

## **CAPE CHURCH LEADERS' STATEMENT**

**ON**

### **CHURCH MINISTRY IN TIMES OF GRIEF AND OPPRESSION (21/7/87)**

Archbishop Stephen Naidoo, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr. Alan Boesak expressed "disquiet at the way police tend to handle funerals which have strong community associations", at a press conference.

"In particular, we are dismayed at the turn of events at the Ashley Kriel funeral which ended in police firing teargas at the crowd, that included church leaders.

"It should be clear to all concerned that funerals of this kind have the potential to become explosive if handled insensitively. It was for this reason, to ensure a peaceful and dignified funeral service, that church leaders in Cape Town tried to negotiate concessions on the restrictions imposed by the authorities. We also pleaded that police maintain a low profile, act with restraint and ignore the odd provocation. We acted in the belief that together, clergy and police could work to defuse a potentially volatile situation caused by the announcement of restrictions.

"From our side, we undertook to ensure that the mourners would behave themselves and that there would be no violence.

"It is important that both the authorities and the public understand that the clergy's presence had nothing to do with political affiliations or alliances. Our presence is an essential part of the Church's ministry to her people in their moment of grief, of anguish, of loss and of oppression. At the same time it is a fact of life that because of the nature and composition of South African society, funerals have become sensitive occasions at which deep emotions and frustrations are expressed.

"Church leaders attended the Kriel funeral in the firm belief that a working arrangement had been agreed on with the police. We arrived at Bonteheuwel fully prepared to put our trust in the police to keep their part of the bargain.

"Regrettably, this did not happen. Without provocation, teargas was fired, upsetting the mourners and the officiating clergy. We record our protest at this action and now call on the authorities to take positive steps to prevent similar unfortunate incidents. We also call on the authorities to reconsider the whole question of funerals and to treat them with the sensitivity they deserve. This calls for the use of police officers who are themselves capable of a sensitive appreciation of the situations placed in their care.

#### **Commitment for peace**

Archbishop Tutu said that church leaders were committed to peace. "If we were people who did not care about violence nor opposed it as we have consistently said we do, then we would not have been concerned about what was going to take place at this funeral. Being black and coming from those communities we are aware of the anguish. We don't need to be told about how we feel. And we know the kind of

feeling in our community, and we were very deeply concerned that an already volatile situation exacerbated by the restrictions should not ignite’.

Archbishop Naidoo added: “It’s important to emphasise what steps we took and that we took them so that the whole situation would be defused. Obviously we feel that we have been betrayed. We would like people to know from our side just how we see this betrayal, and how we feel about it.

“Our commitment to peace remains, but we have been put in an extremely difficult position. Once we put our credibility on the line, and once our credibility has been betrayed like this, we are put in a very awkward position with regard to the future.”

Dr Alan Boesak emphasised that: “If there are more funerals our people will need us and we will be there.”