

SACBC STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC PRESSURE AND NEGOTIATIONS (JANUARY 1990)

1. In 1986 the Southern African catholic Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter on economic pressure for justice in which we made this statement: "We ourselves believe that economic pressure has been justifiably imposed to end apartheid". We went on to say, should there be little hope of fundamental change, "We believe that such pressure should continue and if necessary be intensified" (1986:10).
2. We cautioned against causing hardship greater than the injustice we seek to eliminate and bringing about the total destruction of the economy. Although we stated "that the most effective of non-violent forms of pressure left is economic pressure" (5), we did not attempt to give advice on specific pressures. We urged that experts be consulted before decisions be taken and that "the most important factor in deciding on how much suffering should be allowed to flow economic pressure is the opinion of the oppressed of our land"(10).
3. We have endeavoured to ascertain this opinion, but have not come to clear conclusions. While the great majority of political groups and labour organisations representing the oppressed are in favour of sanctions, surveys of cross-sections of the population reveal hesitations in the face of possible job loss.
4. Our position remains today what it was in 1986: Though deeply concerned about the suffering of people we believe a continuation of economic pressure to be justified. Our dilemma is like that of people who work to free hostages but fear that the operation may result in casualties.

Effects of economic pressure since 1986

5. There can be no doubt that economic pressure has been effective. It has played its part in curbing the government's military power and causing it to negotiate peace in Namibia and Angola. Internally we have witnessed such developments as the reprieve of the Sharpeville Six and the release of prominent black political leaders. As a result of international pressure, reform and negotiations became important issues in the election of September 1989 and are now firmly at the top of the political agenda.

The role of political pressure

6. This welcome change of climate has come about not only as a result of external pressure. At home too, non-violent action has become a powerful factor. The long struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa has played its part. It has recently been given new impetus by the Standing for the Truth Campaign which, proposed by a convocation of churches in May 1988, has encouraged church people to take stronger action to expose and remove the evils of apartheid. In the political sphere the Defiance Campaign has put pressure on the government to create an atmosphere where genuine negotiations can take place.

The present situation

7. The present situation is one of cautious hope. Hope arises from the recent upsurge in peaceful action for justice. Marches and rallies have demonstrated the hunger of the people for freedom and their desire to achieve it in a peaceful way. Hope arises too from the more tolerant attitude of the government and its police in regard to these events.
8. But hope remains cautious for as yet there is no explicit promise of fundamental change. Still firmly in place are such cornerstones of apartheid as the political constitution, the land laws, the homeland policy, discrimination in education and the Population Registration Act. While these remain their consequences remain too: Multiple forms of repression, widespread poverty, insecurity, unemployment and starvation.

The choice before South Africa: Destruction or negotiation

9. Two paths lie ahead of South Africa. In the words of Jeremiah "Look, I offer you a choice between the way of life and the way of death" (Jer 21:8). The way of death lies in stubborn adherence to the policy of apartheid under whatever disguise it may be presented. The way of life lies in realistic negotiation leading to the dismantling of apartheid and justice for all.
10. If the wrong way is chosen an immediate consequence will be the intensification of international pressure. This intensification could come in waves involving step by step further cultural and sport boycotts, restrictions on tourism, air travel and diplomatic relations; the halting of coal exports and imports of oil and computer technology; further pressure on loans and even on trade credit. As each wave fails to produce the necessary political changes it could be followed by another wave of more stringent measures until all trade is effected and comprehensive mandatory sanctions are in force.
11. While fervently hoping that such extreme measures will not be necessary we are of the opinion, as indicated earlier, that the time has not yet come for economic pressures to be lifted. They may even have to be increased. We do not consider, however, that we are competent to indicate how or when.
12. Another consequence of choosing the wrong way will be the intensification of internal pressure to the point of severe social disruption. The black majority has reached the end of its patience. It will not rest until justice is achieved. In the absence of fundamental change the armed struggle, recently somewhat abated, could become more violent, with little likelihood of a quick resolution. The result will be not only increased suffering and loss of life but of violence which war generates in the world's trouble spots the prospect of such a future fills us with dread but honesty compels us to warn of its possibility.
13. The second path before South Africa is the way of life, the way of realistic negotiations about the future. With this in mind many groups have called upon the government to open the way for negotiations by agreeing to

- a) Release all political prisoners and detainees unconditionally;

- b) Lift all bans and restrictions on proscribed organisations and persons
- c) Heed the call of the people concerning the removal of troops from the townships;
- d) End the state of emergency and repeal all legislation prohibiting free political activity;
- e) Cease all political trials and executions.

14. Having made similar pleas in the past we endorse this call and resolve to work with all people of goodwill for the removal of obstacles to negotiation and for the creation of the atmosphere of confidence, freedom and equality necessary in any genuine process of negotiation.
15. To reach this point the government elected by the white people of South Africa must recognise that the issue to be negotiated is the dismantling of apartheid and the restructuring of South African society so as to promote and safeguard the rights of all persons irrespective of race or sex. We accept that owing to historical circumstances this will make an enormous demand on white South Africa. No political community relishes the prospect of surrendering the sole control of its destiny and that is what the dismantling of political structures that perpetuate white control. White attitudes must change profoundly to render this acceptable.
16. The white population and all other people must be willing to say: We are called to a nobler destiny than that of our ethnic self-preservation; we are called to manifest a genuine Christian spirit and to place the well-being of all the people of South Africa above our own, realising that this is the greatest service we can render to South Africa, to humanity, to ourselves and to God. Given this attitude we can hope for a spirit of unity and cooperation that will make South Africa a happy and prosperous people and a respected member of the world family of nations.
17. We realise that this sounds more like a dream than a realistic forecast, but the dream could carry with it some hope of fulfilment once the first courageous steps are taken on the path of genuine negotiation. We urge all Catholics to support this process through prayer and the promotion of the public opinion necessary to make it possible. As bishops we dedicate ourselves to this cause and humbly pray that many in South Africa may be worthy of this mark of the Lord's approval: "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called as children of God" (Matt 5:9).