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Statement by Lorenzo Komboa Ervin (on his imprisonment in Australia)

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

July 9, 1997

I wish to make this statement to the Australian people, and especially to the Black people of this country. It will probably be my last statement as I shall have been forced out of the country or held incommunicado at an undisclosed prison in another part of Australia, a place where my attorneys will not be able to freely visit me. I realize by revealing the facts of my treatment while in prison ensures even harsher punishment.

When you last saw me, I had gone into an immigration hearing in good faith expecting the law to be applied fairly and impartially in my behalf. This has not been the case however; I was taken into a virtual star chamber proceeding and told the decision to deport me from the country had already been made by the immigration minister on the grounds of "national security". My attorneys attempted to obtain another visa, and was told that this would not even be considered. The decision had already been made at "the highest levels of Government", meaning John Howard, the Prime Minister.

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You may ask what are my conditions of confinement like, well let me tell you that i am being grossly mistreated in order to force me to drop all legal proceedings. Although I cooperated with authorities and their visa probe, I have been treated as nothing but an enemy of the state. Upon arriving at the prison, I was shoved around and even had my head, thrown face-first into a wall, whereby my eyeglasses were broken. I had done nothing to provoke this attack, and did not retaliate as it was clearly a well arranged provocation. I said nothing, I know how the prison regime works, "do not complain unless you want more".

Still, the irony of this cannot fail to escape me. I am being treated worse than I was in the American prison system. I was literally dragged by handcuffs behind my back, and then thrown into a high security solitary confinement cell, where I am to be held. In such a situation as this, I can easily see why so many Australian Black prisoners have committed suicide, they have been driven to it by the Australian police state. This is nothing but behaviour modification, to break one's will. In my case, they want me to agree to deportation, and thus make it seem I went along with my captors. I refuse, even though my refusal will worsen my situation.

I am thus a prisoner of conscience in this police state, held on charges from a time when I was a Juvenile, a 19 year old Black civil rights activist in the South. I am now a 50 year old adult, not even the same person. Which is why the American parole and political authorities have cleared my record. Then the question becomes, what is Asutralia worried about? What is my crime now?

Foolishly, the Australian government is deciding to declare the Black Panther Party, which has been disbanded since 1973, as a "terrorist organisation", and anyone who has ever been a member as a "political criminal". Well, it will be interesting to see the government's response when Bobby Rush, a united States representative from Chicago, attempts to come to Sydney for the 2000 Olympic games. Mr Rush was a member of the Chicago Black Panther party, and is now one of presidnet Bill Clinton's key advisers. And what

about John Lewis, a black rpresentative politician from Atalanta, Georgia, who was arrested numerous times as part of Dr Martin Luther king's civil rightrs campaign in the Southern US during the 1960's? Will these prominent people be arrested and jailed when they come here during the Olympics surely because of their past.

What will I now do? I will try to reach a consular officials of my country, although they have not yet allowed this, to complain about my arrest and conditions of confinement. I will also try to let the world' media and human rights organisations know of my situation, since the Australian Judiciary has no independence and will not protect my international human rights.

I do not favour the prospect but I may be killed while in custody, and have my death ruled a "suicide". Whatever the situation, I will not give up the fight.