



AFRICA/SOUTH AFRICA - Hospital strike. Bishops: "We are horrified that care is being denied to the weakest and most vulnerable"

Johannesburg (Agenzia Fides) - "We are horrified that care is being denied to the weakest and most vulnerable," as a result of the doctors and nurses' strike, says a statement issued by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and signed by Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, Archbishop of Durban.

For 4 days, the strike of the public service workers has been crippling South Africa. The major inconveniences for citizens is felt in the health sector, as the strikers using forms of boycott with particularly harsh consequences in order to prevent those who do not join the strike from working. Employees on strike have even blocked the access areas of ambulances, doctors, and even patients of these hospitals. According to a local channel, at least seven people, including three infants, have died because of the strike. In the Hospitals of KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng, military doctors and personnel have been sent in to resume services.

The South African Bishops ask that all those working in health and education "give serious consideration to the poor, the vulnerable, the sick and the young people who are desperately striving for a better life by completing" their schooling. "We call on all educators and health care workers, especially those who are Catholics, to examine their own conscience and action seriously," the bishops said, noting that, while they support workers' right to strike, "we call on you to recognize the rights of others to choose freely" whether or not to take part in the strike.

South Africa's largest union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which has 1.3 million members, called the indefinite strike to try to force the government to meet its demands for an 8.6 percent pay increase and a bigger housing allowance. The state has so far refused to budge on its offer of a 7 percent wage increase and 700 rands (\$95) a month housing allowance. (LM) (Agenzia Fides 21/8/2010)