

PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

We, the South African Catholic Bishops, have raised our voices time and again against the violation of human rights in our country.

We have protested whenever curbs and restrictions are imposed on those who exercise their right to dissent, to have their own opinion, to be kept fully informed, to be meaningfully consulted, to strive for full and equal participation in the political life of the country.

We have warned that these curbs and restrictions are like a malignant cancer, starting in one cell and, if not timeously diagnosed and treated, spreading and gradually but surely weakening and debilitating the body and even accelerating its death.

We were therefore not surprised, but certainly saddened and angered, by the latest action of the government extending their unrestricted powers to stifle even more of these rights.

Where will it end? Who is next to be restricted? Which of our rights will not be tampered with?

We condemn all forms of totalitarian government — what guarantee have we that our government is not on that road?

Even our courts are becoming powerless to protect us against this systematic erosion of our rights. More and more we see that court decisions against government actions serve merely to expose weaknesses in government legislation and

regulations. These gaps are then closed and such legislation and regulations become more and more watertight to ensure that future court action is less likely to succeed.

As ministers of the Gospel and therefore ministers of hope, we must rise above our human feelings of despair and anger. Once again we must exhort the oppressed, those discriminated against, not to lose hope.

God is truth and the truth will make you free.

We will continue, and increase, our support for your legitimate aspirations and for your human and God-given rights.

Once again we must appeal, in the name of God, to those in power and to those who support them — directly or by omission — to desist from the fruitless, systematic control by force.

Before it is too late, we ask you to put aside your fears, to act with courage and to commit yourselves now to take all steps necessary to bring about a society of peace based upon justice to all our peoples.

Bishop Reginald Orsmond

SACBC Acting President

on behalf of the SACBC Administrative Board

25th February, 1988
