

June 13, 2008

The moderation of the Dutch Reformed Church at their recent meeting has expressed its deep concern over violence in South Africa, to which there seems to be no end. They have also taken cognizance of the growing levels of hopelessness, frustration and threats of counter violence. It is especially in light of this that the statement has been issued by us.

When the Dutch Reformed Church points out certain problems in its statement, it is prompted by a concern for the country and its people. We would like to stress this since declarations on violence have in the past been met with accusations of disloyalty to the country. Our Church in Southern Africa exists through the grace of God and will remain here as long as God wills. We have repeatedly committed ourselves not only to South Africa but the entire continent. Our aim is not to be overcritical or negative or to continually find fault. Since 1990 we have gone to great lengths to encourage a positive stance by our members towards the country and have encouraged our members to act constructively towards improving the wellbeing of our country and its entire population. Where ever possible we have cooperated with government and other organisations to the extent that the church leadership has been hauled over the coals a number of times by its members.

We are not unaware of the many problems facing our country and are pleased to say that literally hundreds of welfare projects have been instituted and are run by local Dutch Reformed congregations. However, our community has been shocked once more by the latest spate of violence to which there seems to be no end. Farmers and their workers are prime targets and feel increasingly vulnerable to attacks by hostile elements. In our cities and townships the lives of innocent people - both rich and poor, black and white - are willfully destroyed by mindless deeds of criminal violence. It is indeed possible to be robbed and even shot on the way to the shops.

People no longer feel safe and have lost all faith in the police services to protect them in dangerous and life threatening situations. What is more worrying is the air of negativity, defeatism and anger which is taking hold of our people. People are beginning to give up hope because they feel that the situation is out of control and that there is no real attempt or will to change the situation. More and more we are hearing about people threatening to take the law into their own hands. To us this is a matter of deep concern which needs to be addressed.

In our view there are certain underlying problems that need to be addressed. Firstly, in our opinion, the reluctance on the part of the government to commit itself unequivocally to combating the wave of violence and criminality in all its forms is cause for concern. The public are getting conflicting messages (the latest being the recent statement by the president) which frustrate and demoralize them. In addition a number of occurrences have undermined the public trust in the police. The apparent protection of a high ranking official in one of the metro councils and the special privileges afforded to certain ANC members who have been sentenced to prison, have cast doubts on the government's ability to dispense justice fairly and equitably. There is also a laxity and ineffectiveness perceived in certain sectors of the police force which is unacceptable. We are aware that often lack of equipment plays a part and we are grateful to the many members of the police force who risk their lives daily and work tirelessly in the fight against violence and crime.

We are appealing to the government to act decisively with regards to violence and crime in order to make it possible for people to continue believing in the potential of the country, to continue investing and to help create a future for every child in this country.

When government starts to see it as their duty to set an example, condemns and brings to book any trace of corruption and immediately puts into place a credible and workable strategy to curb crime, confidence in the government will be restored and all sectors of the community will contribute willingly and eagerly to create a South Africa which is precious to all and where we all want to live in peace.

We feel that the time has come for the creation of a strong depoliticized alliance emanating from civil society to guide, advise and support the police in their task. We are praying, as is fitting for believers, without ceasing for the government and especially the police while assuring them that we are aware of the almost impossible task they are facing. At the same time we are duty bound to make our prophetic voice heard.