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# The Standing for the Truth Campaign



## Background

This Campaign was initiated by and launched at the Convocation of Churches which was held on May 30-31, 1988. The Convocation to which all churches and church groups in South Africa were invited, resolved to develop *EFFECTIVE NON-VIOLENT ACTIONS* in the face of the deepening crisis in the country caused by the apartheid regime. The aim was to end the apartheid system by putting pressure on the South African regime to abandon apartheid and to participate in a negotiated settlement to establish a just, non-racial and democratic society in South Africa.

In the face of the deepening crisis the churches felt that they had no choice but to stand for the truth and witness against the evils of the apartheid system. They felt obliged, in the face of suffering, victimisation and oppression of the people of God, to be in compassionate solidarity with the people and also to oppose the present apartheid system and the related regime.

## Goals of the campaign

Whilst being aware of the general mandate of the church to work for and towards the Kingdom of God, the immediate and specific goal of the campaign was identified as the establishment of a non-racial, democratic, unitary, free South Africa. The Convocation of Churches was aware that to achieve these goals, the following steps would necessarily have to precede this:

- The unbanning of peoples organisations and the returning of exiles.
- The release of all political prisoners and detainees.
- The abandonment of apartheid.

These actions would create the necessary conditions conducive for a *negotiated settlement* in the country which the churches see as the only peaceful way of resolving problems of South Africa and affecting the justice and reconciliation we are hoping for.

# Areas of possible non-violent action

The following areas of possible non-violent action were suggested by the Convocation of Churches. They were all incorporated into one campaign, the "Standing for the Truth Campaign".

- *Prayers* for the end of unjust rule.
- *Pastoral care* for victims of apartheid.
- *Witnessing to the Gospel of Truth (telling the truth) irrespective of*

*restrictions according to the State of Emergency regulations.*

- *Acts of non-collaboration and non-co-operation with apartheid.*
- *Intervention strategies* in crisis situations.
- *Symbolic actions* of protest and witness against the apartheid system.
- *International Solidarity Action and Pressure* on the regime.

## Organisational structures of the campaign

- **National Campaign Committee.**

To carry out this Campaign, a National Campaign Committee was constituted as follows with a mandate to co-opt additional members:

- \* Three elected from and by the Convocation of Churches.
- \* Three representatives of the SACBC (Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference).
- \* Three representatives of the SACC (South African Council of Churches).
- \* Three representatives of the Church Leaders.

The mandate of the National Campaign Committee is to plan, co-ordinate and promote the campaign;

to set up regional structures, mobilise churches and create grassroots networks from mass action; to set up training programmes and generate the necessary resources for the campaign.

- **Regional and local structures.**

Regional and local structures are to be formed in every part of the country. These will consist of local church leaders, all the churches and church organisations in the region, and regional council of churches. This programme of regional organisation is to be completed during the first quarter of 1989.

# Theological

It is important to be clear about the theological reasons for the churches taking up this campaign.

**Why "Standing for the Truth?"** We suffer in a very serious situation of division, injustice, oppression and violence, much of which can be traced to an historical process of dispossession of black people culminating in the ideology of apartheid. This ideology was given a theological justification which major churches of the world have now recognised to be a heresy.

The Church has its normal servant task of sharing and relieving the lot of the oppressed, and its prophetic task of declaring God's truth in words and actions to those who oppress and divide. The prophets of Israel and our Lord Jesus did both. In South Africa it also has the particular task of countering this heresy. The heresy and the oppression are maintained, among other ways, by distorting or hiding the truth, hence the determination of the churches to "stand for the truth". (John 3: 18-21).

**Why by the Churches?** Should this kind of action not be left to the individual Christians in their normal political, economic and social activity? Why should the Church as an institution involve itself?

Ultimately one cannot separate what Christians do individually from what they do as the corporate body of Christ. In particular the South African issue is not merely one of differing party political options left to individual decision, it is a matter of the sinfulness of what state authorities are doing at the present time. The passivity of the mass of our people and of the Church itself is part of this sinfulness. To struggle against sin and to point to, or even to embody, the saving grace of God, is indeed the mission of the Church. (Eph 6: 10-18).

Furthermore, many organisations attempting to bring to light and to redress wrongs, have been banned or restricted, leaving the Church to guard and struggle to restore essential civil liberties, such as the rights of freedom of assembly and access to information.

**Why a national campaign?** Is it not sufficient that churches in their local parish activity work for change in society?

