

Press Release - Press Release

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South African Council of Churches

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POST-REFERENDUM STATEMENT BY THE REV. DR. FRANK CHIKANE

We are relieved that the majority of voters in Tuesday's referendum chose to vote "yes" to the continuation of the process of reform in this country. It is now clear that the majority of South Africans are against apartheid. The March 17 whites-only referendum must be the nation's last racialistic vote. Now South Africans must get on with negotiations, and quickly, so that the country may at last realise a non-racial, democratic political, economic and social order.

The vote gives the National Party and the Democratic Party significant support to continue to take part in the negotiations process. We welcome State President F.W. de Klerk's acknowledgement that the vote was not for the National Party but for South Africa. The much-publicised referendum must be seen in the context of South Africa's total population -- most of whom had no vote on March 17 -- and of the demands of their varied representatives.

We remind the National Party that negotiations are, by definition, an open process and that "bottom line" positions in negotiations are but a starting point. Such an open process is integral to the democratisation of the country.

Neither does the "yes" vote condone a broader mandate for CODESA than originally agreed. We reiterate our conviction that the body that draws up the new South African Constitution must be an elected body. Therefore it is essential that the nation moves quickly to the democratic election of a Constitution-making body by all South Africans on a common voters roll.

We remind the international community that while the referendum results show that the majority of white South Africans are committed to negotiations, the National Party should not be given undue credit for the current process of negotiations and reform. We must not forget that the National Party developed and perpetuated apartheid over the past 44 years. Change is coming only because of the persistent pressure and resistance of the oppressed majority, many of whom have died -- and still are dying -- in the struggle for justice, peace and freedom. Therefore, we call upon the international community to remain vigilant against giving an advantage to De Klerk and his National Party against the victims of apartheid.

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The post-referendum challenge will be not only political, but pastoral. The referendum opened old wounds caused by decades of apartheid and oppression of South Africa's majority by the minority. We call on South Africa's religious community to give special attention in its ministry to bringing healing in the days ahead where yet more hurt has been caused by the referendum and by the racism that has characterised so much of the debate.

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THE REV. DR. FRANK CHIKANE
General Secretary
South African Council of Churches
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