



Media Statement by Cardinal Napier on the political situation in Swaziland.

TURMOIL IN SWAZILAND

A delegation of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, comprising of Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, Bishops Barry Wood and Giuseppe Sandri, recently returned from Swaziland where they had paid a solidarity visit to Bishop Ndlovu of Swaziland.

The following statement is a result of their visit.

Swaziland is a country in turmoil; a country tearing itself apart from the inside by the actions of an uncaring head of state and a regime that is getting more brutal by the day.

Swaziland is currently under a state of emergency that was imposed on 12th April 1973 when King Sobhuza II usurped all legislative, administrative and judicial powers by royal decree. By that decree supreme authority was vested solely in the institution of the monarchy and in the person of the king. All political parties and indeed political activities were banned.

It is evident that these powers need to be curtailed since their abuse by those in authority is the primary cause of the current crisis, in which dissenting views meet with brutality of the highest order. Pro-democracy and human rights activists have their home arbitrarily raided; they themselves are arrested, detained and beaten up by security forces, presumably under orders of the king who is the Commander-in-Chief.

Despite having a Constitution that "supposedly" guarantees the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the current constitution simply enshrines the King's 1973 Decree, which has "claw-back" clauses, which in fact deprive citizens of their basic rights - to expression, assembly and association. This makes Swaziland a police state in which political parties remain banned.

Examples of this are the following:

1. The recent quashing of the protest marches in Manzini scheduled for 12th April 2011 in Manzini is a typical example of the high-handedness of the regime. That event led to the most stringent security clampdown in the history of the country.
2. The Human Rights Commission set up (with members appointed by the king) to fulfil the provisions of the Constitution, has since its creation not once attended to any complaints about gross violations of human rights by the state.

3. Two activists, Mathousand Ngubane and Sipho Jele have “mysteriously” died in custody. Inquests were set up in both instances, but the report on Ngubane’s death has never been made public. The report on Jele’s death raises more questions than answers concerning the circumstances surrounding his arrest and leading to his death.
4. Even the Suppression of Terrorism Act pushed through Parliament in 2008 supposedly as the Swaziland’s contribution to the global fight against terrorism has since been used by the government to silence its critics.

Swaziland is currently in the throes of an unprecedented crisis. It has

- the highest HIV AIDS infection rate in the world (26%);
- the lowest life expectancy in the world (32 years);
- an unemployment rate of 40% and rising;
- an extreme poverty rate with 70% of its population living below the poverty line, which is set at under 6 dollars a day.

The “Tinkhundla” system of governance is a breeding place for corruption and greed. Monies intended for alleviating the people’s suffering are diverted to support the lavish lifestyle of the monarchy and its cohorts, namely the King, his 13 wives, 30 children, other members of the royal family and hangers-on.

Finally it is not the people who elect the government. Members of Parliament are elected on individual basis so that they owe allegiance to the King, who also appoints the judiciary.

For these reasons urgent actions in needed to redeem Swaziland from this deadly crisis.

Therefore the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference proposes that SADC and the AU examine critically and honestly:

- a) whether the constitution of Swaziland meets with the requirements of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- b) whether the election process conforms to the SADC Protocol on elections;

We propose further

- that the king lift the State of Emergency by repealing the 1973 Decree;
- that the Constitution be amended to reinstate the full range of human rights;
- that King Mswati III enter into meaningful dialogue with his people in order to facilitate movement towards true democracy his country.

Accordingly we call on all Catholics and people of goodwill in Southern Africa to joins us in praying for meaningful change in Swaziland as the most effective way of expressing solidarity with the People of Swaziland.

Issued by:

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