

Wednesday 8th March 1989.

Statement of the church leaders regarding detentions, the hunger strike and the State of Emergency.

The Church leaders, meeting in Johannesburg on the 8th March 1989, express their deep concern about the fact that a substantial number of people are still in detention. Many of those who have been released have been heavily restricted. They are merely suffering a different kind of imprisonment.

The Church leaders have done all in their power to convince the Minister of Law and Order of the urgent need to act swiftly in response to the hunger strike by detainees. The Minister himself said that even one death would create a situation "too ghastly to contemplate."

In spite of this the Minister has not met the expectations raised at those meetings.

What he has done has not been sufficient to convince the country that the government is moving away from this unjust and evil way of dealing with its opponents.

On the contrary, more people have been taken into detention in the last few weeks. Hundreds who have been in detention for a very long time are still being held. Many of those who suspended their hunger strike are still in prison.

We are particularly concerned about those who are still on hunger strike and those who now in desperation may join them.

The full responsibility for this situation rests on the government and should any one of the detainees die it must accept the heavy burden of responsibility for that death and for what might follow.

We, as Church leaders, have done what we can to intervene and to enter into negotiations as is so often invited by the government.

If the government does not release all detainees and lift the State of Emergency we will, in obedience to the gospel, have no option but to disobey the Emergency Regulations.