

Order list
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STATEMENT OF
 THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD OF BISHOPS OF
 THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

This Statement of the Administrative Board has been made in response to many requests that there should be a clear indication of the attitude of the Catholic Church to the Republic Festival. This attitude is simple and clear. The Catholic Church is taking no part in the Festival officially. Consequently, Catholic institutions generally are refraining from participation.

To some people this decision of Church authority may sound very hurtful. It is not a pleasant decision to take because it seems to show hostility towards South Africa instead of the love that should be shown by the Church towards a national community.

If indeed the whole national community were rejoicing in this festival the Church would be happy to participate by publicly demonstrating its love for all the people of South Africa and by offering prayers of thanksgiving, blessing and petition.

But the great majority of people in South Africa see no reason for participation in the festival. In fact, as far as the majority is concerned, to participate in the festival means showing approval of what takes place in the Republic of South Africa in terms of its policies and laws, and this they could never do.

When the great majority of the people of South Africa reflect on the policy and laws of the country here are some of the images that arise in their minds:

1. Millions of people uprooted from their homes and transferred to other places where they are often crowded together without land, without food, often without water, without work, without the community life that once surrounded and supported them, without the sort of home in which children can be brought up in obedience and respect.
2. The terrifying anxiety about finding a job somewhere, somehow, usually far from home, wife, children, parents. Those who find jobs are the lucky ones even though for great numbers it often means living in a hostel with thousands of other men or women, cooking for oneself after a hard day's work, seldom seeing one's wife or husband and children, struggling desperately to send a few Rand home from an inadequate wage, succumbing to the temptations of sex, drink and gambling, getting involved in fighting, ~~anger and~~ violent death.
3. The appalling misery of life in rural areas where mothers and children and old people and, often enough, unemployed young people, struggle to survive on unproductive land with the help of the little sums of money sent by breadwinners from their distant places of work, where drought means utter destitution and starvation.
4. Life in crowded urban townships with scarcely room to move between box-like houses where large families are compressed into two or three rooms, where electricity is often lacking and the air is filled with smoke and the potoled streets with rubble, where men and women workers leave home often before sunrise and return after dark and children out of school grow up on the streets, where violence and sudden death are all too common.

5. The constant humiliation of being discriminated against in the matter of freedom and human rights, in fact, of being deprived entirely of certain rights like the right of sharing in the political life of the country - a discrimination emphasised by special townships often far removed from city centre, inconvenient in regard to transport and sadly lacking in the amenities considered essential in privileged areas.

Such images and many more like them, including the images of arrest, detention and banning, crowd into the minds of the majority of South Africans when they think of the Republic. No wonder they have nothing to celebrate.

The Republic cannot be blamed for all the evils that affect the people, but its policies and laws and lack of concern are responsible for a lot of that evil, injustice is not exclusive to South Africa. It is common in all human societies. But injustice in South Africa has its own special nature and intensity and it is our concern and our responsibility.

If we are to have a peaceful future we need such prayer and the work for justice that prayer should inspire. May the Republic Festival be an occasion for us to realise this in a deeper, fuller and more practical way, inspired by our love for God and for all the people of the beautiful and richly endowed country that he has given us.

Statement on the Republic Festival - 1st May 1981
