

SACBC STATEMENT

ON

PEACE AND NEGOTIATIONS (21/12/87)

As the Catholic Church throughout the world prepares to celebrate World Day of Peace on January 1, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference reiterates that it deplors all forms of violence, whether institutional or retaliatory.

The bishops also continue to call for open, unconditional negotiations between the government and major black leaders as the only way to avoid the escalation of violence and open revolution. The whites have decided who their leaders in government are. Blacks have no opportunity of putting their leaders into central government. It is thus not for whites or their government to determine who the major black leaders are. This black people must do for themselves through their own process of selecting leaders and through their own organisations.

Any government call for negotiations must have credibility with black South Africans. This cannot be achieved if their organisations are banned and their leaders imprisoned. The release of Mr Govan Mbeki caused a cautious stirring of hope in the hearts of many South Africans. Did his release indicate the intention of the government to move towards a meaningful and credible call to the negotiating table by the releasing of black political leaders and the unbanning of their political organisations? Any slight hope there may have been was dealt a shattering blow by government restrictions imposed on Mr Mbeki. The restrictions are such that they appear as calculated to smother any public manifestation of support for Mr Mbeki as a major black leader, and to silence him lest he publicly proclaim the frustration and feelings of so many black people.

Does the government wish to destroy totally its credibility with the black majority? We fear that the time will come when a sincere call to open and unconditional negotiations will fall on deaf and cynical ears. God help us then! As ministers of the gospel, with confidence in Christ's power to heal all wounds and to calm all fears we desperately appeal again "for a creative, humane and Christian effort to conclude a just and peaceful settlement in our land" – as we continue to pray that "with the help of God, this will be achieved".

Signed by Bishop Reginald Orsmond, vice-president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference on behalf of the Conference Administrative Board.