

STATEMENT ON FRs. S. P. MKHATSHWA AND C. MOKOKA

26 August 1976

Two Catholic priests, Fr. Smangaliso Patrick Mkhathswa and Fr. Clement Mokoka have been detained in the last two weeks. No reason has been given and no charge made. The presumption is that they are considered a threat to security. In view of these developments, we the Administrative board of the southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference wish to make the following declaration:

In expressing sympathy and solidarity with them, we express the same with dozens of others so detained under excessively harsh security laws against which we protested last year and also previously. But in the case of these two priests commissioned to preach the Gospel we have a special responsibility and declare that we will not accept that they have been guilty of crime unless it is proved in open court that they are guilty of something more than an infringement of unjust laws.

We consider the present wave of unrest that is sweeping the country to be at most the inevitable result of unjust and oppressive laws against which we with other churches have continually witnessed for almost three decades. We renew our protest against these laws in the strongest possible terms and urge that they be repealed forthwith.

At the same time we request that it be recognised that the phenomenon of Black Consciousness correctly understood is an inevitable demand by the Black Community for recognition of their human dignity and legitimate aspiration. We appeal to the Government to relieve the present tension not by repressive acts but by rapid and practical moves towards full citizenship and shared responsibility.

The detention of several ministers of the Gospel is a particularly alarming sign. We declare our solidarity with all those who in the spirit of true Christian love and justice are prepared to suffer for their Christian convictions. To show this solidarity we ask that September 12th be a day of prayer in all Catholic Churches throughout the Republic when we shall pray that justice may prevail and peace follow in our country.