



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

CALL FOR PEACE AND CALM

It is with dismay that we take note of the recent upsurge in violence against foreign nationals, starting two weeks ago in the Johannesburg CBD, last week in Pretoria, and this week again in the Johannesburg CBD, Malvern, Turffontein and Krugersdorp.

Once again we receive reports of the authorities doing very little to protect the victims. We received report of police standing by idly in Pretoria while shops were looted and people attacked. Not a single arrest was made on that day.

Once again the authorities resort to the old explanation: that this is not xenophobia, but the work of criminal elements.

Let us be absolutely clear – this is not an attempt by concerned South Africans to rid our cities of drug dealers. And this is not the work of a few criminal elements. It is xenophobia, plain and simple. If it was about drugs, why are South African drug dealers not being targeted as well? Are we really to believe that there are none? And why are drug addicts who rob people in our city centres to get money to buy drugs not being targeted? If it is the work of a few criminal elements, why are South African owned businesses not being looted as well?

The teaching of the Church is direct and uncompromising. More than 80% of South Africans claim to be Christian. What are our religious leaders teaching the multitudes that fill our Churches every Sunday? Galatians 3:28 says: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” By the same token, there is neither South African nor Nigerian nor Ethiopian. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

God makes it absolutely clear that He has a special concern for refugees, migrants and strangers. Deuteronomy 10:18 says: “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” He isn't just concerned about the foreigners. He loves them.

Jesus goes even further. Matthew 25 says: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”.. He identifies directly with strangers. By welcoming a refugee or migrant, we are welcoming Jesus Himself.

In his scathing attack on the inactivity of people of good will to do anything against the Nazi tyranny in Germany, Pastor Martin Niemoller said:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.



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Let us take heed of this. We are facing a rising tide of hatred and intolerance, no different to the rising tide of hatred in Nazi Germany. If we do not take urgent action to stop it, there will be nothing left.

I appeal to all people of faith, and all people of good will, to speak out and take action. In the words of St Francis: "Make us channels of your peace".

My prayer is that God will fulfil his promise made in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

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