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Presiding Bishop delivers protest statement
to South African Consulate

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In the wake of elections in South Africa that deprived that country's majority population of any part in the political process, Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning of the Episcopal Church wrote a letter of support to Archbishop Desmond Tutu and delivered a strongly worded protest to the South African Consulate in New York.

The meeting at the consulate was an open discussion during which the Presiding Bishop reported on his visit last May to southern Africa to Ambassador Pieter Viljoen, who heads the consulate. The two met at the Episcopal Church Center before the trip and decided a follow-up conversation would be helpful. Browning left the statement with the ambassador at the end of the session.

"Once again a wave of violence has been unleashed in South Africa that fills moral men and women everywhere with outrage and indignation," the statement began. "The disenfranchised black population have sought to use the only avenue open to them to protest against the tyranny of apartheid. The government has responded with the worst political violence in South Africa's history," Browning said.

The letter to Tutu coincided with a mass protest march by church anti-apartheid leaders today, during the opening of the South African Parliament, which elected F.W. de Klerk as president. To reinforce his solidarity with the South African church leaders and emphasize his long-standing commitment to end apartheid, Browning wrote: "Our hearts are with you as you gather today to protest yet another formal institution of a government in your country that excludes the overwhelming majority of South Africans from political participation solely on the basis of race. We stand with you for justice and truth. We grieve and mourn with you when you are

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terrorized, brutalized, and killed. Your pain is our pain. Your pain is the pain of God."

During the protests leading to the election, the Presiding Bishop was in regular telephone contact with Archbishop Tutu, assuring him of the constant prayers of Episcopalians in the United States. The churches in South Africa led the campaigns in opposition to the election and to protest deaths at police hands.

The government backed away from a confrontation and agreed to allow Wednesday's protest march through Cape Town, the first to be permitted in three years and the largest in 30 years. A government source said the face-saving formula was worked out through indirect talks between de Klerk and church leaders.

Browning pointed to the arrests of "nonviolent advocates of change, including the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown, and his wife, Leah." Police also searched the homes and offices of the bishops of Johannesburg and Pretoria and "desecrated St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town," Browning added.

The Presiding Bishop challenged the statements of de Klerk who is contending that "South Africa on standing in the threshold of unprecedented reforms." Browning said he is convinced by Tutu and other religious leaders that "a government that takes recourse to rule by violence has lost all legitimacy and authority."

Browning said that the "most constructive course open to de Klerk" would be to end the four-year state of emergency, free political organizations, repeal the acts undergirding apartheid, release political prisoners, and initiate negotiations with leaders of the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front. Unless the new president takes such actions, he "can expect that South Africa will be further isolated through economic, financial, and political pressures from the rest of the civilized world," Browning said.

Instead of a mandate, de Klerk "has been offered the historic opportunity and responsibility to banish the scourge of racism and

repression from his beautiful country," Browning continued. "We in the Episcopal Church would urge Mr. de Klerk to act courageously, and we send him the assurance of our prayers."

Accompanying the Presiding Bishop were Canon Burgess Carr, partnership officer for Africa; Diane Porter, deputy for public ministry in the national mission office; and Bishop Furman Stough, senior executive for mission planning.

For further information or requests for interviews, contact Jim Solheim or Jeffrey Penn at the news office.

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THE MOST REVEREND EDMOND L. BROWNING
PRESIDING BISHOP, THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER
535 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NY 10017

212 867-8400

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Statement by the Most Rev. Edmond L. Browning
Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA
on South Africa

Once again a wave of violence has been unleashed in South Africa that fills moral men and women everywhere with outrage and indignation. The disenfranchised black population have sought to use the only avenue open to them to protest against the tyranny of apartheid. The government has responded with the worst political violence in South Africa's history. The security forces and vanguards of "wildoeke" - right wing vigilantes - have descended on the townships with old style brutality and repression, brutishly whipping, clubbing, teargassing, spray painting and shooting unarmed men, women and children, and arresting the non-violent advocates of change, including the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown and his wife, Leah. They have searched the homes and offices of the Bishops of Johannesburg and Pretoria and desecrated St. George's Cathedral in Capetown.

I feel a fatal ambiguity in the statements of Mr. de Klerk, who wishes the world to believe that South Africa is standing in the threshold of unprecedented reforms that will allow Blacks to participate in determining the political future of their country. I am persuaded that Archbishop Tutu and the other religious leaders involved in the "Defiance" and "Stand for Truth" Campaigns are right in pointing out that a government that takes recourse to rule by violence has lost all legitimacy and authority.

In the circumstances I believe that the most constructive course open to Mr. de Klerk is one that would have him, upon assuming the presidency, declare immediately an end to the state of emergency; unban all political organizations; repeal all Legislative Acts that undergird apartheid; release all political prisoners and detainees and initiate negotiations with leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), who have legitimacy among the oppressed peoples.

Barring such clear and irreversible actions Mr. de Klerk can expect that South Africa will be further isolated through economic, financial and political pressures from the rest of the civilized world.

Mr. de Klerk has not been given a mandate in this election. Instead he has been offered the historic opportunity and responsibility to banish the scourge of racism and repression from his beautiful country.

We, in the Episcopal Church would urge Mr. de Klerk to act courageously, and we send him the assurance of our prayers.