

STATEMENT

NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS' CONSULTATION (NCLC)

Head-office of Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC)
Khanya House, 129 Main Street, Waterkloof, Pretoria, 29 January 2020

As senior church leaders of different denominations, we have met on 29 January at Khanya House, Head-Office of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) Pretoria, to reflect on the challenges South Africa faces at the beginning of 2020.

Against the background of alarming reports presented to the Zondo Commission on State Capture – the plundering of public resources to benefit a few connected individuals or their companies; the mismanagement in State Owned Enterprises (SOEs); the lack of economic growth and employment opportunities and the increase in social hardship, South Africa urgently needs to get its house in order.

1. Political, economic and social crisis – a deficit of trust and accountability

A main challenge is the deep crisis and deficit of trust between citizens and political parties, and between some political leaders, and citizens in South Africa. What kind of reforms are necessary (even constitutionally) to restore accountability between political representatives and citizens? Are we not manipulated by the fierce competition amongst fractions within different parties - that fight for dominance in leadership positions to control resources, whilst sacrificing the wellbeing of all South Africans?

How can we restore leadership that serve the common good for all, that protects our environment and resources for future generations? How can we foster a life-giving economy where everybody benefits, that fosters a caring society – and not only powerful lobby groups (economic, political or civil society) that wrestle for the control of our destiny?

Democracy is not only about regular elections – but the fair chance for all to influence policy choices, to have a real impact on shaping the priorities that affects our daily lives (and not only for those with power or special connections).

The 2003 report of the cabinet appointed Electoral Task Team, headed by Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, recommended reforms to ensure: “*fairness, inclusivity, simplicity and accountability*”. Accountability was specifically identified as a weakness. Public surveys showed the need for individual accountability in the electoral system - with a representative accounting to a designated area. Collective accountability was not enough.” (C. Botha, Time for electoral reform and dusting off the Van Zyl Slabbert Report, 22 May 2019, in Politics Web, 30 /1/2020). Given the power of parties in our system, should the same principles and financial transparency not apply to the functioning of parties?

The lower turnout by voters in the 2019 election (65%) – with many young people not even registering to vote – sets a wrong trend, since it reflects weaker democratic participation. Comprehensive voter education should be fostered by church and faith communities, to strengthen responsible citizenship and political leadership.

2. The constitutional separation of political party interests and Government Office Bearers

This separation on national, provincial and local level – should be protected and Government Office Bearers should serve the public interests of all. The public political discourses in Parliament (National and Provincial), and in town council meetings should reflect respect for different opinions and everybody should be treated with equal dignity.

The high levels of violence and intolerance in our society is a matter of serious concern – that should be addressed by ethical and responsible leaders in all sectors of our society.

It is also disturbing that we hear in the daily news how some officials are strategizing to weaken the efforts of the Presidency to restore discipline and trust in governance, to restore a competent and responsible state.

As church and faith leaders we want to become part of responsible debate and dialogue on how to restore trust in the political process – which effects every South African citizen. Without political stability we cannot build a caring and life-giving society that is in the interest of every citizen.

3. Remove the political, structural and administrative barriers that hinder real partnerships between Government, church and faith communities

A core value imbedded in the National Development Plan (NDP), is to foster active citizenship that contributes to the well-being of all – through economic, social and care-programmes initiated within the broader civil society.

Yet church and faith networks are effectively reduced to mere “service-providers” for state-designed programmes (at the discretion of technical bureaucrats) – despite the proven effectiveness of these faith networks, and the substantial contribution from own resources and infrastructure to deliver cost-effective and efficient programmes, that are sustainable and have a lasting impact.

4. Special protection for our vulnerable children, protection of women in our society.

We support the call of President Cyril Ramaphosa to protect and care for our children, and vulnerable citizens in our society. We are mindful that this requires real commitment to renew fundamental values of equal dignity, mutual care and respect for one another - and that every citizen should take responsibility for the well-being of others.

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka

Chairperson: NCLC

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National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD)

Chairperson: Fr Richard Menatsi (Catholic Church in South Africa) | Vice-Chairperson: Sheikh Achmat Sedick (Director, Muslim Judicial Council Halaal Trust)
Executive Secretary: Dr Renier Koegelenberg (EFSA Institute) | NRASD Secretariat: EFSA Institute | www.nrasd.org.za | www.efsa-institute.org.za

Consulted NCLC members:

1. Archbishop Zandisile Magxwalisa, Archbishop, Jerusalem Church of South Africa
2. Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Anglican Church of Southern Africa
3. Bishop Purity Malinga, Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church of Southern Africa
4. Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Bishop of Mthatha, Catholic Church in South Africa/ President, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC)
5. Bishop Ziphozihle Siwa, former Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church of Southern Africa/ President, South African Council of Churches (SACC)
6. Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Durban, South Africa
7. Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)
8. Rev Lungile Mpetsheni, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA)
9. Bishop Victor Phalana, Bishop of Klerksdorp, Catholic Church in South Africa
10. Bishop Mosa Sono, Presiding Bishop, Grace Bible Church
11. Bishop Zandile Myeni, Bishop, Ethiopian Episcopal Church
12. Bishop Molwane Job, Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa
13. Bishop Melumzi Norushu, Ebenezer Apostolic Church Zion
14. Apostle Fanta Nonyane, Council of African Instituted Churches of Southern Africa
15. Revd Nelis Janse van Rensburg, Moderator, Dutch Reformed Church
16. Revd Miranda Magxwalisa, General Secretary, Jerusalem Church of South Africa
17. Revd Dr Peter Langerman, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa
18. Bishop Horst Müller, Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (NELCSA)
19. Revd Thenjiwe Base, National Treasurer, Reformed Apostolic Mission in South Africa (RAMSA)
20. Revd Hermie Damons, Director of Ecumenical Relations, Association of Christian Religious Practitioners
21. Revd Bonikay Nkenye, Council of African Instituted Churches of Southern Africa
22. Mr Vusumuzi Mndlalosi, Vice-President, Council of African Instituted Churches of Southern Africa
23. Fr Richard Menatsi, Catholic Church, Mtatha
24. Prof Jerry Pillay, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa
25. Dr Gustav Claassen, General Secretary, Dutch Reformed Church
26. Dr Willie van der Merwe, Dutch Reformed Church/ Rector, Hugenote College
27. Dr Abraham Hanekom, Director, Centre for Witness, Dutch Reformed Church
28. Dr Renier Koegelenberg, NRASD
29. Mr Charl Fredericks, NRASD
30. Ms Shirley Moulder, Anglican Church of Southern Africa
31. Sheikh Achmat Sedick, Muslim Judicial Council SA
32. Ms Tahirih Mathee, Baha'i Community of South Africa

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