

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

UITENHAGE SHOOTINGS (22/3/85)

“The Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference calls on all south Africans to show their grief by observing a day of mourning for all those killed in the tragic incident. The bitter irony is that little short of a massacre has taken place on this sad day of national mourning for the victims of the 1960 Sharpeville shootings. Police action has left the bishops’ conference numb with shock and despair. We feel that no amount of provocation – if indeed there was any – can justify such bloodshed.

“Indeed the shootings can only strengthen the argument of those who give little credence to the government’s talk of reform. According to our information from church workers in the area, people were walking peacefully – empty-handed – from Langa to Kwanobuhle Township and not to Uitenhage itself – when the confrontation took place. We have been informed that people were on their way to a church in Kwanobuhle to keep vigil for their dead. The people were not violent nor were they singing when the police ordered them to disperse. We have been told that police opened fire and shot at the crowd indiscriminately. Later church workers were not allowed into the wards of the hospital in Uitenhage to minister to the injured and dying. A fire engine was called to the scene to spray the streets after the killings. Journalists were taken into the area afterwards under police escort. Because of the gravity of the situation and the dispute over the police action, we call for an immediate and independent inquiry into the incident.”

(Additional information from a Catholic Church worker in Uitenhage who collected eye witnesses accounts says the people are unanimous about the fact that there was no aggression or reaction on the part of the people. People were ‘seething with anger about being accused of aggression’, also no one was carrying or throwing stones or petrol bombs as the police claimed. People are asking, why the police couldn’t have used teargas as usual?).