



AFRICA/SOUTH AFRICA - The South African Bishops "regret" the approval of the Protection of State Information Bill

Johannesburg (Agenzia Fides) - The South African Bishops "regret" the approval of the Protection of State Information Bill and ask President Jacob Zuma to refer it to the judgment of the Constitutional Court.

In a statement signed by His Exc. Mgr. Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Cape Town and President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) states that "President Zuma has the power to refer the Bill to the Constitutional Court before he signs it into law. We call upon him to do so, in order to avoid the risk of a prolonged and expensive court battle and the possibility of more parliamentary time being spent on amendments." On April 25, after 3 years of debate, often polemical, Parliament has finally approved the law that regulates State secret. Several criticisms (also on behalf of the Church, see Fides 20/1/2012) have arisen on the text (which has undergone major amendments, however, compared to the original draft), in particular on its possible use to hide forms of corruption on behalf of administrators and politicians. "To fight corruption we need more openness not more secrecy," remarked Mgr. Brislin, who also judges excessive the penalty (up to 25 years in prison) for those who reveal a State secret "knowing or ought reasonable to have known" thus benefitting a foreign State. This is one way, critics say, to gag those who intend to denounce criminal acts protected by State secrecy. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 26/04/2013)