

NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR RECONCILIATION (1985)

From 10 to 12 September 1985 a meeting of church leaders from every part of South Africa and from 47 denominations of the church was held at the Africa Enterprise Centre in Pietermaritzburg. The political situation and matters of social concern were discussed as well as ways in which Christians could meet and get to know each other, especially those of other race groups. On the final day a Statement of Affirmation was published. It stated what the majority of the representatives believed to be the leading of the Holy Spirit for the whole South African church:

PREAMBLE

This message comes to you from a very wide cross-section of Christian leadership, spanning many denominations, drawn from every part of the nation, representative of every racial group, meeting in Pietermaritzburg from 10th - 12th September 1985 for the launching of the National Initiative for Reconciliation. It is to be noted that this is not a single event but the initiating of an ongoing process. This gathering of church unity in our present context of polarization is, we believe, in itself a sign of hope for our nation at this time.

We have come together in humility and deep repentance for our sin and guilt in order to listen to God and to discover one another in new ways. We give thankful testimony to God that a deep thing has happened to us in this process as we have struggled under God with many hard and complex issues and found an astonishing measure of unity where formerly we knew little but division. The spirit of compassion and forgiveness, as well as resolution to move forward together, has laid hold upon us all and is impelling us towards extending God's Kingdom together and building a new South Africa along with all its peoples.

Past experience with statements or resolutions of official Church bodies demonstrate that too often they emphasize divisions rather than an encouragement for action. Therefore, this assembly of Christian leadership does not issue a statement of words but issues a commitment to action.

We believe the Spirit of God is urging us and the whole South African church in new and more determined ways:

1 To seek every opportunity, corporately, congregationally and individually to proclaim and witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, persuading all that in Him alone is to be found forgiveness and that newness of life that is eternal.

2 To continue in prayer and fasting for renewal in the Holy Spirit and reawakening of the Church of Jesus Christ and for peace and justice in our land.

3 To create concrete opportunities for meaningful worship, fellowship and discussion with people of differing social and cultural groups.

4 To help remove ignorance of events in South Africa and prepare people for living in a changed and totally non-racial land.

5 To share the South African reality of suffering by extending and accepting invitations to experience the life of fellow Christians in the townships.

6 To plan and mount regional gatherings of Christian leadership to continue this process of reconciliation and to initiate concrete changes in South African society.

FURTHERMORE:

We feel compelled as witnesses of Jesus Christ to share with the nation the hope that we have experienced together. For those who suffer under the pain and despair of the South African reality we feel bound by God to visible and obedient actions of hope. While not every participant in the conference could agree on the details of these actions, the clear majority of the Christian leaders gathered here in such remarkable denominational diversity resolved:

A That on Wednesday October 9th, 1985 Christians, rather than attending the places of their usual employment (except so far as essential services are concerned), should give the day to repentance, mourning and prayer for those sinful aspects of our national life which have led us to the present crisis. Congregational leadership should further enable this process by bringing greater awareness to members regarding those aspects of our national life. Moreover, Christian employers should encourage their employees to observe such a day and observe it themselves by suspending their normal commercial and professional activities.

B That a delegation representing this Assembly will visit the State President immediately to present the following positive initiatives:

1 End the state of emergency.

2 Remove the SADF and the Emergency Police forces from the townships.

3 Release all detainees and political prisoners, withdraw charges against the Treason trialists and allow exiles to return home.

4 Begin talks immediately with authentic leadership of the various population groups with a view toward equitable power sharing in South Africa.

5 Begin the process of introducing a common system of education.

6 Take the necessary steps towards the elimination of all forms of legislated discrimination.

Mr Michael Cassidy - Chairman Dr Bonganjalo Goba - Vice Chairman Archbishop Philip Russel Rev Alan Makey Bishop Desmond Tutu Prof Adrio Ktinig Denise Ackermann Prof David Bosch Rev Peter Storey Dr Khoza Mgojo Dr Piet Liebenberg Dr Ceasar Bolebatsie Virginia Gcabashe

A group representing the majority of the almost 400 Christian leaders and 47 denominations at the conference.

(Source: NIR leaflet 1985)