



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

Speech of Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, the President of the SACBC in his meeting with the Honourable Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini, His Excellency Siphocleopas Dlamini on the 07th of October 2021, in Mbabane Eswatini.

Your Excellency, I am Sithembele Sipuka, bishop of Mthatha and President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC). With me are the two secretaries of the Conference, Fr. Hugh O'Connor, the General Secretary, and Sr. Phuthunywa Catherine Siyali, the Associate Secretary. We are here in the name of the Catholic Bishops in Southern Africa, constituted of Botswana, Eswatini, and South Africa. Bishop José Luis Ponce de León, the only Catholic bishop in Eswatini, is a member of the Conference and serves as a reference point for the relationship between the Church, society and the Kingdom of Eswatini.

It is said Your Excellency that one of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation. When alone in the face of difficulties, one feels alienated, fearful and not strong enough to deal with the emerging challenges. After hearing about challenges this beautiful country is facing, some of them similar to those of South Africa, and not at all claiming that we have a solution, we decided as both neighbours and Church Leaders, to make this solidarity visit and we thank you Your Excellency for the time you have granted us despite the short notice.

Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past and it is because of this shared sense of being close to one another that we are here today. The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.

In the context of these sad experiences that the kingdom of Eswatini is going through and their negative impact on the life of the citizens of this country, the Catholic Church strongly affirms the possibility of overcoming the obstacles that prevent a solution to these experiences. The confidence about the possibility of overcoming obstacles is based first on the peace-loving character of EmaSwati for which this Kingdom is known. From the side of the Church this confidence is based on the divine promise guaranteeing the ever presence of our Lord Jesus Christ amongst those who believe in him (Mt. 28: 20).

The tremendous challenge of the present times that we hear about, (i.e. violence, destruction of property, use of excessive force by the security personnel, deaths, toy-toying in schools, etc) are not only a threat to EmaSwati but also to the whole Southern African Region. It is worth noting, Your Excellency at stake is also the dignity of the human person, whose defence and promotion have been entrusted to us as leaders by the Creator, and which every person must do his or her best to uphold and defend. As many people are already aware, the present situation does not seem to correspond to the defence of this dignity.

Your Excellency, our humble presence here is to add our own voice for peace, and if needed to collaborate in efforts that will see this country resolving differences peacefully and creating an environment for order, development and promotion of justice. The Catholic Church feels profoundly involved in this enterprise and she hopes for its ultimate success.

We believe that it is the Kingdom and its citizens who will resolve the present challenges, and the purpose of our solidarity visit Your Excellency is to appeal to everybody, Their Majesties,



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the three arms of government, civic groups, and every individual, to be convinced of the seriousness of the present challenges and make efforts inspired by solidarity and love 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 identical in each one of us.

In this appeal, we reiterate the words of Pope Francis who, upon hearing about the situation in this beautiful country on the 4th of July, invited *“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 making this appeal, I also remember what Pope Francis wrote in *Fratelli Tutti* about dialogue when he said: *“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).

Your Excellency, the Catholic Church in Southern Africa is praying for this country which has served for many years as a reference point for peace in the region. We pray that God, the Almighty, may open the hearts and minds of all EmaSwati so that, together and in peace, they may find a solution that will open avenues for Justice, Peace and Development.

Lastly, I would like to thank you Your Excellency once more for your graciousness in granting us audience with you at such a short notice. This is a gesture that truly reflects the warmth and love of EmaSwati. May God continue to Bless and Protect this lovely nation.

Thank You!