

## **SACBC STATEMENT**

### **ON**

## **BILLS DEALING WITH SQUATTERS, SLUMS AND GROUP AREAS**

**(16/8/88)**

1. The new bills dealing with squatters, slums and group areas threaten hundreds and thousands of poor people with immense distress and privation. The bills will intensify South Africa's acute problem of homelessness.
2. The Prevention of Illegal Squatting Amendment Bill will virtually make eviction of squatters compulsory without any provision of protection from the courts. It re-introduces the state's power to remove any group, tribe or black person from any area to another area, that is, it re-introduces influx control in a more severe form. It is estimated that at least two million persons will be affected, that is, deprived of what pitiful security and shelter they now have.
3. The Group Areas Amendment Bill will ensure that the Act will be rigidly enforced and that people will be evicted without provision for alternative accommodation. Whatever benefits the 'open area' may offer will fade into obscurity in the face of this measure.
4. The Slum Bill, by removing all existing procedures, will leave people defenceless against arbitrary orders to vacate issued by local authorities.
5. As things stand now and before these bills become law it is estimated that five million people, by government figures, have no place to live. This means that one in six in our society has no proper shelter or is living illegally somewhere. Admittedly it is a reflection of a world-wide trend towards rapid urbanisation whereby half the world's population will soon be living in cities. But the South African situation is also due to the government's own insufficient provision of low cost housing.
6. Now in addition the three bills threaten the poor and the homeless with further misery and make their misery a crime.
7. The harsh penalties proposed will deter people of goodwill from coming to their aid and the courts will be able to offer little or no protection.
8. The fact that these bills are being introduced after the International Year of the Homeless is very distressing. To mark the end of this year the Catholic Church issued a document, which stressed that the right to housing is a fundamental human right. In the Scriptures to live in one's own home, with one's own family, is a sign of happiness and peace (Ps 128). Our final destiny is expressed in terms of having a home. "in my father's house there are many rooms" (Jn 14:2). In the Christian tradition the home is like a temple in which the family, the "domestic church" leads its daily life.
9. In upholding human rights and Christian dignity therefore we call on the government to scrap these bills, to promote low-cost housing, to establish favourable mortgage conditions and to make land available on which families can build their own homes, in short to replace these bills with housing policies that are favourable to the poor.