

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

RIGHTS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS (29/10/81)

*Cease to do evil
Learn to do good*

*Search for justice
Help the oppressed*

*Be just to the orphan
Plead for the widow
(Is. 1:17)*

It pertains to the mission of the Church to foster the dignity and the rights of every human person. This dignity and these rights are based on the fact that each person, irrespective of race, colour or creed is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), called to be re-created through the grace of Jesus Christ, and destined for everlasting life.

In fulfilling this God-given mission, therefore, the Church can never condone any social, political or economic system in which the full dignity of persons is not respected, the fulfilment of married life denied, profit and productivity pursued regardless of human cost and the totality of the worker's life controlled. The Church teaches that the power and authority enjoyed by the state can only be understood on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of human beings.

Responding to an urgent plea to take up again the painful issue of migrant labour the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference has decided to publish a Charter of Rights for Migrant Workers.

By migrant workers we mean men and women who in order to make a living leave home for another place where they do not take up permanent residence, either because they do not so desire or because they are legally debarred. In South Africa, being a migrant worker usually means finding employment in an area where the migrant is debarred by law from taking up permanent residence and from having his family with him. All too often he has to accept accommodation in a hostel or compound.

In principle we consider it unjust that people are prevented from taking up permanent residence at their place of work for they should have the right to live where they contribute to the good of the community by their work.

Realising that Migrant labour will not easily be abolished we call for recognition of:

CHARTER OF RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS

1. Migrant workers, like all other people, have the right to a just and human condition of life materially and spiritually.
2. They have the right to be seen and treated in their full humanity and not merely as instruments of production.
3. Their income should be sufficient to maintain a sound standard of living
4. Migrants should have the right to compete in the open labour market and in so doing undertake work or enter a profession as opportunity occurs.
5. Migrants should be free to enter or form trade unions with the accompanying benefits and obligations.

6. In regard to conditions of work, migrants should enjoy the same rights and benefits as other workers.
7. Migrants should have the right to live wherever they please, according to their means.
8. Migrants have the right to be decently housed and to maintain their families and bring up their children in comfort and security.

(Published by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference)