

THE ASHLEY KRIEL FUNERAL

Chronology of efforts made by Cape Town church leaders to avert confrontation.

This edited report was compiled by John Allen (CPSA) and Sydney Duval, media officer, Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town.

Mr. Ashley Kriel, 20, was shot dead by police in a house in Hazendal, Athlone (9/7/87). Described in press reports as an “African National Congress member”, “guerrilla” and an “allegedly ANC-trained activist”, Mr. Kriel was a founder member of the Bonteheuwel Inter-Schools Congress.

Cape churchmen met before Ashley Kriel’s funeral (16/7/87). Dr. Allan Boesak, moderator of the NG Sendingkerk and president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches had telexed the Minister of Law and Order, Mr. Adriaan Vlok to plead that restrictions on the Kriel funeral be lifted. Clergymen and community leaders would bear responsibility for maintaining order at the funeral.

Friday, after 11am:

At a meeting chaired by Archbishop Stephen Naidoo at his chancery, the archbishop told Brigadier Ronnie Van der Westhuizen, divisional commissioner of the police that township funerals had become important occasions that could also be volatile. Too many restrictions became counter-productive; suppressed feelings and caused great frustration.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (involved in several funerals before restrictions when there had been great potential for an eruption as at the Uitenhage and Biko funerals), said these had passed without incident because of the low police profile. He said church leaders would give the brigadier an undertaking that if restrictions were lifted they would see that “nothing happens.”

Brigadier Van der Westhuizen said the restrictions were published in the *Government Gazette* and were law, and it was his duty to enforce the law.

Archbishop Tutu said restrictions were provocative. People were hurt and their feelings aroused. Church leaders wanted the funeral to be held with dignity and peace.

Archbishop Naidoo said “What we are trying to do is make sure no one is hurt or killed. You have duties. We have duties. Can’t we achieve peace together?”

Dr. Boesak had not had a response to his telex to the Ministers of Law and Order, so he spoke to Lieutenant-General H.G. de Witt, acting commissioner of police and told him that he and the archbishops were prepared to take personal responsibility for keeping the peace at the funeral – and to publicise their commitment – if the restrictions were lifted and the police were kept away.

He was told: “The task of the authorities is to ensure the maintenance of public order and to protect the interests of society in general”, and General de Witt asked Dr. Boesak to use his personal influence to ensure that the restrictions were obeyed.

Dr. Boesak replied: “There is absolutely no way in which the community will obey your restrictions in the current circumstances.

“Archbishop Tutu, Archbishop Naidoo and I will be present at the funeral but can accept no responsibility for a decision which you have taken yourselves and that is so clearly against the wishes of the community and against our well-intentioned advice”.

The funeral

Early on Saturday morning Archbishop Naidoo, Archbishop Tutu and Dr. Alan Boesak met General Bert Wandrag, and brigadier Van der Westhuizen at the brigadier’s office in Cape Town. Two hours of negotiations followed. The churchmen said that they would publicly take responsibility and ensure the funeral was conducted peacefully. The police in turn would maintain a low profile and would not seek to enforce a limit on numbers. Church leaders would ensure that only clergymen spoke and that only those who could be transported by vehicle to the graveyard would attend the burial service itself.

The police said placards bearing Ashley Kriel’s photograph could be displayed but they would not allow flags or political slogans to be shown. Church leaders said they could give no guarantees. It would be difficult to prevent other flags or placards from being displayed.

The police said they would not allow a service at a stadium in Bonteheuwel, after the church service in the New Apostolic Church. Church leaders pointed to an inconsistency in the police position. While the police had conceded on the number of mourners, church leaders were not given a venue where they could address mourners to explain their undertaking to maintain peace. The deadlock on this issue was not resolved.

After the service at the New Apostolic Church where proceedings had already started when the church leaders arrived. Contrary to the undertaking given by General Wandrag, there was a large contingent of armed police around the church and the streets approaching it. A helicopter hovered overhead and a “sneeze machine” was parked outside the church building.

The three church leaders approached the officer commanding the police contingent – believed to be a Major Odendaal – and told him of General Wandrag’s commitment. They asked him to withdraw his men. The officer refused. Archbishop Tutu spoke to Brigadier Van der Westhuizen and was told to speak to General Wandrag “in Cape Town”. He telephoned him and asked that he withdraw his men. The general replied “I am coming over. And I will come by helicopter so I will come quickly to see for myself.”

Betrayed

General Wandrag did not appear. Archbishop Naidoo was told by a Brigadier During that the general would not be coming to the actual scene. (It was later discovered that the general was already in the helicopter circling overhead when Archbishop Tutu spoke to him).

Another roadside meeting took place between Archbishop Naidoo, Dr. Boesak, Bragadier During and Major Odendaal in which the assurance was given that the coffin could be brought out to the hearse and that the people would be given safe passage to buses taking them to the burial service.

At the end of the service in the Anglican Church, Major Odendaal tore an ANC flag off Kriel's coffin as it came out of church. As a struggle developed over the flag, the officer ordered teargas to be fired.

Archbishop Naidoo and Father Frank de Gouveia, Catholic Episcopal vicar for Justice and Peace, had to duck for cover between cars. The archbishop in liturgical dress, had to dodge teargas canisters as he pleaded with the police to stop firing. He had covered his mouth with a handkerchief for protection but already inhaled sufficient teargas to feel sick. The gas has a stunning effect.

In the meantime, mourners in the vicinity had run back into the church grounds. Some clambered over the walls to escape as the hearse sped away. Women parishioners and catechism-class children later emerged from the church, tears streaming down their faces.

Later Archbishop Tutu discovered that a number of buses carrying mourners to the graveyard in Maitland had been stopped from going there. Major Odendaal said he would allow only 800 mourners to enter.

At the cemetery, the service was conducted jointly by Archbishop Naidoo and Suffragen Bishop Patrick Matolengwe. They were under the impression that the service was restricted to 15 minutes. The service was conducted in that time approximately. The crowd then dispersed.