

THE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

8 AUGUST 1997

Dear Sir,

The letter from Mr Wynand Malan dated 29 May 1997 refers.

We will make a few comments relating to our church, but as a general statement we record that throughout the apartheid era in South Africa our church was an active member of the South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) and identified closely with the actions of the SACC viz.

1. Dependents conference
2. Various forms of sanctions
3. Protest actions

Besides our involvement in SACC we were active members of the World Council of Churches, Council for World Mission, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, All Africa Council of Churches and Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches. All of these bodies were strongly opposed to the nationalist government. Our church believes firmly in Christian Unity and in addition to the bodies mentioned we also participated in the leadership of the Church Unity Commission. (Prof' John de Gruchy and the late Rev. Joseph Wing).

It is difficult to identify the lay members of the church who were punished for their opposition to the Nationalist government, but we can provide information relating to our clergy who were detained and/or persecuted in various ways. Our church was strongly opposed to the tri-cameral parliamentary arrangements. As certain of our clergy such as the *Revd.* Allan Hendrikse were members of the labour Party this caused a significant split in our denomination.

Dealing with two specific points you seek comments on

Gross human rights violations

We do not believe that our denomination condoned violence either by the government or the liberation movements. However because our denomination believed it was imperative that the Nationalist party had to be removed from power it is likely that some of our members and persons in opposition to the government would have believed that gross human rights violations were justified.

The congregational form of church government is from the bottom up. Many of our members are very conservative in their beliefs relating to the role of the church in society in its widest definition. As a result although we did not always move quickly as the "top down" denomination we believe were equally committed to the struggle.

The road to reconciliation

As Christians we believe that It is always possible for repentance and salvation to take place. These two concepts follow each other. Repentance could encompass forgiveness and until men are reconciled to each other there will be a barrier in man's reconciliation with God.

As a denomination we opposed the stand of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and its initial support of the Nationalist Government, Once the DRC reviewed its position we encouraged contact with them and actively supported the acceptance of their application for membership of the SACC.

Legislation is part of the action needed to build a country which is devoid of human rights violations. However all South Africans must be given hope - there must be employment, adequate housing, education and health care. People without hope will become disillusioned and start seeking their own solutions even if that violates the rights of others, We also need to deal with petty transgressions in a firm way. The rights of society and individuals must be protected - our new constitution certainly helps in this direction.

Yours truly

B.T.MALULEKA

Administrative Secretary