuals in the custody of law enforcement agents."

On Friday, the tiny right-wing white Herstige Nasionale Party issued a statement saying "hysteria" over the attack was misplaced.

"The continued excessive publicity on the incident will only encourage racial hatred against whites," party general secretary Louis van der Schyff said.

Jody Kollapen, a member of South Africa's Human Rights Commission, said the attack indicates the country's hopes of quickly turning into a "Rainbow Nation" where people all colors live in harmony were too high.

"While those concepts made us feel good, they were also a bit unrealistic in that they did not consider the depth of racial hatred in South Africa and its history," he said.

Zimbabwe's Supreme Court bans land reform

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Zimbabwe's Supreme Court said Friday that the government's land reform plan and the occupations of white-owned farms were illegal — a ruling that poses a serious challenge to President Robert Mugabe.

In the past, Mugabe has indicated that he will go ahead with a plan to seize white-owned land for redistribution among landless blacks, no matter what. Government officials were not available for comment after the ruling Friday evening.

The five judges also ordered police "to use all means and authority available" to end the occupations of 1,700 white-owned farms by ruling party militants.

Police have ignored previous court orders to remove the occupants. The Supreme Court ruling said police commanders could be charged for contempt if they do not obey the new order within 48 hours.

Six farmers have been killed and dozens of farm workers beaten since the occupations began in February. The occupations have disrupted farming, raising fears for food shortages.

Authorities plan to seize 3,000 white-owned farms by the end of the year under

Mugabe's "fast track" land reform plan, which began in June. According to law, the government must assess how much land improvements, such as irrigation and roads, on the farms are worth, and pay accordingly. It doesn't have to pay for the land.

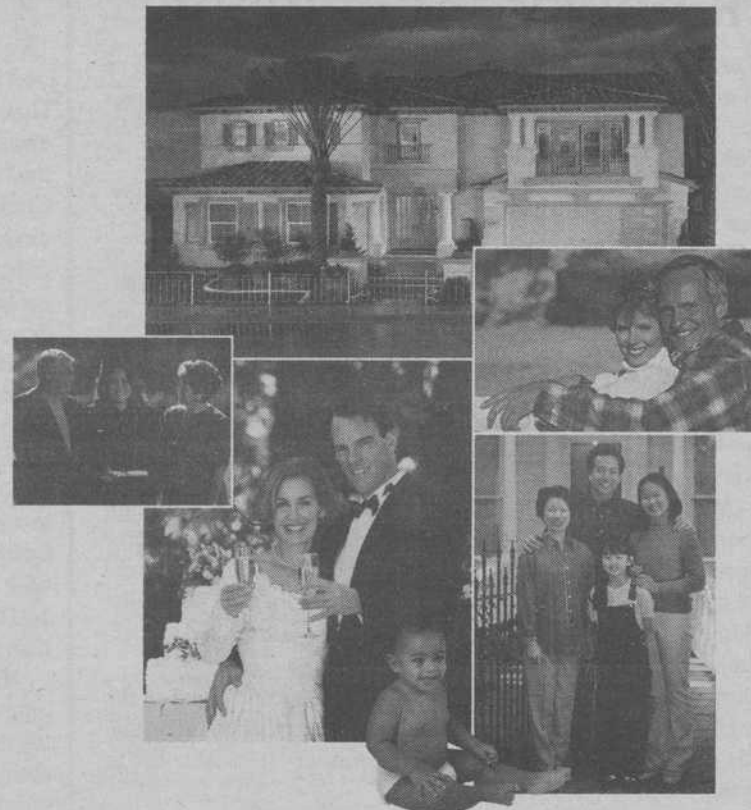
The Supreme Court said the government has failed to carry out the assessments, and it has failed to give landowners three months notice of the takeovers, as legally required.

David Hasluck, head of the Commercial Farmers Union, which represents Zimbabwe's white farmers, said he was "absolutely delighted" with the Supreme Court order.

Zimbabwe's independent court system has often issued rulings declaring government moves illegal. Ruling party legislators have called for the resignation of all five Supreme Court judges.

Opponents accuse Mugabe of using land seizures to improve his diminishing popularity. His ruling party won parliamentary elections held in June, while the main opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change won 57 of 120 elected seats. Mugabe's party controlled all but three seats in the previous parliament.

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