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STATEMENT OF GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES,  
BISHOP DESMOND TUTU, OCTOBER 11, 1979

The Minister of Police and Prisons, the Hon Mr Louis le Grange, is quoted in newspaper reports as having made serious allegations against the SACC. My response is based on these reports which we hope reflect accurately what the Minister said.

If that is the case then I can only say I am now deeply shocked. I am shocked that someone holding such a responsible position could speak so irresponsibly, so tendentiously and so untruthfully. It is distressing to find that Mr le Grange is picking up where his predecessor left off, by making statements which cunningly link up the SACC and the Churches with, for instance, the Communist Party, so that there will be guilt by association and innuendo.

I want to declare categorically that I believe apartheid to be evil and immoral and, therefore, unChristian. No theologian I know of would be prepared to say the apartheid system is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Mr le Grange thinks that blacks do not have their human rights denied and that they are not suppressed and exploited and do not have their human dignity infringed, then I invite him to be black for just a day and he would know that Mr Arrie Paulus has said he is like a baboon and a high ranking police officer has said he is violent by nature.

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What price black dignity then?

In the land of their birth blacks who form 80 per cent of the population have 13 per cent of the land, when the white minority of about 20 per cent has 87 per cent of the land; a white child of 18 years can vote in this country and a black person, be he a university professor or a bishop or whatever, has no franchise; a black doctor with the same qualifications as his white counterpart is paid less for the same job.

One could go on with this sorry catalogue - do whites have to be subject to the humiliations of pass raids; have any whites had their homes demolished and then been asked to remove themselves to an inhospitable area where they must live in tents until they have built new houses as happened last week with the Batlokwa people:

Why have the Government suddenly decided to remove discriminatory signs if these are not unjust and oppressive? Why have they only now decided to extend trade union rights to black workers if it is not that they recognise they have been denying them basic human rights?

Can the Minister still stand up and say that this is not an unChristian and unjust system, where human rights are denied etc?

I am sorry that he speaks of propaganda actions on the part of Churches. Fortunately, the Churches have not been guilty of using R64 million to sell an unsellable commodity and they have not engaged in any nefarious activity. The right to conscientious objection is one recognised in most non-totalitarian countries. There are persons who in conscience cannot participate in war and the preparation for war.

The Dutch Reformed Church acknowledged this right because during the Afrikaner rebellion in 1914, it declared "no one may revolt against lawful authority other than for carefully considered and well grounded reasons based on the word of God and a conscience enlightened by the Word of God. (Resolution of Afrikaans Council of Reformed Churches).

The resolution on obeying God rather than man was taken by a responsible Conference made up not of fire eating so-called leftists, but of responsible church leaders and duly elected representatives from the member churches and organisations of the SACC.

The SACC and the Churches reserve the right to condemn if need be, any legislation which is abhorrent to the Christian conscience and which represents an abrogation of the rule of law. Certainly, detention without trial and the arbitrary banning of people are in this category and we do not apologise for being ever vigilant in this regard.

The SACC has been critical of the role of the foreign investment, but has no where yet advocated cautiously or otherwise, an anti-investment policy.

Is the Minister aware of what he is saying when he accuses the SACC and the Churches of the crimes of providing relief for political detainees and for providing legal defence for those involved in political trials? If these are crimes then we openly and proudly plead guilty. We declare that everybody is entitled to the best defence possible. We should be praised rather than vilified for our part in ensuring that there is an equitable administration of justice.