



OFFICE OF INFORMATION/Room 850/475 Riverside Drive, N.Y., NY 10115/(212) 870-2227

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NCC'S MCCLURG, BROUWER SEND MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH COUNCIL

NEW YORK, Feb. 29----The president and general secretary of the National Council of Churches Friday (Feb. 26) pledged to continue their support of efforts for peaceful change in South Africa through, among other means, "insisting in our own country on the imposition of comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa."

The Rev. Patricia A. McClurg, NCC president, and the Rev. Arie R. Brouwer, NCC general secretary, made that pledge in response to a strongly worded appeal issued by South African church leaders following the South African government's order effectively banning operations of 17 people's organizations.

"The leaders are right to say that God's justice will prevail. This we know," McClurg and Brouwer said in their telex to the Rev. Frank Chikane, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches. "It is a profound tragedy that the government continues to seek to eliminate organizations and to restrict people who seek that justice by peaceful means."

Leaders of South African churches held an emergency meeting in Johannesburg Feb. 23 to discuss "the crisis in our country which was created yesterday (Feb. 22) by the South African government" when it issued the banning order and also "prohibited many activities of the Congress of South African Trade Unions and restricted 18 of our leaders."

Persons affected include Simon Gqubule, principal of the Methodist Church's John Wesley College, and Albertina Sisulu and Archie Gumede. McClurg and Brouwer said the three are "persons respected in and beyond South Africa for their commitments to the peaceful struggle for justice."

The two NCC leaders said they share South Africa church leaders' "view of the futility of such measures by the South African government in a desperate attempt to maintain its power within the system of apartheid." They promised prayers, especially on Sunday, Feb. 28, when South African churches planned to hold services of witness and protest.

Following those services, South African police arrested and briefly detained several prominent South African church leaders including Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu; the Rev. Alan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and Chikane of the SACC.

Brouwer and McClurg promised to "continue our efforts to pursue peaceful change through the peaceful means available to us:

" -- Through continuing prayerful support for the South African Council of Churches and for all those in South Africa who bear both the pain of the present and the hope for a new future in South Africa.

" -- Through constant efforts to achieve the freedom of political prisoners in South Africa, and the lifting of restrictions such as those recently imposed on the free exercise of the people's rights.

" -- Through insisting in our own country on the imposition of comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa, in the hope of bringing about peaceful change."

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Said the South African church leaders in their message to more than a dozen overseas colleague organizations, including the NCC, "We believe the restrictions represent a desperate attempt by weak people to hold onto power in the face of an ever-increasing determination by the oppressed of our country to bring about justice, democracy and peace."

"The government's drastic and brutal action removes nearly all effective means open to our people of working for true change by peaceful means, and if there is violent reaction to its action, this government must take the responsibility."

"The activities which have been prohibited are central to the proclamation of the Gospel in our country," the church leaders continued. "We must make it quite clear that, no matter what the consequences, we will continue as a matter of course to campaign for the release of prisoners, to call for clemency for those under sentence of death, to call for the unbanning of our political organizations, to call for negotiations involving the true leaders of our country to bring about a transfer of power from a minority to all the people of our country, to commemorate significant events in the life of our nation, to commemorate those who have died in what the state calls 'riots,' and to call upon the international community to apply pressure to force the government to the negotiating table."

"Our mandate to carry out these activities comes from God and no man and no government will stop us," they said. "If the state wants to act against the church of God in this country for proclaiming the Gospel, then so be it."

The South African church leaders urged "the oppressed to intensify the struggle for justice and peace in accordance with the Gospel and we encourage them not to lose hope....To the White voters of South Africa, we must say -- without too much hope of being heard -- that you are being deceived by the government. Your fellow South Africans want nothing more than to live in a just and peaceful country. Your position is becoming untenable and we believe that you must disassociate yourself from this government. Apartheid is a heresy. You can't reform a heresy, and if you are to assure your futures, you must now pull out of 'White politics' and join the real struggle for democracy."

"We hope the international community -- and especially South Africa's major trading partners -- will wake up to the fact that this illegitimate government is threatening their interests as well as the lives and security of Black and White South Africans. It has shown quite clearly that it has nothing to offer but instability and bloodshed. It must be isolated to force it off the awful path it has chosen," the church leaders said.

Chikane, in a separate statement, called the banning order and restrictions "another draconian way of closing the doors for all organizations which were still committed to non-violent change in this country. Once more the nationalist government has revealed what really lies beneath its reform policy, i.e. total control of the people of South Africa by a White minority and outright repression of dissenting voices of the majority of people in this country."

Continued Chikane, "The argument by the minister of law and order that the order does not prohibit the organizations from preserving their assets, keeping up to date their books and records, and performing administrative functions is an attempt to give an impression to mislead the international community that this action does not amount to closing down the organizations so affected. The order is in fact directed to the fundamental aims and objectives of these organizations, i.e. to protest and work for the end of apartheid."