

## **SACBC DEATH SENTENCE CLEMENCY PLEA (MARCH 1983)**

The Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa, thirty in all, representing Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa, sent the following petition to the State President:

In my capacity as President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, I write on behalf of the Conference to plead for commutation of sentence in respect of six prisoners condemned to death: Simon Mogoerane, David Moise, Jerry Mosolodi, Thabo Marcus Motaung, Johannes Shabangu, Anthony Tsotsobe.

All six have been found guilty of high treason arising out of attacks on police stations at Moroka, Orlando and Wonderboom or of other acts of treasonable nature alleged against them.

From information we have received it appears that all six young men mentioned above came to the conclusion, after the disturbances of 1976, that there was no hope for change in South Africa that would grant black people greater participation in political life and so they left the country and embarked on a course of action which ended with their arrest, trial and condemnation to death.

In the decision they took, they followed in the footsteps of countless young men of every age and country who have suffered political humiliation and privation. In the eyes of those that they opposed, they were considered guilty of high treason. In the eyes of their own people, they were considered heroes and, if executed, martyrs.

I think, Mr. President, that against the background of your own heritage, you understand this. The present head of our Church, Pope John Paul II, also comes of a people that has known deep and prolonged suffering. This has enabled him to sympathise with those who have become impatient with their lot and have reacted against it. He is a firm and dedicated promoter of non-violence, but understands how people can be tempted to the opposite course. Recently, in his address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican, he pleaded for the abolition of the death sentence, especially in the case of those found guilty of political offences.

Associating ourselves with the plea of Pope John Paul II, we apply it in a special way to the six young men with whom this letter is concerned and beg that mercy may be extended to them and that their sentences may be commuted.

With every confidence that Your Excellency will give serious and sympathetic consideration to the request.

I remain,  
Sincerely yours,  
DENIS E. HURLEY  
Archbishop of Durban