

STATEMENT

On

THE NATIONAL CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

SACBC Administrative Board, 8 November 1977

In line with the constant efforts of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference to communicate its understanding of how the spirit of Christ should influence the complex situation in our country, the Administrative Board of the conference feels compelled to speak out once more in a moment of national crisis. In doing so the Board appeals to all to whom the message comes to respond with sustained and humble prayer that will dispose us to know and do God's will in our pursuit of reconciliation and unity.

A good number of people, including many Catholics, query our declarations, claiming that they do not deal with religious matters or that the statements are one-sided.

They may appear to be one-sided to people who, perhaps through no fault of their own, have never known the other side. They may also appear not to deal with religious matters until we remember that Christian love and justice have their place in all human concerns, including livelihood, property and politics.

When we speak of politics we do not imply an interest in the pursuing of political power. Our concern is pastoral: that politics may be inspired by the spiritual values of the Gospel, so that people may live in peace and security and that violence may be eliminated, both the violence of oppression and the counter-violence of civil unrest and revolution.

Reflecting on the recent events we endorse the protest by our President of 19th October. We are aghast at the wave of bannings and detentions and the forbidding of penalised persons to answer accusations against them in open court, also at the ruthless suppression of Black opinion and organisations.

It is claimed that these measures are necessary for the maintenance of law and order. We cannot accept a version of law and order that is so destructive of human rights and liberties.

Among other causes of growing tension we refer to the matter of citizenship.

We understand that, if a homeland accepts independence, all persons of the ethnic group said to be associated with that homeland become, in terms of South African law, citizens of the homeland and lose automatically the legal rights, however tenuous, deriving from their former South African status.

This applies to many people who have never seen the homeland and are unlikely ever to live in it. Though we have learned of promises concerning residence and work in South Africa in favour of such people, we fear that millions may be left in grave insecurity between a homeland that cannot provide them with a livelihood and a country that, while making use of their labour, deprives them of the last vestige of

citizenship. This is a grievous injustice and we protest against it in the strongest possible terms.

Once more we plead for the recognition of the lesson of history: that a situation like the one now prevailing in South Africa is intolerable to men and women of spirit and self-respect.

Once more we appeal to the Christian attitudes our leaders claim to hold in honour, attitudes that call for expression not only in personal and domestic life but also in social and political affairs.