



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

A STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE SOLIDARITY AND PASTORAL VISIT TO ESWATINI BY THE SACBC

We greet you in the name of our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of eSwatini is known as a peaceful country with a culture of courtesy, humanness, and hospitality. We remember its hospitality and solidarity when it received the South African refugees and exiles who were fleeing the oppression of the Apartheid state, in South Africa. We also remember the hospitality with which the people of eSwatini received refugees from Mozambique in the late 1980's and early 1990's, fleeing the violence of the civil war in that country. Both these countries owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the people of Eswatini. Exiles benefitted from the superior quality of education in the Kingdom and returned well equipped to serve their countries.

Like many countries, eSwatini has had its fair share of challenges, including being one of the countries worst affected by the HIV pandemic. The suffering caused by HIV has been compounded by other social, political, and economic challenges and lately by Covid 19, forcing many into abject poverty. Over the years, the eMaswati have, true to their peace-loving nature, been navigating these difficult times peacefully. The recent upsurges of unprecedented violence, that swept the country in the middle of this year and resulted in loss of life and limb as well as the large-scale destruction of property, seem to suggest a loss of patience that must be regained if this beautiful country is not to descend into civil war and the concomitant suffering that has befallen other countries.

Seeing this suffering and fearing for worse still to happen and moved by the sentiment of sharing one humanity and by our belief that though "we are many parts; we all belong to each other". (Rom 12:5), the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (of which eSwatini is a part) decided to make a solidarity and pastoral visit to eSwatini over the period from 06 October to Monday 12 October 2021, led by the President of the Conference. We are grateful to the government of eSwatini for welcoming us and talking to us about the situation in the country. We are equally grateful to the eSwatini Catholics, consecrated women, priests, eSwatini Council of Churches and the multiple civic groups as well as individuals who shared their views about the situation in the country.

We write this statement to briefly state what we have heard and to humbly say a word about what could contribute to the building of peace for which eSwatini is known.

While in the past, eSwatini enjoyed a common appreciation of the form of government, these days, from what we have heard, there appears to be a call from some avenues for a consideration of a different form of government. The reasons for this call are too numerous to narrate here. While perhaps this call is not new, given the unprecedented violence and the apparent determination to stick to this call, we humbly propose that attention to this call be given. We are concerned that a failure to heed this call may lead to escalation of violence that will see more loss of life and destruction of economy and infrastructure happening.



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We are encouraged by the fact that all those that we spoke to, government included expressed openness about dialogue and negotiations. We are however, concerned that there are different opinions about the format of dialogue and negotiations, and given these differences, it appears that such dialogue may not take place, or at least may not be as effective as hoped for if the format is not mutually agreed to. While eSwatini is known for its traditional structure of dialoguing, all the people that we spoke to, except the government, have expressed opinion about considering other structures of dialoguing. Given this clear wish, unfortunately accompanied by violence, it appears to us that “dialogue about dialogue” would be a constructive starting point and that this begins sooner than later.

Furthermore, we would like to record a strong sentiment of alienation that some of the people we spoke to felt from their King and a desire for the restoration of a felt symbiotic and caring relationship between the King and His people.

In making this proposal for a dialogue that would be considered meaningful by all, we re-echo the words of Pope Francis that he lovingly addressed to “those who hold responsibility, and those who are manifesting their aspirations for the future of the country, to a common effort toward dialogue, reconciliation and the peaceful settlement of different positions”. In his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which is about human fraternity, he fatherly advises that “authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns.” (Fratelli Tutti, 203).

We repeat the call we made in our address to the Prime Minister of the need for everybody to be convinced of the seriousness of the present moment and to implement measures that will help in building a just and a peaceful society. This is what we see as demanded by the present moment and above all by the very dignity of the human person, the indestructible image of God the Creator, which is the same in each one of us.

We close by assuring the government of eSwatini and its citizens of our prayer as they navigate these difficult times for the courage to break with set ways of thinking and to adopt a mental disposition that will bring the country together leading to sustainable Justice, Peace, and Development for all.

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President of the SACBC
14 October 2021