

## SACBC STATEMENT

### ON

#### ALTERNATIVE MEDIA CURBS (28/8/87)

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference is deeply disturbed by the implication of new regulations affecting the alternative media, for these will take South Africa further down the road to dictatorship.

The bishops advise those taken in by government propaganda and the use of the communist bogey man not to rejoice, but rather to mourn over measures against the media. For it is not primarily the media being attacked, but the people of the country themselves who are being deprived of a most important means of being informed of the other side of the story. The government is running scared. Larger and tighter blinkers are fitted over the eyes of the white electorate to shield them from the ugly realities of South Africa today.

They will know even less of what their black compatriots experience and feel about those realities. The result will be even deeper polarisation. Furthermore, they will be even less informed and aware of the urgency of working to secure a settlement that will meet the aspiration of South Africans along a route of negotiation aimed at effective and just power-sharing. The alternative is a second Lebanon. We do not want that.

The new measures will prevent the oppressed from making their voice heard as they cry out against the injustice and inhumanity to which they are subjected by structures and agents of the apartheid system. They are deprived also of their inherent right to speak for themselves and to demand that steps be taken to establish a just and equitable system of government.

The bishops believe this will inevitably lead to frustration and anger. It bodes ill for the efforts of those committed to seeking a peaceful solution. We are particularly concerned about the fate of the *New Nation*, the alternative newspaper owned by the Catholic Bishops Publishing Company. The editorial content of *The New Nation* is not fabricated to create a climate of unrest. What is reflected in the newspaper is the stark reality of life in South Africa, particularly in the townships and other black residential areas.

Our concern extends beyond *The New Nation* to other alternative publications as well. It is precisely because the bishops' conference sees negotiation as a way to a peace based on justice that it defends the right to existence of a free press – for without such a press the views of and information about the oppressed will not be known.

We doubt whether the government can be persuaded from its folly of delaying the moment for peaceful negotiation by muzzling the mouthpiece of the voiceless, yet an appeal is made that the latest measures against the alternative media be rescinded.

Signed by Bishop Wilfrid Napier of Kokstad, president of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference on behalf of the Conference Administrative Board.