

MEDIA RELEASE
23 April 2008

The Moderators of the Cape Synods of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church

Dr. Allan Boesak and Dr. Braam Hanekom, the Moderators of the Cape Synods of the *Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa* (URCSA) and the *Dutch Reformed Church* (DRC), returned to South Africa last night after a two day visit to Zimbabwe. They were accompanied by Dr. Kobus Odendaal of the Ministry of Public Witness and Service of the two churches. The aims of the visit were to express the two churches' solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe and to gather first hand information on the status quo in the neighbouring country.

The visit took the church leaders to both urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe, where they met with local church and community representatives and human rights activists. In order to protect the safety of those involved, names of people met and places visited are not disclosed.

Drs. Boesak and Hanekom expressed the following observations at a media briefing in Belhar this morning:

- There is no doubt that Zimbabwe is experiencing a most severe crisis characterized by large scale and blatant injustice. The physical needs of people are clearly and immediately visible as the economic situation continues to deteriorate daily. In light of an anticipated bad agricultural season due to unfavourable weather patterns this summer, a short term humanitarian disaster is inevitable.
- People live with intense uncertainty and fear. In discussions it became clear that the hope and expectations that people experienced shortly after the elections were short-lived and are fading rapidly in light of the continuing delay in the announcement of election results. A large percentage of Zimbabweans are sceptical about a re-run of the elections and feel cheated.
- It is abundantly clear that levels of intimidation have indeed significantly increased since the election. It finds expression in intense levels of physical violence. Communities exhibited fear but also great anger.
- All indications are that the few white farmers who are left will now be removed from their farms. Of the original more than 4000 white farmers, fewer than 400 are left and they too are subject to intimidation.
- Very disturbing as well are the signs that the judicial system seems to be in a state of collapse and the courts are sometimes no more than handmaidens of government.

In light of the above we,

- As church leaders we call upon all believers to pray earnestly for the people of Zimbabwe. This is a plea from the churches in Zimbabwe.
- We call on SADEC to urgently and directly intervene in the Zimbabwe situation. It should, for various reasons, include a SADEC peace force.
- Any efforts from the Zimbabwe government to acquire weapons such as the case recently should be rigorously opposed wherever possible.
- In light of the threatening hunger situation it is urgently necessary for all relevant players to prepare coordinated plans of action.
- We join other voices in urging the South African government to immediately take steps to address this crisis.

END

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Belhar

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