

SACBC STATEMENT ON ELECTRIC BORDER FENCE BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND MOZAMBIQUE (18/9/89)

Delegates of the Southern African catholic Bishops' Conference, together with representatives of other churches, representing millions of Christians in South Africa, wish to draw attention to the inhumane form of enforcing border control between Mozambique and South Africa, which has already cost hundreds of lives.

This border has seen an ongoing violation of human rights ranging from the shooting of refugees to forced repatriation that has culminated in the erection of a 3500 volt electrical fence between Komatipoort and the Swaziland border.

We see ourselves charged with a sacred mandate to defend the rights of people whenever these are violated because these rights are God-given. We are conscious of fulfilling our role of advocacy on behalf of many voiceless refugees who are seeking peace, safety and shelter. We look upon them as brothers and sisters in need. Until recently their plight has gone virtually unnoticed. By our presence we wish to attract as much attention as possible to their desperate pleas for safety.

We earnestly request therefore that:

1. The electric fence be switched off permanently, and that a joint South Africa/Mozambique Commission monitor the border to ensure that all land-mines on the Mozambique side of the border are removed.
2. Any form of harassment such as the rounding up of refugees, the shooting of fugitives in the Kruger National Park and the transporting of people forcibly around Swaziland to Komatipoort should stop. Army and police should restrain themselves at road blocks while dealing with refugees or illegal immigrants.
3. The South African government and the United Nations (through the High Commissioner for Refugees) should embark on immediate negotiations with a view to securing **Refugees Status** for Mozambicans moving to South Africa for shelter.
4. Forced repatriation, which concerns an average of 3500 people per month should be stopped.

With dire urgency we call on the South African and Mozambique governments, on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on the Organisation of African Unity and on all non-government organisation involved in one way or another to:

Do their utmost to halt the on-going war in Mozambique that is the immediate cause of the plight of so many thousands of people; and

Alleviate the suffering of the refugees, people who have been forced to leave everything behind in the hope of finding relative peace and security.

Issued on behalf of the Administrative Board by SACBC President:
Bishop W F Napier, OFM.