

SACBC MESSAGE TO COSATU (15/7/87)

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference sent a message to the Congress of South African Trade Unions saying that "the launch of COSATU in 1985 was an historic moment for South Africa's workers. We bishops congratulate you on your achievements in organising such a powerful worker force and for struggling relentlessly for the human rights of all. You have become an important rallying point in the struggle for social justice. Many of your leaders have suffered detention, and many like Moses Mayekiso are still behind bars. Suffering need not dampen one's determination but can be an impetus to increase one's resolve.

"We are encouraged by COSATU's commitment to a democratic, non-racial South Africa. We note your members are struggling for their rights and for improved wages in factories, mines, farms and homes. We are conscious of the exploitation suffered by many workers in South Africa. Workers – because they contribute so greatly to the production of wealth in our land – are entitled to a just remuneration and share in the benefits that come from that wealth. We have observed your efforts towards making people conscious of the need to be justly remunerated for their work. We urge you to give serious consideration to the plight of domestic workers.

"To the extent that you seek justice, you are involved in God's work, as He requires justice for His people. Thus we trust you will pray with us for His guidance, so that you may respond to the challenges of our times with sincerity, courage, wisdom and a true sense of responsibility for the future of our country. We remember, too, that man's work is a participation in the work of the Creator. May your work also be a reflection of the Creator.

"We Catholic bishops appreciate the constructive work achieved by COSATU so far. In our dealings with our Church members, many of whom are workers, we have noticed an improvement in their lot because of the efforts of COSATU. As many of you are aware, the Catholic church has in past years become more involved in labour, labour relations, trade unions, and the education and formation of trade union members. This is because we have realised that justice should not only be preached but must also be practised – also in the field of labour.

"The rights of workers and trade unions are reflected in the encyclical letter, *Laborem Exercens*, issued by Pope Paul II in 1981: 'In order to achieve a social justice in various countries and in the relationships between them, there is a need for new movements of solidarity of and with the workers. Solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by social degrading of work, by exploitation of the workers and by growing areas of poverty and hunger'.

"The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the Church of the Poor."