

16. Ecumenicity and Authorities

16.1 REPORT DEPUTIES ECUMENICITY – AUTHORITIES (Artt 233, 234)

- A. Rev C Aucamp tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.

C. REPORT

1. Mandate

Acta 2012:119, 16.3; 16.13; 16.14; 16.15.

16.3.2 The Synod appoints new Deputies, who are instructed to:

- 16.3.2.1 represent the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) in making contact with the government of the Republic of South Africa and other institutions (like Solidarity Alliance) with which the Reformed Churches must/should maintain contact
- 16.3.2.2 support churches in the GKSA in their interaction with the authorities on different levels as well as cooperate with other churches' interaction with the authorities, where necessary and possible
- 16.3.2.3 work with the "Parliamentary Desk" of the Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk and allow for such work in the budget
- 16.3.2.4 monitor legislation and its enactment to act, where necessary, in accordance with the decisions of the Synod by utilising the possible and accessible channels the government offer as well as study proposed legislation in light of Scripture, the Confession, the Church Order, Synod decisions and Reformed ethics to comment in the most effective way possible
- 16.3.2.5 where necessary, enter into discussion with the independent mechanisms the Constitution offers in support of constitutional democracy, like the Public Protector, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities and the Human Rights Commission
- 16.3.2.6 establish contact between different groups of Deputies for a coordinated effort towards discussion with and commentary to the authorities, whereby other Deputies of the GKSA must first confer with these Deputies before entering into any discussion or delivering any comment, and
- 16.3.2.7 represent the GKSA at the Ad Hoc committee that initially focussed on the protection of property rights.
- 16.13.2.1 The Deputies are mandated to launch a study into fundamental rights from a Christian-reformative perspective and present the study for approval at the next Synod.
- 16.14.2.1 The Synod mandates the Deputies Ecumenicity and Authorities to represent the GKSA on the Council.
- 16.14.2.2 The Synod mandates the Deputies Ecumenicity and Authorities to testify, together with other religions, on matters of common interest with the understanding that the particular basis for Christian ethics is not threatened and that such testimony occurs within the framework of CO, art 49.

Decision: Point 1 noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

Given that the tasks are predominantly preventative in nature, only those matters that featured during the last Synod were addressed. It did, however, at times require haste from the Deputies, which resulted in the Deputies establishing procedures for attending to such time-related matters as effectively as possible. The following items were addressed:

2.1 *Testimony via presentations and statements*

2.1.1 Presentation in re Pornography

Subsequent to the press release of the public hearings to be held by UKASA on the application of the then Top TV to add channels with pornographic content, there was only a day or two available for public reaction. In this regard prof N Vorster, together with rev Aucamp and other Deputies, drew up a statement that rev Aucamp distributed to all the relevant institutions (including the GKSA's electronic mailing list). UKASA, however, indicated that they received such a huge response that no further comments would be accepted.

This is, however, a prime example of the speed with which the Deputies sometimes need to act and how difficult it is to process all the Deputies' input in time.

2.1.2 Presentation on Christian holidays

The Deputies submitted a presentation to the Commission for the promotion of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities on the thoroughly substantiated grounds for retaining Good Friday and Christmas Day as public holidays. The presentation was also sent in full to *Die Kerkblad* and the GKSA mailing list, as general notification.

2.1.3 Press releases: blasphemy and misuse of religion by politicians

The Deputies issued a press release condemning a misleading statement by then Minister Lulu Xinhana about Calvinism. This statement was also sent to all the churches.

The main content was also included in a statement issued by the Reformed conventicle on the matter.

The Deputies furthermore issued a public statement on the ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe's comparison of the tripartite alliance to the Holy Trinity.

2.1.4 Statement on affirmative action and request for advice (e-mail 16 May 2013)

Written request for advice submitted to the Deputies Law: When can discrimination/differentiation by a church, religious institution or an institution from civil society founded on a particular Christian ethos be considered "unfair discrimination" in terms of Art 9(5) of the Constitution, as further defined in Art 14(2)(b) of Act 4 of 2000?

Motivation: Over the course of our work, we receive more and more requests and queries from churches to contact the authorities about the mentioned Chapter 9 stipulations and offer public testimony on instances where a church, religious institution or institution of civil society founded on a particular Christian ethos forbid certain actions based on such an institution's own religious values for appearing to be discriminatory in nature. It is the fear that the independence and rights of a church or an institution to act according to their convictions could be restricted by the state and in this way threaten Art 15 of the Constitution.

Although this matter has been addressed by the Deputies Law, as far as we know, we have not as yet received a formal response.

2.1.5 Statement on Marikana violence (21 Aug 2012)

Upon the request of rev Koos Venter of Rustenburg, the Deputies issued a statement on 19 August 2012 condemning the violence in Marikana.

2.2 *Testimony via participation*

2.2.1 Ad hoc Committee on land possession/right of ownership

Rev Cassie Aucamp and Elder Bingle Kruger represented the Deputies at the national conference on land possession, arranged by the Ad Hoc committee. The delegation recommended that the Deputies stay involved in this committee and for the Deputies to especially testify and collaborate against the State's totalitarian abuse of power and towards the strengthening of civil society.

Rev Aucamp attended a second conference and led the opening. The conference was conducted in the form of a workshop for preparing the commission's input, in terms of the relevant legislation. Abovementioned standpoints were clearly stated.

The Deputies recommend that cooperation with the Ad Hoc commission continues.

In this regard, the Parliamentary Desk of the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk* offered valuable input, in terms of matters that relate to the minister as marriage officer. The information was provided to all the churches and ministers.

Rev Aucamp and the head of the Parliamentary Desk, dr Ben du Toit, was in constant communication.

Dr du Toit also regularly reported on the Inter Church Council meetings and conferences of the conventicle.

The Deputies recommend that such informal cooperation with the Parliamentary Desk continue, which will also make it unnecessary to add this item to the budget.

2.2.2 Contact with the Human Rights Commission and the Public Protector

No matters arose that necessitated the Deputies' involvement. The Deputies did, however, consider responding to a statement made by the Human Rights Commission regarding the Create Training Centre, but decided against it.

2.2.3 Discussion with Deputy-president Motlanthe (and not the ANC)

A delegation of the Deputies participated, on 22 April 2014, in a discussion with the national authorities (lead by Deputy-president Motlanthe). Although the authorities invited a range of groups, profs Nico Vorster and Derrick Mashau were given the opportunity to speak. The Deputies' testimony were widely reported within the church and media. The Deputies would like to thank the members, contracted for their expertise, for their contribution.

The Deputies decided to decline an invitation to meet with the ANC. Although the Deputies had previously accepted a similar invitation, it was deemed inappropriate so close to a national election.

2.2.4 Discussion with the ANC, May 2012

Rev C Aucamp and prof DF Muller attended the meeting. The statements made were conveyed to all the churches.

2.2.5 Council for Religious Rights and Freedom

The Council met on 29 May in Stellenbosch and decided *inter alia* to continue endeavours to submit the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (of which the GKSA is a fellow signatory) to parliament. It was furthermore decided to leave the (voluntary) membership fees unchanged. The fees amount to R5 000 per annum for organisations and R700 per annum for individuals. The Council's work is, however, hampered by a lack of funds and yet do not want to alienate anyone by making fees compulsory. The members of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities present undertook to support and further promote the matter. Prof DF Muller represented the Deputies at the meeting.

2.2.6 Institute for Public Justice (IPJ)

Profs N Vorster and DF Muller were invited to join the Institute as of 2013. The Institute consists of jurists and different Christian groups, promotes public religious rights and were protesting a proposed casino close to Menlyn in Pretoria, at the time of this Report.

