

SACBC COMMENT ON THE 17 MARCH REFERENDUM (25/2/92)

It is in the best interests of all South Africans to know as clearly as possible where the white community generally stands on the issue of a negotiated settlement for a non-racial democracy in our country.

In recent months, the Nationalist Party has lost several by-elections. The white right of South African politics has used this to claim legitimacy and has increasingly become more aggressive. Given the reality of South Africa's history, neither the right nor the white population as a whole can be ignored. The transition to a new South Africa, which cannot be stopped, can either be a peaceful one or one fraught with more conflict and bloodshed.

On the one hand, the white community must realise that by voting 'No' it is actually choosing conflict and bloodshed. On the other hand a 'Yes' vote will indicate a desire for peaceful if difficult negotiations. Although the white minority has no moral right to exercise a veto over the majority, all South Africans have a right to know what the future is likely to hold.

Sadly, the referendum as called by President de Klerk, is a legacy of our Apartheid history. But past history can be turned to present advantage. Whites have often been asked to express sorrow for the past. The best apology is a change of behaviour. We urge all white people to vote a resounding 'Yes' as a clear apology for Apartheid and a firm commitment to a future democratic South Africa. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference looks forward to the day, hopefully before the end of this year, when all people of South Africa can exercise their democratic right to vote in choosing a new constitution and a new government.