

National Church Leaders' Consultation The Third Consultation

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tuesday, 27 October 2009, 9h30 - 15h00

Southern Sun Intercontinental Johannesburg O R Tambo Airport Hotel, Johannesburg

Church Leaders welcome new Government openness about HIV & AIDS and Crime in South Africa.

The Church Leaders of South Africa enthusiastically participated in a frank and open discussion with Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi and National Commissioner of Police, Bheki Cele at the Southern Sun Intercontinental Hotel at the OR Tambo International Airport in Gauteng on 27 October 2009.

Church Leaders described the meeting as honest and refreshing.

Dr Motsoaledi and Commissioner Cele had been invited to address the National Church Leaders Consultation which takes place two to three times a year and involves prominent Heads of Christian Denominations and Church Leaders in South Africa. The Consultation is a discussion forum on matters affecting the South African community.

Dr Motsoaledi described HIV & AIDS as a 'scourge bedevilling the Nation'. In a pragmatic presentation, the Minister showed how HIV & AIDS antenatal prevalence had approached 45% in some districts. Mortality had also increased.

Focussing on pregnant women, child mortality and general mortality, the Minister called for a new zeal in dealing with HIV & AIDS. Using statistics from a number of sources, he showed that South Africa needed a mass mobilization for testing, treatment rollout and prevention. He asked the Church communities to increase their efforts at building a healthier, more caring society.

Church Leaders appreciated his openness and realism as a refreshing new direction from Government. His candour in calling HIV & AIDS a 'big monster of which everyone had some part but no one had the whole picture of' was seen as encouraging.

'I am putting my head on the block – we are going to reduce crime in South Africa' said National Police Commissioner Bheki Cele promising that by working together, South Africans would reduce crime.

As part of a rigorous discussion, he urged Church Leaders to take charge of strengthening the morals and ethics of the people in their church communities. He urged a greater focus on the family. 'Let us all say that it is good to do good everyday'.

Pre-empting being questioned on the 'shoot to kill' issue, the Commissioner stated that the phrase has been coined by the media and not by any official. 'What government is saying is SA police should not die in the hands of thugs, SA citizens should not die at the hands of thugs. Section 49 says 'an *arrestor has a right to defend the citizen and himself if under threat and has a right to use deadly force*' - I will not retreat on this statement'.

'We must take back our peace and security- the thugs must be made to fear the law- the situation in our country is abnormal and this calls for abnormal responses. I will not kiss anyone.'

The Commissioner also spoke of the important task of the criminal justice system to rethink the issue of Bail which is given to criminals who go back onto the streets to commit the same crimes.

The Commissioner ended by encouraging Church Leaders to work with government to rid the country of crime- to preach about crime; - to preach to parents and communities who protect their children who have committed crimes and to deal with domestic violence.

Church Leaders said that they had greatly appreciated the Commissioner's straightforward approach. They also enjoyed his humour.

Church Leaders committed to working together with one another and with the Department of Health and the Police Commissioner. To this end, task groups would be set up to liaise with both departments on an ongoing basis.

Media Liaison:

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