The South African disease, however, is a national one and it cannot be adequately addressed by isolated activity. The very dividedness of the Church itself contributes to this disease and our united action is essential. Also it is the whole of the disease

# Rationale

that has to be tackled, not merely its local symptoms.

**Why effective action?** For decades the churches have been strong on resolutions and protests, but it has been left to a few Christians usually acting outside church structures and to secular organisations to risk suffering and imprisonment effectively to change the situation.

The prophets of Israel did not limit their ministry to verbal messages. They acted, often decisively, to create new national situations e.g. Moses (Acts 7:22), Samuel (I Sam 16), Elijah (I Ki. 18), Elisha (II Ki 6 and 9): Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His approach to Jerusalem and in the Temple cleansing acted in a national level to reach and redeem His people. The early Christians risked death from the Sanhedrin and from a persecuting Empire to maintain the truth of the Gospel and to resist idolatry (Acts 4 & 7, Revelations 13: 5-10).

**Why non-violent action?** When driven to desperation by the intransigence of the Government, some have understandably resorted to violence against their oppression.

The Church, while traditionally allowing the possible justice of such violence, is today more aware of the

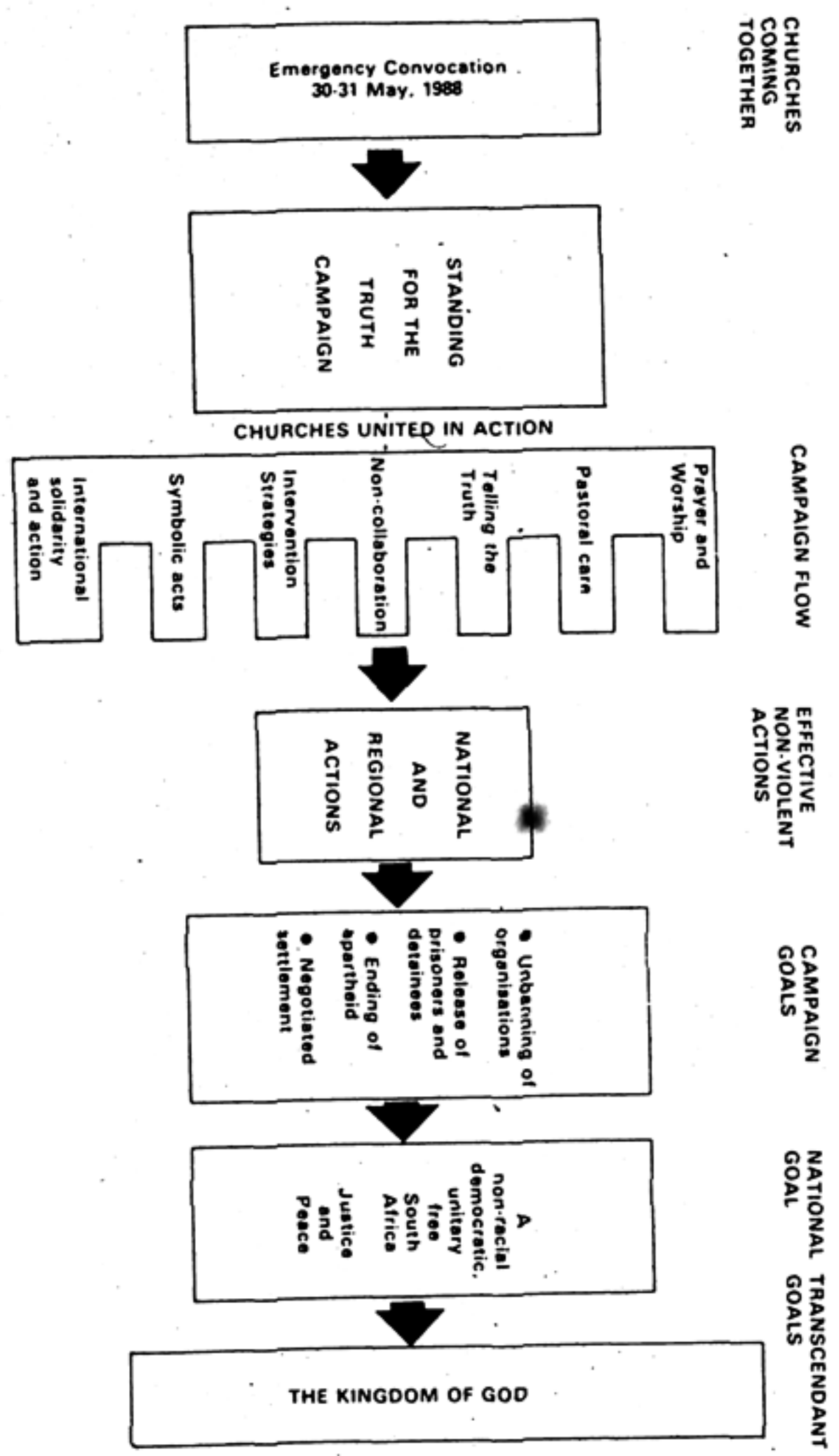
power of non-violence as practised by its best exponents and of the reconciliation and justice produced by such non-violent action. Its calling is to follow in the steps of its Master (I Peter 2: 21-24), bearing injury rather than inflicting it and turning oppressive suffering into redemptive suffering.

