

## **DIAKONIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES CONDEMNS THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO OUR NEIGHBOUR – ZIMBABWE – THROUGH DURBAN PORT**

Diakonia Council of Churches, an ecumenical Christian organisation serving churches in the eThekweni area, objects in the strongest possible way to the recent clearing by the Durban port authorities of the Chinese vessel, *An Yue Jiang*, which South African Police have confirmed is carrying arms destined for Zimbabwe.

This is in direct conflict with the principles of peace and dialogue, supported by the South African Government, as well as with the EU Common Position banning the delivery and supply of arms to Zimbabwe.

The Council notes with dismay that China has been promoting arms-for-oil deals with Africa as the continent is becoming one of its major sources of oil, and that country has been a major supplier of heavy arms and ammunitions to Zimbabwe for many years. It is all the more alarming that our own city is now a partner in this deal as we willingly participate in the supply chain through our own port.

Member churches have for many years stood in solidarity through prayer and support for the oppressed people of Zimbabwe who have suffered under a regime of violence, inducing poverty and suffering on millions of people.

Diakonia Council of Churches Chairperson, Bishop Barry Woods, said in response today, "We the Council, representing the local church of Durban, cannot stand by and condone the clearing of arms to pass through our port and which are destined for our neighbour, Zimbabwe. It is alarming that these arms are being provided at a crucial time in the democratisation of Zimbabwe, and even more so given the current situation and potential for unrest, violence and military crackdowns which have already begun to manifest themselves there. We call on our local authorities to re-examine their decision to clear the vessel and its cargo; we call on local government to support all peaceful initiatives and to condemn any action which promotes the use of violence; and we reiterate our stance in solidarity with all faith communities calling for the immediate release of election results in Zimbabwe. We urge the South African Government and other SADC members to actively pursue justice for the people of Zimbabwe."

At this year's annual Good Friday Service held by Diakonia Council of Churches, the theme "Who is my neighbour?" explored our relationship to all our neighbours and the faith community was challenged to exercise its Biblical call to practice 'neighbourliness' to countries like Zimbabwe. Specific prayers were offered for Zimbabwe by Durban's Anglican Bishop Rubin Phillip. The service was attended by around 3000 people from many different churches in Durban.