

SACBC STATEMENT

TO THE BRAZILIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (25/11/86)

The system of apartheid (racial separation) is based on economic discrimination. By law 87 percent of South African land is reserved for whites (5 000 000 people), leaving 13 percent for the rest of the population (25 000 000). Housing, health and education services for blacks are separate and inferior. The nutritional level and income of black people are vastly inferior.

The government is engaged in a process of adaptation to make the system more acceptable to international opinion. It has abolished some minor measure of apartheid, (for example, the ban on mixed marriages) but refuses to make real concessions. An important part of government strategy is its attempt to find puppet leaders who will cooperate with the system in return for financial rewards or power. As part of this policy the government has set up a system of states (Bantustans), giving blacks "citizenship" in these territories, but not in the Republic of South Africa. The 1983 constitution of South Africa excludes Africans (not "Coloureds" or Indians) from voting rights or seats in parliament.

Resistance

There has been popular resistance to this system of domination since the beginning. The main opposition organisation, the African National Congress, was founded in 1912. Until the 1960s its policy was passive resistance and peaceful protest. In the 1960s after the slaying of many civilians by the forces of the state, it formed an arms wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, "Spear of the Nation", which carries out a small-scale guerrilla campaign. In view of the disparity of forces, no one sees armed struggle as the sole means of liberation. The African National Congress is banned inside South Africa.

The main resistance organisation active inside the country is the United Democratic Front (UDF), a non-racial front comprising some 600 community organisations. It has chosen to work outside the present parliamentary system. COSATU, the main trade union federation, is beginning to mobilise workers against the apartheid system.

AZAPO is a black consciousness movement also opposed to apartheid. INKATHA is a cultural movement based on the Zulu people. It is opposed to the present system, but has serious differences with the UDF and COSATU.

The Church

Since 1977 the Catholic Church has taken a clear position in favour of the people's struggle. It accepts that the welfare of all South Africans will only come through the liberation of the majority. In an urgent message to the state president in August 1986 the bishops called on the government to recognise the demands of the people as a movement for liberation, to release political prisoners and negotiate with the genuine leaders of the people. Earlier this month Archbishop Hurley and other senior bishops had a meeting with President P.W. Botha and leading government figures. The government rejected the bishops' appeal, telling them to "put their house in order". Archbishop Hurley said that this meeting "made it difficult to hope".

The church supports popular movements; the secretary general of the Bishops' Conference, Father Smangaliso Mkatshwa, is a patron of the United Democratic Front. The Church also encourages popular organisations to strengthen their unity and plan seriously for the future. In this endeavour ecumenical cooperation is a constant feature. The Catholic Church works closely with other Christian Churches, not only through the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

An important process of theological discussion involving close consultation between theologians and community began in 1985 with the publication of the Kairos Document, which received international attention. It has been published in Brazil: *'Ser Cristao No Pais Do Apatheid'* Petropolis, Vozes, 1986. A second English edition appeared in September 1986.

The present situation

Since June 12 1986 South Africa has been under a state of emergency, which allows imprisonment without trial, bans political meetings and imposes a news blackout on disturbances and police and military action. Accurate figures for numbers of detainees are difficult to obtain, but they are believed to be tens of thousands. The detainees include Father S. Mkhathshwa, Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, who has been tortured. Many church personnel are detained for their activity in community organisation.

Foreign help

The South African Bishops believe that foreign pressure on the South African government is essential to minimise suffering in the process of liberation, which they believe now to be irreversible. This pressure will have to include economic measures. It is important for the church in Brazil to accompany their brothers and sisters in South Africa, by keeping themselves informed, by informing government and people in Brazil of the situation in South Africa, and supporting the people of South Africa's struggle by prayer and exerting pressure.

The 1988 *'Campanha Fraternidade'* on black people will be an important part of this support, and we greatly welcome it.