In this kind of action the Church is the bearer of hope in the world, a hope that is based on the power of God to bring life out of death, the power of the Spirit to change the minds, hearts and relationships of people.

**Will non-violence produce change?** Christian non-violence aims for both the transformation of structures and the conversion of the opponent. Its actions are such that they do not threaten the opponent's life or well-being. But persuasion alone may not change the opponent's mind.

Numerous examples this century show that persistent non-violence also builds the power of a people to take constructive control of their future, despite the existence of tyrannical rulers. At the same time it leaves oppressors eventually without the resources to impose their will on others. "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished" (Thoreau).

# Organisational Chart



Regional structures consisting of effective non-violent actions and strategies which will then be discussed by the national network and implemented accordingly.

The programme and activities of the campaign depends entirely on you. All are welcome to make suggestions.

# What will the programme of the campaign be?

Neither Church Leaders nor the National Campaign Committee wishes to prescribe to their churches and congregations as to what needs to be done and what actions to engage in. This is open to all Christians in South Africa to suggest and develop effective non-violent actions.

It is hoped that they will also draw on the training programmes and resources mentioned above. For example, it is expected that a loose-leaf kit will be available from a training programme to be held early in May 1989. This kit will contain suggestions of the kind of actions ordinary people, congregations and organisations can undertake and guidelines for these actions. Also there will then be a group of trainers in non-violence whose services can be requested.

For information on the kit and trainers contact: National Standing for the Truth Committee,

Queensbridge Building, Juta Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

This is your chance to make your contribution to the life, practice and witness of the church in an oppressive society.

Participate through your local church or ecumenical organisation. Participate in or initiate local Standing for the Truth Campaign Committees and link them up with the Regional Committees that are being formed. Through these structures of the campaign you can make your vision and ideas known. Methods and strategies for effective non-violent action proposed by you can then be fed into the national campaign.

It is together, as the people of God, that we will make the programme and determine the effectiveness of this campaign.

# Programmes for non-violent action

Effective non-violent action is based on the transforming power of love and truth. It involves:

- A continuous search for truth concerning both sides of the conflict.
- Confronting the opponent with the consequences of their policies until they see the wrong in them, or can no longer carry them out.
- Offering positive alternatives, instead of merely protesting.
- Total respect for the human person and therefore seeks solutions that include the opponent and offer them a way of saving face.
- Refusing to meet violence with violence, but being prepared for redemptive suffering.
- Incorporating future goals in present actions.

- Openness, courage, creativity and perseverance.

Its methods, in the order in which they are usually undertaken, are:

- *Analysis* of the situation and definition of goals sought.
- Continued attempt at *dialogue* with the opponent.
- *Persuasion* by appeals, education etc.
- *Demonstration* by processions, services, fasting etc.
- Selective *non-co-operation* in social, economic, political, etc, fields.
- Non-violent *intervention* which involves putting oneself in the way of the unjust or violent system.
- The creation of *alternative systems* which simply by-pass an old system that will not change.

## Conclusion

The year 1988 was a turning point in the life of the church. It was a year when the church moved forward from just *condemning* apartheid to a commitment of effective non-violent *action* to end apartheid. It was a year when the churches stopped debating about violence and non-violence and chose to rather *act* non-violently to end this evil apartheid system thus making violence unnecessary.

All this, it was agreed, will be done

with the goal of a negotiated settlement in mind. The churches see this as the only way in which the destruction of life can be reduced. They felt that this was the only way in which the total destruction of this country can be averted.

We hereby invite all Christians in this country and all peace-loving South Africans to participate fully in this campaign of Standing for the Truth.