

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

PAPAL AUDIENCES (12/6/84)

Whenever a head of state or political leader is in Rome and applies for an audience, this is always granted. It is unheard of for such a request to be turned down.

There are two types of audience for political figures: An official audience with full diplomatic protocol and a private audience. In the case of Mr. P. W. Botha it was a private audience.

We realise that many people in South Africa were totally opposed to the Pope's receiving Mr. Botha. However, there was no objection from the bishops of the Catholic Church in South Africa. Their attitude is that even when people differ profoundly, dialogue can prove helpful.

In this particular case the Holy Father was fully briefed on the South African situation, with special reference to Namibia, the homelands policy and relocations; in fact on all major aspects of apartheid. Obviously we do not know what passed between His Holiness and the Prime Minister, but it is hard to imagine that these topics were not mentioned and that the Holy Father did not endorse the positions taken up by the Catholic bishops. We would consider an exchange of this nature between the Pope and the Prime Minister beneficial.