



Diakonia condemns unrest and violence and calls for peace and leadership

The upcoming national and provincial elections provide all the citizens of our land with an opportunity – their democratic right – to vote for leaders of their choice. This right and duty should be exercised in an environment which is free of fear or intimidation, and as a result of a process of fair exchange of information regarding the issues which affect their future welfare.

Recent incidences of violence, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, which include murder, threats to safety and increasing levels of intolerance, are completely unacceptable. In many cases, such intolerance has been displayed by those who would call themselves leaders, both at senior level within political parties, as well as those in civil positions and even at municipal level.

The upcoming elections have been heralded by many as the most important in our young democracy's history, welcoming for many a second transition towards economic justice and social transformation. It is sad, that those who would wish to govern our country seek to mar the potential which these elections hold, by resorting to force – forceful words, violent tactics and harmful deeds, imposed on the very people they wish to serve.

“As people of faith, it is our duty to ensure that peace reigns supreme. Our leaders, and more especially those who wish to serve us and govern our land for the next five years, should be beacons of hope and should offer the electorate promises of true freedom – from poverty, disease, oppression and division. Instead we are witnessing far too much divisive language and offensive rhetoric. This does not bode well for ensuring an environment which is conducive to free and fair elections, nor do these actions portray the kind of moral fibre which every voter should be assured of amongst the leaders of tomorrow,” said Bishop Barry Wood, OMI, Chairperson of Diakonia Council of Churches.

We call on all the people of KwaZulu-Natal to reject all forms of violence as a means to obtaining power. Power achieved in this manner is not power at all, but rather leads to tyranny, and eventual anarchy amongst a population which feels subverted and disillusioned.

We call on our leaders, and those who are entrusted with the task of ensuring safety in our communities, to resolve to attend to these tasks with a new commitment to peace.

As an authentic civil voice, the people of faith will be required to look back on the elections with a view to determining their fairness. The electoral process can only be declared such if the electorate have been able to exercise their votes in a conducive environment, characterised by the total lack of intimidation, void of any form of violence, free of favour and girded by honesty, tolerance and political maturity.

We condemn all acts of violence, hate speech, any talk which reflects intolerance or disrespect for the views of others, or any actions which are aimed at intimidating those who would seek to cast their vote for leaders of their choice.

We urge all those campaigning for political position to reflect these values - in their actions and in their deeds, and we commend the outcome of these elections to the will of our Almighty God – a God who seeks justice and compassion, especially for the marginalised, the poor and the disenfranchised.

END

Issued by Diakonia Council of Churches
Durban, South Africa
27 February 2009