

**SOUTH AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE EXCERPTS  
FROM THE DISCUSSION BOOKLET ON NEGOTIATIONS  
(FEBRUARY 1990)**

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As president of the bishops' Conference it gives me great pleasure to present this booklet to the Catholics of Southern Africa for study and discussion, for the Conference is committed to working for a negotiated political settlement in South Africa. In the past "while welcoming talk about negotiations, we (the bishops) recognised that negotiations are not possible as long as there is no freedom of association and political activity and that the obstacles which prevent dialogue must be removed as a matter of urgency.

"Several countries, organisations and individuals called on the government to:

- Release all political prisoners and detainees unconditionally;
- Lift the bans and restrictions on proscribed and restricted organisations and persons;
- Heed the call of the people concerning the removal of troops from the townships;
- End the state of emergency and repeal all legislation prohibiting free political activity;
- Cease all political trials and executions.

"The Bishops who in the past made similar calls endorse all these and resolved to work for the removal of the obstacles to negotiations. In addition the Bishops called (27/10/89) on all South Africans to stand for the truth by acquainting themselves with the issues involved in achieving a political solution and with the views of the major groupings involved.

"The Bishops urged all Catholics to work towards creating a suitable climate for negotiations by promoting democracy and reconciliation."

During the January Plenary Session all the bishops decided to meet all the major parties likely to be involved in the negotiating process and to encourage all Catholics to discuss the matter.

President F W de Klerk's speech at the beginning of February has done much to remove the obstacles to negotiations although many still remain. We thank God that we have moved into the new era of negotiations and hope that it will end with a just and peaceful settlement to South Africa's problems. In the meantime many different voices will be heard. That is why we decided to publish the discussion document in its present form. The only statement which reflects the position of the bishops is that on "Economic Pressure and Negotiations." (in this volume of **The Bishops Speak**, pages 116 to 120).

Two papers reflect the positions of their authors not that of the bishops and are designed to promote discussion and debate. The Organisation of African Unity and United Nations documents help illustrate the issue of negotiations from an international perspective. It is hoped that parish groups will take up the matter and, if

they wish, send comments to the SACBC. If the occasion demands it the bishops may issue a pastoral letter at a later date.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Signed:

BISHOP WILFRID F NAPIER OFM

President: SACBC, PO Box 941, Pretoria, 0001