



### **Bishop calls for political maturity**

**On behalf of the member churches of Diakonia Council of Churches, Chairperson Bishop Barry Wood has issued a strong call for peace and prayer to the people of KwaZulu-Natal.**

The Council and its member churches have expressed deep concern over the increasing levels of intolerance displayed by supporters of various political parties and by the leadership of some political organisations. “Churches and other civil society organisations have a key role to play in speaking out against all forms of intolerance and prejudice, especially where these are displayed by the very people elected to leadership positions. Our leaders are expected to present themselves as exemplary at all times”, said Bishop Wood.

Speaking ahead of party conventions over the weekend, Bishop Barry Wood emphasised the importance of safeguarding the values of democracy – freedom of speech and association being central – as well as the right to vote. “Democracy is about change; democracy is our means towards ensuring we have a government which is answerable to the people; democracy is a process which entrenches our right to organise ourselves politically and socially. We must defend these values and the church has a role to play in educating its members”, he said. “Democracy means we can differ from one another and we can form new parties, we can and must allow for change and we must protect the rights of those who seek to do so,” he added.

Diakonia Council of Churches strongly condemns the various forms of violence which have occurred in the political discourse over the past few weeks. This violence has played out in many ways, not least of which has been the language and rhetoric exercised in the public arena by various key people. Bishop Wood urged those who enjoyed the public stage to avoid any references to violence, however obscure these might be, and seek rather to create an environment most conducive towards peace-building and neighbourliness. “We cannot afford another outbreak of violence – we must do everything in our power to ensure peaceful conditions pre- and post-elections”, he said.

The true test of a mature democracy is the ability of all stakeholders to remain focussed on the real issues at hand. The political arena needs to shift focus from personal agendas and partisan infighting to the real needs of the people it serves. Bishop Wood called for a renewed commitment to the real crises besetting our people: “KwaZulu-Natal is in the grip of the world’s worst rate of HIV infections. The rate of crime is spiralling and poverty reduces the lives of

millions to a sub-human existence. Service delivery to the people who need it most leaves much to be desired. Children are being orphaned every day and the state of our schools and clinics is desperate. Our environment is being degraded and climatic changes present growing challenges to us all. These are the real issues – these are the debates which we should be hearing. Addressing these problems will go a long way to bringing about peace in our land.”

Diakonia Council of Churches calls on all people of faith to pray for peace for our country and for wisdom and courage for our leaders. “We call on all people of faith to practice peace-building – in word and deed. KwaZulu-Natal is a province with deep scars which require healing and reconciliation. This can only be realised through strong and bold leadership committed to peace and justice”, says Bishop Wood.

Diakonia represents hundreds of thousands of Christian believers and has strong ties with other faith communities. The organisation has a long history of working for justice and peace.

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Media enquiries to: Roland Vernon (031) 310 3551 or 074 311 0000 or  
[roland.vernon@diakonia.org.za](mailto:roland.vernon@diakonia.org.za)