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SACC calls for dissolution of parliament and elections for fresh mandate!

Statement of the 2017 Triennial National Conference of the South African Council of Churches, Benoni, June 6 - 8, 2017.

JOHANNESBURG: The South African Council of Churches (SACC) held its 2017 session of the Triennial National Conference at Kopanong, Benoni from Tuesday June 6 to Thursday June 8, under the theme of Nehemiah (2:17), *“Come, let us rebuild... and we will no longer be in disgrace.”*

Twenty-five (25) of the major churches in the country and a number of associate member churches were represented at the Conference covering all the traditions and expressions of faith from Catholics, African Independent and indigenous churches, Anglican, Methodists, Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches throughout the country. Accordingly, the SACC is the most representative churches organisation in the country.

The Conference unanimously resolved, that the south African government has lost its moral legitimacy. The SACC's Unburdening Panel Report revealed to the SACC, the systemic patterns of governmental wrongdoing in the design of inappropriate control of State systems through a power-elite that parcels out contracts and other opportunities for their circles against the interests of good governance and against the common good of the South African citizenry.

The stalemate on Nkandla, especially following the SACC meeting with the President, on the 15th December 2015, points to a serious breach of public integrity. The President's stance in his defence on the matter of the expenses on his private home, seemed syndicated across government and the broad leadership of the governing party. The Minister of Police and other Government Ministers performed what seemed like a choreographed chorus in endorsing the President's position.

Parliament, the nation's mandated representatives to supervise the conduct and performance of the Government Executive, seemed to have shared in the legal portion passed syndicated across the governmental establishment, in displaying complete moral bankruptcy in the execution of their responsibilities in upholding that laws of the Land.

Against these realities, the Conference concluded that the President has caused Parliament, the country's representatives, and therefore the people of South Africa to sin. (1 Kings 14:16). In confirming the impropriety of their actions against the State, the Constitutional Court further ruled that The President, the Minister of Police and the National Assembly must pay costs of the applications including the costs of two counsel.

These are for the SACC, areas of moral concern, not to mention the very fact that no one in government thought there was an issue of inequality, poverty and homelessness in justifying a personal household development bill of nearly R250 million. Nehemiah exclaims: “What you are doing is not wrong and morally bad. Should you not walk in the fear of God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?”

The Prophet Ezekiel condemns shepherds who feed themselves and starve the flocks? He urge us too to condemn shepherds who eat the fat of the land, and clothe themselves, with the wool, slaughter the fatlings, but do not feed nor strengthen the weak sick, the broken, nor bring back what was driven away, the lost..., (Ezekiel 34:2-5)

In the light of all these, the Conference resolved to:

1. Call for Parliament to be dissolved and fresh national elections be held to secure a fresh mandate based on acceptable values and on integrity.
2. Convene a national convention that includes a broad base of South Africans to reflect on these matters and the way forward. This to provide the opportunity for a new consensus on national values, that will for once, help South Africa arrive at a common basis for a common, reconciled citizenship. This would of necessity have to address not only the governmental values and standards, but also how to hasten the establishment of a reconciled social and economic dispensation for the realization of the post apartheid promise of South Africa - a just, equitable, reconciled, peaceful, and sustainable South Africa, free of racist, tribalist, xenophobic and gender prejudices; free of corruption and deprivation, where every child born is free to develop to its God given potential.

The Conference spent a lot of time both in a special commission and in plenary, deliberating about the scourge of the killing of women, some by their partners, and sad notion of corrective rape and killing of lesbians, as well as people with albinism. A special noontime devotion was conducted on this pain, led by Father Michael Lapsley, Director of the Centre for Healing Memories, together with Major Holmes of the Salvation Army. Some names of the recently murdered were read out symbolically for all those who have perished in this way. Special prayers for Lesotho and Israel Palestine we are also said.

The Conference resolved that churches must take up the struggle against gender based violence in earnest. Including addressing the sinfulness in this regard through the language, culture and practices in churches that may inspire and engender patriarchy and the reducing of the human dignity of women. "As the Church of Christ, we will pause to pray against the wanton killings of lesbians, people living with albinism and women. What is the current church rhetoric on these issues when God's heart bleeds?" said Bishop Siwa.

Conference had a number of commissions with resolutions for all the areas of the SACC campaign of The South Africa We Pray For - addressing poverty and inequality where the issues of education were dealt with as it is critical to fight inequality in the long terms. Conference dealt with the matters of the family life, economic transformation that includes the vexed land question, healing and reconciliation, and of course the challenge of anchoring democracy, where the governance issues belong. In this regard Conference follows the prophetic model of Prophet Jeremiah who, when the country was besieged and the economy in a serious junk status with land becoming of no value, bought land to generate hope and said: "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land." (Jeremiah 32:15)

Conference elected a new National Executive Committee, with the Praesidium made up of: President - Bishop Zipho Siwa, Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa; Senior Vice President - Rev. Frank Chikane, International President of the Apostolic Faith Mission; Second Vice President - Ms Nomasonto Magwaza of The Ecumenical Service for Socio Economic Transformation (ESSET), an affiliate organization of SACC.

This Triennial Conference was graced by the presence of the representative of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Archbishop Emeritus Anders Wejryd from Sweden, President of the WCC for Europe; the President of the Botswana Council of Churches, Bishop Metlhayothle Beleme; the General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Lesotho, Mr Koosimile Emmanuel Makubekube; three former Presidents of the SACC, Bishop Peter Storey, Bishop Mvume Dandala, and Bishop Jo Seoka; two former Senior Vice Presidents, Mrs Thabisile Msezana and Rev Joy Faith Kronenberg; and a former veteran staff member, Rev. Abraham Maja from Limpopo. Archbishop Emeritus Anders Wejryd encouraged the Conference in saying; "Your constitution

governs. Your constitution was formed in a process involving many – so that it could serve and govern many. You as churches accept and hail the constitution. It reflects values which we together recognize as serving humanity and God’s will with us, and through us.”

The SACC is determined and inspired by Nehemiah, to rebuild the nation to be a fully functional and equitable democracy. The SACC is committed to realize the pastoral mandate with God’s help; to pray and work for the restoration (1 Pet 5:10 -11) of the violated social structures and address the mismanagement of the nation’s resources. Thus in this context the church should restore hope in a hopeless and broken society.
