

SACBC STATEMENT ON THE CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION (19/8/91)

Meeting in Plenary Session at Marianhill, Natal, from 6-13 August 1991, the Bishops of the Catholic Church in the Southern African region considered the current state of affairs in South Africa.

The weeks prior to the plenary session saw the revelations about the government's funding of Inkhata projects, President De Klerk's response, and additional allegations regarding the security forces' involvement in the perpetration and promotion of violence. The tragic events at Ventersdorp took place during this plenary session itself. In the midst of all this, politically motivated violence continued in various parts of the country.

At one level there have been many accusations and counter-accusations. Attempts at political point-scoring abound. At another level, ordinary folk continue to suffer, experience the loss of dear ones and are left wondering when the mess we find ourselves in will come to an end.

In his recent encyclical letter, *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II remarks '...if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power'. And again 'In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and we are exposed to the violence of passion and to manipulation, both open and hidden'. (C.A.46)

The events refer to earlier illustrate only too vividly just how apt these observations of Pope John Paul are.

Sadly, over the years we have grown accustomed to finding out that, all too frequently, denials by those in authority in our land stand for little. South Africa's involvement in Angola was denied, only for us to find out later that we were heavily involved. Cross-border destabilisation was denied and later found out to be true. Funding of organisations within and outside South Africa was denied and then, on production of irrefutable evidence, grudgingly admitted. Time and time again truth has been the victim of political expediency on the part of those who rule our land.

Truth has frequently also been a victim in the positions taken and arguments advanced by many claiming to speak for or act on behalf of the oppressed. Half-truths, exaggerated claims and distortions of reality have continued to engender fear, intolerance or anger in people to such an extent that violence readily ensues.

Likewise the distorted arguments advanced by leadership of the political right, its provocative statements and actions cause the emotions of people to be aroused to such an extent that events, such as senseless attacks on innocent people who are of a different colour, or the planned confrontation that occurred at Ventersdorp, follow all too easily. This situation is even more tragic in that recourse is often had to justifying such behaviour in the name of defending Christian values. Such justification is clearly devoid of all truth.

If justice and peace are to have any chance of prevailing in our land it is imperative that those exercising political leadership accept the necessity for truth and accountability. Without these it is impossible to promote the trust and mutual acceptance required for a speedy and peaceful transition to a new South Africa. To this transition we now turn our attention.

We consider that the process of change would be greatly helped if the government of the day publicly acknowledged the iniquity of the past and made immediate and honourable amends, for example, in the case of land expropriated under the apartheid system.

This would be a welcome addition to the positive developments of the past eighteen months, which have placed the country on the road to a new dispensation. We believe that what has been set in motion is irreversible. To re-impose apartheid laws that have been repealed and to endeavour to suppress the freedom of expression and political organisation that has been recognised is not possible.

There can be no turning back. There must be a concerted effort to press forward vigorously, both in political negotiations and building up the economy and social fabric indispensable for the new South Africa. While respecting the views of those who hold economic pressures to be still necessary to motivate faster change, we consider that these pressures have contributed to bringing about a situation in which they are no longer necessary. We hold that what is required now is a united political, social and economic effort in pursuit of the vision of the future.

For this effort to succeed it is vitally necessary to ensure that attention be concentrated on the social dimensions of new investment and the promotion of massive projects to improve the social fabric and multiply employment opportunities. We are especially concerned about education, health, housing and family life.

In order that what we have outlined may be achieved:

- We call upon all the people of our land to demand of those who claim to represent them: truth, justice and public accountability.
- We urge the leaders of all political persuasions to move quickly and decisively to bring about a new political dispensation in which all the citizens of our country will have a say.
- We again call upon all Catholics to pray for an end to violence and to contribute in whatever way they are able to the negotiations' process.
- We pledge ourselves to do all in our power to facilitate peace in our land, a peace based on truth, justice and love.

Signed by:

Bishop W F Napier OFM, President, Kokstad
Bishop R J Orsmond, First Vice-President, Johannesburg
Archbishop G F Daniel, Second Vice-President, Pretoria
Archbishop D E Hurley OMI, Durban
Archbishop P F Buthelezi OMI,
Archbishop L P Henry, Cape Town

Bishop j Minder OSFS, Keimoes-Upington
Bishop E Hecht OMI, Kimberley
Bishop F Le Roy OSB, Pietersburg
Bishop M D Biyase, Eshowe
Bishop H Bucher, Bethlehem
Bishop J L Brenninkmeijer, Kroonstad
Bishop D Verstraete, Klerksdorp
Bishop D Khumalo OMI, Durban (Auxiliary)
Bishop A Brook, Umtata
Bishop B Haushiku ICP, Windhoek
Bishop P T Mngoma, Marianhill
Bishop B T Setlalekgosi, Gabarone
Bishop E Adams, Oudtshoorn
Bishop M Rowland OFM, Dundee
Bishop H Lenhof SAC, Queenstown
Bishop H Slattery MSC, Tzaneen
Bishop M Coleman, Port Elizabeth
Bishop Z P Mvemve, Johannesburg (Auxiliary)
Bishop S G Ndlovu, Umzimkulu
Bishop F Lobinger, Aliwal
Bishop K Dowling CSSR, Rustenburg
Bishop M M O'Shea OSM, Ingwavuma
Mgr L Holling OSFS, Keetmanshoop
Fr A Matordes MCCJ, Witbank