

SACBC STATEMENT
ON THE
SOUTH AFRICAN (AND SO-CALLED) CATHOLIC DEFENCE LEAGUE
(25/5/82)

Having considered reactions to the report on the Namibian situation published by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, the administrative board was very surprised at the importance given by some sections of the media to the so-called Catholic Defence League. This body is in fact a tiny minority in the church and, to the best of our knowledge, it amounts to less than one-tenth of one percent of the church's membership and has no official standing whatsoever.

It should be made clear that the Catholic Defence League is in no way representative of the Church and that its opinion on any matter represents only the views of this very small number of individuals. Moreover, it is to be regretted that this group often seems to equate concern for social justice with a commitment to communism, which is of course absurd.

The activities of the Defence League have been totally repudiated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Furthermore the report on Namibia was the result of an extensive investigation in which all members of the Conference were involved. It was published in the name of the whole Conference. It appears that some see this report as the view of the president of the Conference, Archbishop D. E. Hurley, or that of the six bishops who visited Namibia at the end of 1981. It is astonishing that the defence League and some sections of the media portray the president of the Bishops' Conference as a political leader rather than a church leader. This is totally false. He has from time to time involved himself in matters of social justice, which is in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

The Synod of Bishops of 1971 speaking on Justice in the World says: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel".

Add also the quotation from the Apostolic Exhortation, "Evangelii Nuntiandi", of Pope Paul VI. He says: "Hence when preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems" (Par.34).

Such activities therefore can in no way be regarded as involvement in party politics but rather the promotion of Christian ethics in the political field. Over the years Archbishop Hurley has been internationally known as an outstanding figure in such fields as catechetics and liturgy. From 1975 to 1981 he was chairman of the Department of Catechetics of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. For the past seven years he has also been chairman of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

The Bishops' Conference has been criticised for not cooperating with the board of inquiry set up in Namibia by the South African Defence Force to investigate allegations of torture perpetrated by members of the South African forces. The Conference takes the same stand on this matter as the Council of Churches in Namibia. As long as there are members of the South African Defence Force on the board of enquiry the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference supports the position of these churches in not being prepared to consider the existing board as a suitable agent to examine such accusations. The axiom that nobody is a judge in his own case certainly applies here. However, the Conference would be more than happy to assist and cooperate with any committee, which is established to investigate this most serious matter provided that it is seen to be fair and impartial.

Signed:

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