



A/111 Brodwin/Africa

Church leaders march to parliament. From left to right Rev. Khoza Mgojo, Archbishop Stephen Naidoo, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rev. Allan Boesak, Rev. Frank Chikane

## South African church leaders confront the state

On Thursday 25 February, the day after the South African government banned a long list of democratic organisations and activists, an emergency meeting of church leaders decided that statements were no longer enough. On the following Monday, 29 February, more than 125 South African clergy assembled at Cape Town's Anglican cathedral, held a brief service and set out on the short walk to parliament to present a petition of protest signed by 25 church leaders, representing a total of 12 million people. Within minutes the five leading clergy, the two archbishops of Cape Town, Catholic Stephen Naidoo and Anglican Desmond Tutu, Rev. Frank Chikane, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Rev. Allan Boesak, moderator of the NG Sendingkerk, and the Methodist president Dr Khoza Mgojo, were bundled into police vehicles. The rest of the march was broken up with water cannon. The petition, stained by the water, was later sent to State President P.W. Botha by Archbishop Tutu.

The text of the petition is reproduced below. The subheadings have been added by CIIR.

### Witness, prayer and protest

We, as leaders of a number of South African churches, have come to Parliament today to witness and pray in a time of crisis outside the buildings in which you make important decisions affecting the lives of millions of South Africans who belong to our churches. In terms of the principles of non-violent direct action, we informed the Government of our intention before coming here. Once we have completed our act of worship outside where you work, we intend returning to St George's Cathedral.

We are deeply distressed, and protest to you in the strongest terms, at the restrictions which were placed last week on the activities of 17 of our people's organisations, on the Congress of South African Trade Unions and on 18 of our leaders.

We believe that the Government, in its actions over recent years but especially by last week's action, has chosen a path for the future which will lead to violence, bloodshed and instability. By imposing such drastic restrictions on organisations which have campaigned peacefully for the end of apartheid, you have removed nearly all effective means open to our people to work for true change by non-violent means. Only yesterday one of our number pleaded publicly with our people not to react to your measures by resorting to violence, but if some of our

people turn to violence you must take responsibility.

### 'You have chosen the "military option"'

We are particularly horrified at the restrictions you have placed on people and organisations who have been in the forefront of the struggle to bring peace to the strife-torn areas of Pietermaritzburg and KTC in Cape Town. Mr Archie Gumede, Mr Willie Hofmeyr and Mrs Albertina Sisulu are just a few of many people who are now banned from working for peace. Your actions indicate to us that those of you in government have decided that only violence will keep you in power; that you have chosen the 'military option' for our country. It appears to us that you are encouraging the growth of black surrogate forces to split the black community and to smash effective opposition to apartheid, moreover that you are trying to ensure as far as possible that it is the blood of black people, and not of white people, that is spilled in your struggle to hold onto power.

### 'A blow at the heart of the Church's mission'

We regard your restrictions not only as an attack on democratic activity in



From left Archbishop Naidoo, Archbishop Tutu and Dr Boesak as the police stop the march

South Africa but as a blow directed at the heart of the Church's mission in South Africa. The activities which have been prohibited are central to the proclamation of the Gospel in our country and we must make it clear that, no matter what the consequences, we will explore every possible avenue for continuing the activities which you have prohibited other bodies from undertaking. We will not be stopped from campaigning for the release of prisoners, from calling for clemency for those under sentence of death, from calling for the release of political leaders to negotiate the transfer of power to all the people of our country, from commemorating significant events in the life of our nation, from commemorating those who have died in what you call 'riots' or from calling on the international community to

apply pressure to force you to the negotiating table.

**'Withdraw from white politics and join the real struggle for democracy'**

Last week many of us issued a statement in which we addressed primarily the oppressed people of our land, for we believe it is they who will decide in the final analysis when apartheid is going to be abolished. We urged them to intensify the struggle for

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**'We regard your restrictions... as a blow directed at the heart of the Church's mission in South Africa. The activities which have been prohibited are central to the proclamation of the Gospel in our country...'**

justice and peace and we encouraged them not to lose hope, for victory against evil in this world is guaranteed by our Lord.

Our message also applies to you. Your position in becoming untenable. Your fellow South Africans want nothing more than to live in a just and peaceful country and we urge you — without too much hope of being heard — to turn from the path you have chosen. If those of you in government persist with your current policies, then we urge those of you out of government to withdraw from white politics and to join the real struggle for democracy.

We urge you to take the following action:

- Lift last week's restrictions and end the State of Emergency
- Unban political organisations, release and remove restrictions on our political leaders, allow exiles to return and free all detainees
- Enter negotiations for a dispensation in which all of us can live together in peace, freedom and justice.

We have not undertaken this action lightly. We have no desire to be martyrs. However, the Gospel leaves us no choice but to seek ways of witnessing effectively and clearly to the values of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and you give us virtually no other effective and peaceful means of doing so.

God bless you. ■

