

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

GROUP AREAS ATC (18/9/87)

In the light of its teaching that “apartheid is intrinsically evil” the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference maintains that apartheid cannot be reformed or made more acceptable. Evil cannot be reformed. It must be removed or broken with totally. In as much as there is no evident intention or commitment to do this, recommendations of the President’s Council on the Group Areas Act are disappointing and harmful. The recommendations will not in any significant way normalise South African society. The “local option” provision – which gives local authorities and the public the right to choose the nature of their area is a double-edged sword and is unacceptable. People cannot be allowed the choice to entrench evil.

The question of accommodation for mixed couples has not been addressed, the integration of schools has been glossed over – in spite of the recommendation that the Separate Amenities Act be scrapped. The government should heed the call of the victims of the Group Areas Act and those whose Christian conscience cannot allow them to tolerate this evil any longer. The bishops call upon government to repeal the Group Areas Act and the population Registration Act out of respect for the demands of Christian and democratic principles.

Until the Acts are removed totally, apartheid will continue to enslave South African society and prevent development of the rich variety of gifts and talents with which God has blessed the people of this land. As long as this is not done, the different groups will continue to be strangers or even enemies to each other.

What makes the report reprehensible is that a higher value is placed on property than on human dignity and worth. The preoccupation of the report seems to be the value of property in mixed areas, rather than the opportunity for people to live in decent conditions.

Furthermore little or no consideration is given to the crucial issue of redressing the injustice that has been done to millions of people affected by the Act. Nor has the equitable redistribution of land been given attention in the recommendation on agricultural land. The council’s report does not take South Africa any further forward on the road to a peaceful future.

Signed by Bishop Wilfrid Napier, president of the Southern African Bishops’ conference on behalf of the Conference administration Board.