

SACBC OPEN LETTER

TO INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (24/11/86)

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference delegation presented this open letter to the Commission of Institutions of the European Community.

"We wish to express our grave concern at the worsening crisis in South African. Our society is being torn apart by the consequences of apartheid. A fierce confrontation has arisen between the structures of apartheid and the forces and liberation. We are deeply disturbed by the suffering and anxiety thereby generated.

"The state of emergency is at best a misguided concept to crush the urge for liberation which has irreversibly taken hold of the black oppressed people of South Africa. The picture that emerges from personal or reported knowledge of the effects of the state of emergency is very disturbing: Increased, even extreme, repression is its major feature. We are concerned at the way the detention net has been cast particularly wide and by the treatment of the detainees once in the custody of the security forces. The continuing detention and torture of Father Smangalis Mkhathshwa, the secretary general of the Conference, is a particularly distressing case in point. We draw attention to the Pretoria Supreme Court ruling last week that assault on a detainee does not render the detention unlawful and therefore the release of Father Mkhathshwa is not justified.

"A major consequence of the present state of emergency is the people's reaction to the primary violence on the part of the state. Inspired and impelled by the unquenchable spirit of liberation, the people and especially the youth are unyielding in the face of increased repression and respond with counter-violence against those seen to be active in this latest form of repression. We deplore in the strongest possible terms the summary trial and, 'execution' of those suspected of collaborating with the state. We similarly deplore increasing vigilante violence and are concerned by the long term consequences for a just and peaceful new South Africa resulting from the government's attempts to play on ethnic divisions in defence of white political control.

"It is against this background that we commend the Commission's special programme to assist victims of apartheid and the European Parliament's efforts to increase the resources available to this programme. We commend also the Commission's willingness to work through our traditional partners in Europe. In welcoming efforts in Europe and elsewhere to extend assistance to victims of apartheid, we recall the joint position of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, the South African Council of Churches and the Kagiso Trust that all such programmes should:

- ❖ Subscribe and promote the concept of non-racialism.
- ❖ Subscribe and promote the general ideal of uniting people of different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds, which implies that programmes which create or sustain, wittingly, or unwittingly, ethnic, racial or cultural divisions should not be promoted.
- ❖ Encourage democratic practices and enjoy the active support of the communities in which they are based.

“It is on the basis of these principles that we participate in such programmes, in the firm belief that, only if these principles are observed, will such programmes contribute to the establishment of a democratic, non-racial South Africa.

“We are conscious, however, that these measures are part of a package of both positive and restrictive measures implemented by the European Community. We share the community’s view that positive measures such as the special programme are not an alternative to the need for sustained, effective economic pressure on South Africa. The present tempo and scope of the South African government’s reform process does not appear to take into account the needs of this time in our history. A piecemeal abolition of unjust and discriminatory structures is not enough to meet the critical situation in our country. Only through such economic pressure can the gravity of the current situation be brought home to those with the political power to bring about the total abolition of apartheid.

“We feel we have a responsibility also to express our opposition to Pretoria’s campaign of aggression and destabilisation against the independent states of Southern Africa. We welcome the European parliament’s efforts to establish a special budget line to compensate SACDCC states in the face of South African aggression and regret its defeat in plenary session. We hope that these efforts continue and, at the same time, that more will be done to treat the problem at its source.

“Finally, we must once again come back to the question of Namibia. Unfortunately peace has not yet come to Namibia. South Africa continues its armed occupation and through this is responsible for the death and disruption, which continue to plague that unhappy country. Once again we urge the acceptance of Resolution 435 of the United Nations Security Council. We trust that the European representative on the council for Namibia will play an active and constructive role, as an expression of Europe’s firm commitment to the independence of Namibia.

Signed:

WILFRED NAPIER OFM, Bishop of Kokstad, (Vice-president of the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference).

HUGH SLATTERY MSC, Bishop of Louis Trichard-Tsaneen