

## **SACBC STATEMENT**

### **ON**

#### **THE DAY OF MOURNING AND PRAYER (MAY 1985)**

Since 1952 at regular intervals, the catholic bishops have made statements and issued reports about the evils of apartheid and racial discrimination in South Africa. They have long ago declared that, in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the system of apartheid is “intrinsically evil” and a serious sin of injustice (Statement of July 1957).

In 1977 they committed themselves to the eradication of all the effects of apartheid within the Church and its institutions. Again and again they have had occasion to deplore the use of detentions and bannings, and in more recent times they have felt impelled to publish reports about atrocities in Namibia and the shocking conduct of the police in some black townships.

And now, still stunned by the shooting of so many people in Langa, Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth, we face the endemic unrest, killings and clashes that continue day after day in one place after another. Years of oppression, suffering and frustration on the one side and years of implementing a policy of racial prejudice and apartheid propaganda on the other have plunged us into the worst crisis our country has ever experienced. There have been sporadic uprisings before. There have been killings and injuries and other forms of violence before. But the long term effects of apartheid are being seen and experienced today as never before.

We have all been affected, in one way or another, by a social system that has profoundly influenced almost every aspect of our lives in South Africa. Now we see more clearly than ever before where the policies of apartheid have led us, and where they are likely to lead us in the near future.

We are compelled to declare that such policies and actions call down the anger of God. If the prophets of old felt impelled to warn the Israelites about God's anger because of their unrepentant sinfulness, then we must believe that God is responding to our situation today in South Africa in much the same way. We must not underestimate the seriousness, in the eyes of God, of what has been done and continues to be done by those who uphold apartheid in whatever form.

Unrepentant sinners must always face the threat of divine punishment – sooner or later. And this applies as much to social and public sins as it does to personal and private sins. Despite the repeated warnings issued by us and by others about the evils of apartheid and its catastrophic consequences for our country, there are those who still appear to be unaware of the consequences of their actions, their policies or their silent complicity.

Human life is sacred. It is a gift that has been given to us by god Himself. Human life must therefore be safeguarded by **all** and especially by those who have been entrusted with the task of maintaining the common good of the community, namely, the police. We have been particularly saddened by the violence used by some of the oppressed against others in their communities who are accused of collaboration. For those who

follow the example of Jesus Christ, revenge can never be a way of solving problems or redressing wrongs.

This is indeed a time for mourning. But it is also a time for repentance and conversion, a time for making a break with the past and throwing off the shackles of apartheid once and for all. It is a time for new initiatives, new proposals, open dialogue, serious negotiations and radical change. We pray that in this time of crisis, negotiations may become possible not in a spirit of fear and selfishness, nor in a spirit of revenge, but in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. There can be no peace and no reconciliation without justice. Our prayer then, as we mourn the dead, is that we may enter upon a new phase in South Africa, a phase of vigorously and tirelessly pursuing that justice for all upon which forgiveness, reconciliation and peace can be built.

Above all, our present time is a time for hope. As St. Paul says, we must be willing “to hope against hope” (Rom 4:18); that is to say, because we must trust in God we must continue to hope even when there are no signs of hope. But today **there are signs of hope** in our country. The opposition to apartheid has never been as strong and vigorous as it is today, both in the international community and among the people of South Africa themselves. In many parts of the world people are protesting, in one way or another, against the evils of apartheid. And in South Africa itself, in almost every corner of the country, as never before, the people, especially in the black townships, are making their grievances and demands known and standing up courageously for their rights. And so while we mourn for those who have been killed and express our prayerful sympathy to all the bereaved, while we deplore the violence that is being perpetrated and while we remain deeply concerned about the sufferings imposed upon so many people, we nevertheless entertain the sure hope that God is now leading us, more surely and swiftly than ever before, towards true justice, peace, reconciliation and liberation for all the people of South Africa.

It is in this spirit that we call upon all Catholics in South Africa to observe Sunday June 16 as a special day of mourning and prayer. June 16 is the day of commemoration for those who were killed in Soweto in 1976. This year we will be mourning all who have been killed not only in Soweto but also in Sharpeville, in Sebokeng, in Crossroads and in many other places but especially in the tragedy of Langa, Uitenhage, in March of this year. However, as we pray for the dead and for the bereaved, we also join together to pray more earnestly and hopefully than before that all the evils of apartheid may be brought to a speedy end.