

Clemency appeals at eleventh hour

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UP TILL last night only hours before the expected hanging of the three condemned ANC guerillas several black and white leaders made last-minute appeals for clemency while condemning the Government's refusal to change its mind on the hanging.

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SOWETAN REPORTER

The Black Sash sent a telegram to the State President, Mr Marais Viljoen, begging for clemency.

The President of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), Archbishop Denis Hurley, released a statement asking for God's mercy to inspire the State President to review his decision.

"When there is a denial of human rights and one side makes rules and the other must conform or suffer the consequences, it is sad to see young people going to the gallows for actions that though in themselves reprehensible, flow from certain stances induced by frustrations, humiliations and desperation.

"Bearing this in mind, on behalf of the SACBC, I earnestly plead with the State President to grant a reprieve to these three ANC men. This is all the more necessary in this tension-filled month of June, when people's minds are filled with bitter and tragic memories of Soweto 1976," the Archbishop said.

After a meeting held in Durban yesterday morning, the Catholic Clergy of the Archdiocese also appealed to the Government to grant a last minute reprieve to the three men.

"This is on the grounds that the execution will exacerbate feelings, intensify conflict and further reduce hope for reconciliation. In the name of Christ, the meeting appeals for mercy," the statement said.

Bishop Desmond Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, said the Government would be credited a lot if it were to commute the death sentence.

"We have to point out that in many ways the odds are stacked against blacks in this country. The laws are in the first place not made by us and even without questioning the integrity of court officials who deal with such matters, it has been pointed out that a white man cannot jump out of his skin when try-

ing a black man

"The value systems he upholds are those of the community from which he comes and for a country like South Africa, it would take a very exceptional situation for a person in that position not to yield to all subtle pressures of his community," he said.

The Save the Six Committee, whose prayer service for the condemned men was banned last Sunday, said the three men should not die because "they are not criminals, they should be treated as combatants in a civil war."

Dr Nthato Motlana, chairman of the Soweto Committee of Ten said: "Even at this late hour, we black South Africans join other people in the world in urging the Government to stop the judicial killing as it serves no purpose whatsoever.

"Life is very precious and should be preserved at all times. This was no ordinary murder. We therefore urge the State President to exercise his powers to commute the death sentence even at this late hour."

Mr Ishmael Mkhabela, Azapo's publicity secretary said the execution was an indictment of a Government based on racial hatred and the interest of the minority.

"Blacks are going to view the death of the three men in the same

light as numerous deaths in detention which are a violation of justice and respect for human life.

"Their death is not in vain. This present action should fuel the liberation movement. South Africa has once again shown itself to be insensitive to the call of world communities and this puts into question its relationship with America and Western countries which continue to support it to maintain racial oppression and exploitation."

Meanwhile a night vigil was to have been held at the Dube YWCA last night. At 1pm today Bishop Desmond Tutu will officiate at a lunch hour service to be held at Khotso House, and another prayer service will be held at the Methodist Youth Centre in Central Western Jabavu at 7 o'clock tonight.

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