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*media release*

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The banning of the peace talks!

February 24 will now become another day of national mourning and protest, commemorated in years to come alongside June 16, Sharpeville day, June 12....

All South Africans will bear the costs of this callous action: but for residents of Natal it is particularly disasterous.

\* At a time when great numbers of people are dying in townships surrounding Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the government's action means that peace talks have been effectively banned. If the UDF and Cosatu cannot hold meetings to consult their members, how can peaceful talks proceed? Over the past few months the government has detained people from UDF and Cosatu who have been trying to bring about peace. Now with Archie Gumede, a prominent figure in the peace process, having been placed under restrictions and UDF and Cosatu banned it would appear that the government is simply not interested in a solution to the problems of this region. Residents of Pietermaritzburg, black and white, UDF, Cosatu or Inkatha, must strongly oppose this attempt to sabotage the fragile talks.

\* The government's action will also have negative effects on the education crisis in this region. The banning of the National Education Union of South Africa and the National Education Crisis Committee is tragic at a time when they have issued a national call to students to return to school. In Natal particularly, these education organisations have played a crucial role in finding schools for students who have been refused registration for political reasons. It is ironic that only two weeks ago Minister Gerrit Viljoen said that the government could accomodate some aspects of people's education.

\* The banning of organisations can only cause further anger and frustration. If people are not allowed to create organisations which represent their views and which will express their legitimate political aspirations we are heading for disaster. It is nonsense for the government to claim that all the political activity over the last four and a half years was created by the UDF and its affiliates - the grievances of a dispossessed and oppressed people have been simmering since 1976, and long before. The UDF merely provided a channel for people to express their opposition to the life-denying and inhuman policies of apartheid.

An organisation of the African Methodist Episcopal, African Presbyterian, Anglican, Evangelical Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic (Archdiocese of Durban & Diocese of Marionville), United Congregational Churches in the greater Durban area and of the Belytendekring (Natal Region).  
PATRONS  
Rev John Boman  
Bishop Eric Dlamini  
Rev Ezrome Dlamini  
Archbishop Denis Hurley  
Rev Sam Khumalo  
Rev Arnold Malinson  
Bishop Paul Mngoma  
Bishop Michael Nuttal  
Rev Nimrod Sibakane

"Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8, 9

\* The business community can witness to the effects repression of community organisations has had on trade unions - workers have increasingly taken up community issues though trade union activity. Now even this avenue has been closed. It is short-sighted for the government to think that workers are not going to be concerned about rents and transport costs and unrest: but with Cosatu now restricted to only trade union activities, where will they be able to take up these issues?

When a nation is angry, it is naive to believe that further repression will control the situation. The only way to peace in South Africa is the freeing of political prisoners, the unbanning of organisations and the ending of all discriminatory laws - which will allow for the free and democratic negotiation of a new constitution which will represent all our interests. This is the direction in which we should concentrate our energies.

We, the church leaders in Natal, call on the government to restore the rights of people to organise freely and without harrassment.

Signed by:  
Archbishop Denis Hurley  
Chairperson of Diakonia  
Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban