

Several church bodies in South Africa and abroad have reacted to the unrest which first erupted in Soweto, Johannesburg, last Tuesday (June 15). In view of the importance of the incurrences, EduNews is reproducing all the available statements on the disturbances.

STATEMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The horror of what has happened in Soweto today is the most dreadful evidence yet of the lateness of the hour in South Africa.

What began as a legitimate and deeply felt grievance, non-violently protested has in a matter of hours exploded into a Black-White confrontation. We are appalled at the authorities total lack of response and understanding to the aspirations of black people. This has led to the total breakdown of communication.

The particular situation in education has been highlighted by the students in Soweto. Their rejection of parts of the educational system has not been heard despite appeal to all levels of authority over a period of several weeks. The result was a series of non-violent demonstrations that still were not heeded and answered only with rejection, threats of expulsion and the calling in of the police.

The fact that the confrontation involved school children has the frightening implication that black grievances are not only a matter of politics, but have become a matter of intense and widespread agony, felt even by children which could escalate into a national catastrophe.

The people of South Africa, and the authorities in particular must heed the deep hurt, anger and frustration which the apartheid system has bred in the heart of all Black South Africans.

On the initial issue of the language of instruction in black schools, which has been taken so lightly, we affirm our solidarity with the Soweto children. This is further evidence of the repressive measures which the government has used consistently to suppress the aspirations of black people, aspirations which are not only legitimate but universal. We appeal to those who surely have a deep understanding of the pain of language discrimination to hear the cry of others who resent the forcing of a language upon them. The legitimacy of the students' cause makes it impossible to silence their protest by guns.

We therefore:

1. Urge that the authorities repeal immediately the offending regulations.
2. Express our support of the protest of the students against the offending regulations and deplore the totally unwarranted actions taken against them.
3. Question whether the same action could have been taken had the protest come from White students.
4. Recognizes the increasing dilemma of responsible Black leadership when legitimate and non-violent means of effecting change are totally disregarded.

We acknowledge the Church's past failure to join in the struggle for justice. We therefore undertake:

1. To call an immediate meeting of Church leaders, including the leaders of the Churches not belonging to the SACC to deal with the urgent implications of what is happening in Soweto and the responsibility of the Church, on Friday 18th June, 1976, at 11 a.m. in Diakonia House, 80, Jorissen Street, Braamfontein.
2. To seek a meeting with the Hon the Prime Minister, the Minister of Bantu Administration Department and the Minister of Bantu Education Department.
3. To invite the student leaders to avail themselves of the services of the SACC for the purposes of mediation.

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4. To appeal to all Churches to give guidance and support to a shocked and bereaved society and to those who by virtue of the vote, bear the responsibility for the fueling structure.
5. To call on the Churches to observe Sunday, 20th June as a day of prayer, bringing to their attention St James Bible.

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

The SABC expresses its deep sympathy with the families both Black and White who have been killed and injured.

We call on the authorities and the people of South Africa to heed the voice of God and not be like Pharaoh who happened his heart despite the plagues.

STATEMENT ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE LEADERS MEMBERS OF SABC SECRETARIAT

We have listened for two hours to first-hand reports from Christian leaders young and old, who have come directly from Soweto. Their analysis of the situation together with reports of the rapid spread of unrest and bloodshed indicate that the position is of such crisis proportions that certain measures ought to be considered immediately as contributions to the de-escalation of the present growing confrontation. We offer these suggestions in the prayerful hope that they will be regarded as being based on our deep desire for peaceful and Christian solutions to be found, and in first-hand contact with leaders of the Black leadership.

It appears to us to be of the utmost importance that violence be de-escalated in order to create a climate in which more fundamental problems can be solved with a spirit of openness and dialogue as soon as possible.

We would, therefore, earnestly plea:

1. That the Hon the Prime Minister, as a sign of his regard for the seriousness of the situation and for those who have suffered and are suffering now, postpone his overseas visit.
2. That SABC attempts to interpret the situation cease, on the grounds that such attempts, questioning as they do the depths of the peoples' grievances, constitute evidence for the protesters that they have not been heard.
3. That Radio time be made available for a direct appeal to the Black Community by acknowledged leaders in that community, who presently do not hold positions within Government recognised structures.
4. That a decision be made as soon as possible to suspend the Afrikaans-language medium regulation which was the initial cause of offence, and that this decision be announced regularly on the SABC.
5. That in order to achieve recognition from the Black community of the value of a judicial commission and to secure their co-operation, the commission be broadened to involve acknowledged Black community leaders.
6. That Mr P C Botha agree as soon as possible to receive a deputation consisting of Black and White Church leaders from this meeting in order to discuss the motivation for these pleas.

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7. Because it is the conviction of the acknowledged leaders from Soweto that the presence rather than the absence of the police has in many situations provoked violence, we would convey their plea that police and armed units avoid wherever possible direct contact with the Black population, and that acknowledged Black leaders be allowed an opportunity to defuse the situation.

We have also agreed:

1. To establish a fund immediately for the offering of aid to those who have suffered through bereavement and injury in the present violence.
2. To ask the SACC to endeavour to organise a legal Aid Service.

Knowing that the Churches share a responsibility for the critical situation now upon us, and seeing earnestly to contribute to peaceful change in South Africa we offer our co-operation to all who see it.

STATEMENT BY PERSONS ATTENDING A MEETING OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SA

The Meeting expressed its serious concern about the disturbances amongst our people in our land and we express our solidarity with those who are objecting, especially, the students, to the unjust laws of this country.

STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

For a very long time the Christian Institute has warned South Africa of the serious dangers created by the racial policies which have been forced upon our population, and the enormous tensions which they have generated amongst Blacks.

Sporadic incidents have now burst wide open with the student protest in Soweto. This local specific issue has become of national importance surpassing the Sharpeville massacre. It is symptomatic of the state of mind of the black population and the brutal response of the State, which is plain for all to see.

In expressing our solidarity with the students in Soweto, we confess the truth of their complaint that not only the Government, but also their parents and the Churches did little to support their claims, mediate in their dispute, or prevent its escalation into violence.

We call upon the Government:

1. To recognise that the country is brought to the brink of violent racial conflagration.
2. To remove enforced instruction through the medium of Afrikaans.
3. To convene a national conference of black and white leaders in order to prevent an irrevocable break in relationships.

We call upon the Church:

1. To support the call of the SACC.
2. To confirm that their rejection of separate development over the years always recognised that apartheid could only be enforced by violence.
3. To call upon their white ministers and members to publically remove their support from the policies of the Government, without equivocation, and to make personal and collective representations to their members of parliament to press for a conference of black and white leaders, recognising that there can be no peace until men are totally liberated.

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1. To bring these matters to the attention of their local churches, members of parliament and friends.
2. To become involved in their own crucial local issues.
3. To contribute to the needs and maintenance of those suffering and bereaved.

STATEMENT BY INTERDENOMINATIONAL AFRICAN MINISTERS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL MINISTERS' UNION ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

The General Purposes Committee, Programme Directors, and members of the National Executive of IOA-ASA and IOA-USA meeting at Stellenbosch on 16th June, 1976, wish to express their apprehension of the acts of violence perpetrated by the Police on blacks now, and in the past, which has now spread from adults to children. For as long as there is injustice there will continue to be racial animosity and strife resulting in ugly incidents such as the killings of helpless people and children in Soweto.

Whilst decisions are made for black people and not with them and as long as these shall continue to be dissatisfactory and race relations in this country will continue to be unhealthy.

We call upon the Government to remove injustice and allow black people to live their full God-given potential.

STATEMENT BY WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, DELE.

The Soweto massacre today took a new, unprecedented and escalating toll of human life in South Africa. As in 1968 at Sharpeville, the South African Police have responded to legitimate protests with ruthless, repressive actions. As a result, hundreds of Africans have been killed and wounded in Soweto and other African townships surrounding Johannesburg. Previously this would have coerced Blacks into submission. Now the protests spread in proportion to armed police efforts to contain them.

The World Council of Churches is grieved by this tragedy, and urges immediate action to reverse this course of events. South African authorities should cease their attempts to dominate these protests by force and take immediate steps to meet the just demands of Black people.

The immediate demand is to rescind the order imposing Afrikaans as the language for certain subjects in African schools, it is, however, the whole Bantu system of Education imposed on Africans in 1953 by the White South African Government which is at issue. The inferior education this system imposes is designed to deny Blacks any role in society other than that of worker and serf. It is part of a system of separate development which has created Black townships like Soweto and whose ultimate expression is the Bantustans themselves.

Africans reject such apartheid policies which exclude them from all decisions affecting their existence. It is illusory for South African authorities to treat the incidents now as an isolated phenomenon that can be controlled by force. They must begin immediately to meet the Blacks' demands.

The South African Government has refused to do this.

/Instead, Prime Minister

Instead, Prime Minister Vorster has put forward his policy of 'Detente' in an attempt to give the apartheid system a human image abroad. The Soweto massacre has laid bare this subterfuge. 'Detente' has remedied none of apartheid's evils. The events in Soweto show once more that while apartheid continues there can be no peace for South Africa either at home or abroad.

We therefore express:

- our grief at this wanton loss of life
- our solidarity with those in protest.

We call urgently on the South African Government:

- to cease immediately the use of armed police repression and multiple arrests as a response to legitimate African protests.
- to take immediate steps to meet African demands for full human rights
- to release those imprisoned for political reasons as a first step towards assuring the rights of South African Blacks to full participation in political decisions-making.

We commend the South African Council of Churches for supporting the protest of the students and asking the South African authorities to repeal the offending regulations.

We commend the Christian Institute of Southern Africa for calling on the Churches "To confirm that their rejection of separate development over the years always recognised that apartheid could only be enforced by violence."

We urge the South African Churches to respond courageously to the present crisis and in solidarity with the African people.

We call upon WCC member churches elsewhere to continue to initiate actions to bring pressure on the African Government to meet the legitimate demands of the African people.

ALAN A. BRASH - Acting General Secretary

STATEMENT OF BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Profoundly shocked by Soweto Tragedy. Deepest sympathy to all bereaved. SACC statement immediately reissued to British Press. British Christians joining in prayer Sunday for Race Relations in both South Africa and Britain.

God Bless Africa, guard her peoples, guide her rulers and give her Peace.

HARRY MORTON, General Secretary British Council of Churches

STATEMENT OF COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN GERMANY

We hereby convey to you a message of the Chairman of the Council of the EKD.

With shock and deep concern Christians in Germany follow the events in Soweto and other places, through which Black and White families have been thrown into suffering and despair. South Africa stands on the brink of a violent racial war. In these times, Christian action is placed before difficult and heavy decisions. The EKD fully backs yesterday's statements of the SACC and the CI.

In the given situation, discussions between the S A Church leaders and the Prime Minister are urgently demanded. The Council of the EKD in Germany reaffirms its relationship with Black and White Christians and their leaders in South Africa.

D. HELMUT CLASS, Chairman of the Council of the EKD in Germany.

/National Council of Churches

STATEMENT BY NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, USA

American Christian Community expresses concern for yet another indication of the depth of frustration felt by the majority people of South Africa in their struggle for human dignity in their motherland. Please convey our commitment of prayer and where needed appropriate assistance thru SACC to meet humanitarian needs of the Soloto community. Please advise status of situation and program of assistance mounted by SACC and desired role if any of international Ecumenical Councils.
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STATEMENT BY NETHERLANDS COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

We express our deepest sympathy with the victims of Soloto. Please send our condolences to those concerned. We wish you courage and strength in your struggle and decisions. We will publish your declaration in the Netherlands.
FICLET, General Secretary, Netherlands Council of Churches

STATEMENT BY AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Australian Churches condemned Soloto events. Media interest. Prayerful thoughts.
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STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Following the Church Leaders' meeting which was held on Friday 18th June 1976 at which one of the resolutions read as follows:

"We have agreed to establish a fund immediately for offering aid to those who have suffered through bereavement and injury in the context of violence",

steps were taken this day to formally create this fund within the context of the South African Council of Churches to be known as "The Churches' Against Killings Fund".

The President of the South African Council of Churches announced his intention to take this fund known to all churches in fellowship with the South African Council of Churches.

It is obviously necessary to provide relief and assistance to the families of bereaved but it is also anticipated that funds will be deployed in other areas such as the assistance of families where the bread-winner and/or family member has been arrested.

SIGNED : REV. D. THORNE, President of SACC

STATEMENT BY AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The African Independent Churches representing approximately 3-million Black Christians in South Africa, condemn the mass killings of innocent and unarmed school children by members of the South African Police - school children who were peacefully demonstrating against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction.

History has repeated itself as the same incident was experienced in Sharpsville, Cato Manor and Langa; and this attitude is not only becoming a threat to the internal security of our country, but to international security and peace.

10/whilst policies and principles

Whilst policies and principles are formulated and implemented for Black people without practical co-operation and contact with them, there shall continue to be dissatisfaction, and race relations in this country will continue to deteriorate.

We call upon the Government to remove all the root-causes of misunderstanding and friction between White and Black. Whilst we are against the acts of vandalism that took place, we are aware of the fact that hoodlums and work-shy frustrated youths seized this as an opportunity to get under the armpit of the students in order to voice out their grievances.

We call upon all Black leaders of Associations and Organizations to convene a National Convention.