



South Africa

# ARCHDIOCESE OF PRETORIA

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## STATEMENT ON THE CHAOS IN PARLIAMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS FROM THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference is alarmed by the happenings in Parliament on the occasion of the President's State of the Nation Address.

To witness the disruption of our chief democratic institution, followed by the needlessly aggressive actions of the security forces called in to remove EFF MPs, leaves us deeply perturbed. We call on the leaders of all parties represented in Parliament, together with the presiding officers, to commit themselves to uphold and respect the dignity of the institution.

While it is the right and duty of political parties to hold the executive to account, we question whether it was appropriate for the EFF to use the State of the Nation Address for that purpose. At the same time, we believe that the presiding officers acted too quickly in calling in security forces. If those forces were indeed members of the South African Police, then what the nation saw was a serious violation of the sanctity and autonomy of Parliament. The fact that this was authorised by the presiding officers only makes it worse.

We also strongly condemn the use of a jamming device to block cellphone signals in the House. It is the fundamental right of every South Africa to know what is happening in Parliament, and any attempt to deny us that right violates the Constitution and demeans Parliament. We note that the presiding officers were unaware of the presence of such a device and we trust that they will conduct an urgent, thorough and transparent investigation into this matter.

The SACBC also notes that, as long as President Zuma declines to answer fully and openly the many questions that remain about the expenditure of public money on Nkandla, such disturbances are likely to be repeated. The President has a duty to Parliament and to the nation to put this matter to rest by providing adequate answers.

The unfortunate scenes on the floor of the House overshadowed the speech itself, and detracted attention from the programme set out by the President. This was in itself a disservice to democracy and to the citizens of South Africa.

Twenty years after the achievement of democracy, we deserve better than this.

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SACBC Spokesperson  
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