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REACTIONS TO GOVERNMENT REFORM ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUMMARY

1. THERE HAS BEEN A BROAD WELCOME FROM WHITES TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS FOR ABOLITION OF THE PASS LAWS AND INFLUX CONTROL. ONLY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OBJECTS TO THE REFORMS. BLACKS ARE GENERALLY SCEPTICAL. INITIAL PRESS COMMENT TO THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE PUBLIC SAFETY ACT IS ALSO CRITICAL.

DETAIL

2. WHITE COMMENT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM PROPOSALS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CRITICISM BY THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS BEEN FAVOURABLE. COLIN EGLIN, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY, HAS SAID THAT QUOTE THE ENORMOUS TASK OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION CAN NOW BEGIN UNQUOTE. THE LABOUR PARTY, WHILE OBJECTING TO THE RACIAL BASIS OF THE POPULATION REGISTER HAS WELCOMED THE REFORMS AS "ANOTHER BLOW FOR APARTHEID".

3. JAN STEYN, SPEAKING FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR COUNCIL ON URBANISATION WHICH REPRESENTS THE FOUR MAJOR BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS (FGI, ASSOCOM, AHD AND NAFCC) AS WELL AS THE URBAN FOUNDATION, SAID THAT THE PAPER ON URBANISATION IS "A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN DECISIVELY MOVING SOUTH AFRICA AWAY FROM RACIAL DISCRIMINATION".

4. THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS WAS MORE CAUTIOUS IN ITS WELCOME, COMMENTING THAT ALTHOUGH THE "GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO HUMAN DIGNITY AND EQUAL TREATMENT" WAS WELCOME, THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF GROUP AREAS AND THE FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE RIGHTS OF TBVC CITIZENS IN SOUTH AFRICA WERE NEGATIVE FACTORS. BLACK SASH AND THE DETAINEES PARENTS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HAVE MADE SIMILAR COMMENTS.

5. THE LOCAL PRESS HAVE WELCOMED THE REFORM PROPOSALS, THOUGH HERE TOO RESERVATIONS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED. 'BUSINESS DAY' COMMENTED THAT "THE GROUP AREAS ACT IS APPARENTLY TO BE USED AS A CONTROL MECHANISM, AND THERE IS SOME QUESTION WHETHER RESTRICTIONS ON SQUATTING AND HEALTH ARE TO BE APPLIED IN GOOD FAITH". HOWEVER THE LIBERAL 'CAPE TIMES' DESCRIBED RESERVATIONS AS "MINIMAL COMPARED TO THE OVERWHELMING EXPRESSION OF GOOD INTENTIONS".

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THE AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPER 'BEELD' COMMENTED THAT THE REFORMS WOULD LEAD TO AN IMPROVEMENT OF BLACK CIRCUMSTANCES, "IN A FIELD WHERE THERE ARE PROFOUND GRIEVANCES".

6. IN CONTRAST, BLACKS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR MORE SWEEPING CHANGES. CHIEF BUTHELEZI HAS SAID THAT "THERE WILL NEVER BE A JUST URBANISATION POLICY WHILE THE GROUP AREAS ACT REMAINS ON THE STATUTE BOOK". BISHOP TUTU HAS DESCRIBED THE REFORMS AS "TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE". AZAPO HAS CALLED IT A "MINUTE STEP". THE UDF, SAYING THAT IT NEEDED TIME TO STUDY THE PROPOSALS, ADDED THAT "WE WILL RESPOND WHEN IT HAS BECOME CLEAR WHAT FORM OF ACTION IS POSSIBLE".

7. BLACKS ARE ALSO CRITICAL OF THE PROPOSED INCREASED POWERS FOR THE MINISTER OF LAW AND ORDER UNDER THE PUBLIC SAFETY ACT. 'THE ARGUS' NEWSPAPER DESCRIBED IT AS "A MOVE TO REASSURE THE WHITE RIGHT" AND THE 'CAPE TIMES' HAS CONDEMNED IT COMMENTING THAT THE IMPOSITION OF EMERGENCY POWERS IN 1985 PROVIDED NO REMEDY, AND THAT THERE WAS THEREFORE NO REASON TO SUPPOSE THAT THESE POWERS WILL HELP. 'BEELD', THOUGH DEFENDING THE INCREASED POWERS ON THE GROUNDS THAT LAW AND ORDER WAS A PRECONDITION FOR NEGOTIATED REFORM, CONCLUDED THAT "WITH THE GREATER POWERS OF THE POLICE THERE SHOULD BE A GREATER EFFORT ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENT TO ACCELERATE THE REFORM PROCESS".

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