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Ref: African governments colluding with land-grabbers at the expense of the poor

Scores of Church related Organisations operating in SADC region have criticised the African governments for betraying people by allowing massive land grabbing by foreign multi-national companies. Church leaders and activists from six SADC countries (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, DRC, South Africa and Angola) who met in Durban from 16 to 18 October singled out national elites and African governments as the major actors in land-grabbing. They felt that lax laws were allowing the rich foreign corporates to displace the poor to pave way for mining, game reserves, golf estates and agricultural activities in pursuit of their own profits. The Durban based Catholic Cardinal Wilfred Napier, who was part of the workshop lamented that the poor people seem to have lost importance in eyes of their governments and the corporates. He said they only gain prominence during election times and are conveniently forgotten immediately thereafter.

One of the common issues which continued to emerge from presentations of participating countries is the governments' slow pace or reluctance to protect people's land rights. Most countries experience cases where ordinary people were given short to long term land leases that are subject to

cancellations. While in other circles Zimbabwe has been commended for giving land to the poor through its fast track programme, the question of land tenure security is still contentious.

The 30 participants shared experiences showing that tenure systems in all Southern African countries are open to abuse and misuse by political elites, multi-corporates and traditional authorities. In Zambia local communities are being displaced to make way for mining activities, e.g. Solwezi district.

The participants strongly urged church leaders to redistribute church land and seek experts to offer advice on use of church land for food production and job creation. Bad governance and greed seem to have taken over in the distribution of God's given natural resources. Speaking during the same land summit Methodist Bishop and Chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council Mike Vorster called upon the South African government to abandon the willing buyer and willing seller land policy. Bishop Vorster said the policy was trying to balance two contrasting interests of the white landowners and the landless black majority, a situation he described as unworkable. The Church organisations resolved to lobby African governments to depoliticise and de-commodify land. As they plan massive mass mobilisation and campaigns in the entire SADC region, the group appeals to African parliaments

to come up with laws that protect land owners, promote land rights and to criminalise massive land grabbing.

For any further inquiries please contact us on the details provided below.

Bishop Mike Vorster

Chairman of KwaZulu Natal Christian Council

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