

## **SWAZILAND POLITICAL SITUATION- NOVEMBER 2008**

### **COMMENT**

Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Master reprove your disciples,’ but he answered, ‘I tell you, if these keep silence, the stones will cry out.’(Luke 19: 39-40)

1. The Roman Catholic Church in Swaziland has been observing, for quite sometime now, the political developments in the country. Quite frequently we have, together with the Council of Swaziland Churches, offered comments and advice on the political developments taking place in the country. This was especially true as Swaziland was embarking on the Constitution making exercise. It was then that we insisted on a more inclusive Constitutional making process. Indeed the principle of subsidiarity teaches us not to make decisions for people who can make these decisions for themselves.
2. Needless to say, our calls for a more inclusive constitutional making process were not heeded. The Constitution was adopted and a significant portion of the Swazi people was left out of the process. We believe that it was due to being marginalized that led some people to adopt crude and violent methods so as to force change in the country. This is really a cry for attention and recognition. The recent bombings are thus a manifestation of the failure by the ruling elite to engage in serious and honest dialogue with the citizenry.
3. Nevertheless, we have to mention that the Church condemns all forms of violence. Accordingly therefore: “Terrorism is to be condemned in the most absolute terms. It shows complete contempt for human life and can never be justified, since the human person is always an end and never a means. Acts of terrorism strike at the heart of human dignity and are an offense against all humanity; there exists, therefore, a right to defend oneself from terrorism (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*, 5: AAS 94 (2002), 134.) It is worth mentioning at this stage too, that the Catholic Church also pays attention to the causes of terrorism as outlined and wishes that all should work together to avoid these unfortunate acts.
4. Indeed, “excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among people arouse tensions and conflicts, and are a danger to peace. To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all persons, and therefore the common good of all humanity. Peace

- cannot be limited to a mere absence of war. No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among people (Pope Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* 1967: #480).
5. The King's highly emotional speech at the cattle byre did not manage to reach out to the marginalized population of this country. On the contrary it further marginalized them and gave a clear indication that there was no desire on the part of the ruling elite to engage them in dialogue. The King emphasized that those who disagreed with the status quo were to be throttled and dealt with harshly. He invoked the old maxim of an eye for an eye. We all know that if we were to live by this maxim the whole nation would become blind.
  6. The recent appointments to political office and committees also served as a clear indication that the King was intent on maintaining the status quo. Indeed such appointments were bestowed upon the relatives and friends of the ruling class. Such nepotism can only make those who are marginalized be driven to a point of despair.
  7. Last week the Prime Minister dropped a bombshell by putting a clear plan on how to deal with those who disagreed with the ruling elite. He branded a number of liberation movements as terrorists and proclaimed that anyone found to be a member or even associating with them would face the full might of the terrorism act. The subsequent arrest of the leader of the Peoples' United Democratic Movement, Mario Masuku, was a clear indication that the dictates of the King were now being adhered to.
  8. In the prevailing political and social climate, the Roman Catholic Church invites all concerned, especially on the side of Government and the ruling elite, to real and serious dialogue. Dialogue, we believe, will bring to the centre all those who have for a long time felt that they were at the margins of the political and economic life of the country. Accordingly, then, we call on all people of goodwill and Parliament, to reject the terrorism act. It is also not too late, to embark on a more inclusive Constitution making process.
  9. The Roman Catholic Church's main duty is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people as commanded by Christ himself (Mt. 28: 18-20, Acts 1: 8). The command of Christ means that we have to reach out to all people. Church statements on justice and peace are not just directed to Catholics only but also to Non-Catholics. Our mission is to be inclusive all the time. In this we are encouraged by the great

- example of Jesus who never marginalized people, even those who were considered to be outlaws during his time.
10. It is worth mentioning too that some members of Pudemo, Swayoco, Swaziland Solidarity Network and Umbane may also be members of the Church. We have, as a Church, every duty to minister to them and not only them, but also to Non-Catholics. This means that we will continue to minister to all people, even those branded by the Government as terrorists. This is a task that Christ has set for us and we will do all in our power to make sure that we attend to it. Jesus promised that he will be with the Church all the time, even during difficult times. We therefore trust in Divine providence, believing that Christ will guide us as we continue with the task of announcing the good news to all people.
  11. The Roman Catholic Church continues to work for peace for all people. Indeed, peace is the goal of life in society, as is made extraordinarily clear in the messianic vision of peace: when all peoples will go up to the Lord's house, and he will teach them his ways and they will walk along the ways of peace. (Cf. Is 2: 2-5) We look forward to lasting peace when the king rules according to God's justice, righteousness flourishes and peace abounds 'till the moon be no more' (PS 72: 7).

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19 November 2008