2.3 Testimony via other avenues

2.3.1 Brazilian Missionaries (e-mail 18/03/2013)

The Deputies received a request from churches in Brazil in March 2013 to approach President Zuma to use his influence in aid of two missionaries from Brazil that were arrested 6 November 2012 in the Ivory Coast, after proclaiming the Gospel. A request based on South Africa and Brazil both being members of BRICS. Given the access rev Aucamp still had to the President, he undertook to personally convey the request to him and put forward the matter telephonically as well as in writing to the secretary of the President. The President did not personally respond, but it was undertaken to address the matter via our office in Brazil.

2.3.2 Wreath laying during centennial anniversary

The chairman, rev Cassie Aucamp, laid a wreath upon invitation and as representative of the Deputies during the 100-year anniversary of the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.3.2 noted.

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

3.1 *Recommendations*

3.1.1 The Synod is to comment on the work of the Deputies.

3.1.2 The Synod should allocate an amount in support of the Council for Religious Rights and Freedoms (see 2.2.5).

3.1.3 The Synod should appoint Deputies to:

3.1.3.1 maintain, on behalf of the GKSA, the necessary contact with the government of the Republic of South Africa

3.1.3.2 contact civil society bodies where testimony or cooperation will benefit the church and Kingdom in South Africa

3.1.3.3 support the GKSA in their interaction with the authorities at different levels as well as, where necessary and possible, collaborate with other churches in terms of contact with the authorities

3.1.3.4 work with the Parliamentary Desk of the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk*

3.1.3.5 monitor legislation and its enactment and, if possible, offer commentary in accordance to Scripture, the Confession, the Church Order, Synod decisions and Reformed ethics in the most effective way possible

3.1.3.6 enter into discussion, where necessary, with the independent mechanisms the Constitution offers in support of constitutional democracy, like the Public Protector, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities and the Human Rights Commission

3.1.3.7 establish contact between different groups of Deputies for a coordinated effort towards discussion with and commentary to the authorities, whereby other Deputies of the GKSA must first confer with these Deputies before entering into any discussion or delivering any comment, and

3.1.3.8 represent the GKSA at the Ad Hoc Committee that was initially focussed on the protection of right of ownership.

3.1.4 The Synod should mandate the Deputies to:

3.1.4.1 proceed with the study on basic rights from a Christian-reformatory perspective, in the event that the current Deputies are not be able to do so before the Synod for approval

3.1.4.2 represent the GKSA on the Council for Religious Rights and Freedoms; and

- 3.1.4.3 offer testimony together with other religions on matters of common interest, in accordance with the principles and guidelines approved by Synod 2012 (Acta 2012:162).

Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.1.4.3 approved.

D. SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

1. Testimony via participation (see 2.2 of Report)

1.1 Testimony at congregation of churches in Stellenbosch

The Deputies received an invitation to attend a Conference of churches/church leaders in Stellenbosch to reflect on 20 years of democracy, in terms of the issues churches touched on in their proposals to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997. The GKSA did not testify before the TRC in 1997.

Rev C Aucamp and prof JH van Wyk, who offered personal testimony together with three other brothers in 1997, attended the conference and also gave presentations.

Prof van Wyk conveyed the content of their erstwhile presentation, in which they personally professed guilt *regarding their share in and neglect with regard to apartheid*. Then he moved on to the problems of today. He stated the following in this regard: *During the seventies of the previous century South Africans were advised by the Western world to move away from apartheid and to implement a system of "majority rule" and "minority rights", which was realised, as we all know, in 1994. After twenty years of democracy we still face the same challenge, which imply to find a meaningful balance between the concepts of unity and diversity. To emphasise only unity, endangers the idea of diversity and tends to force it into uniformity, whilst to emphasise only diversity, tends towards division and conflict – what happened during the apartheid era. I think it is important to reconsider once more the views of the Stellenbosch philosopher, Johan Degenaar, who opted for a plural democracy in a plural society, instead of a liberal democracy.*

Rev Aucamp mentioned in his presentation the great strides made towards reconciliation in South Africa, but that the crisis around reconciliation in South Africa has moved from a race struggle to one of class: *The tipping point in the South African society has moved from the divide between black and white, to the divide between rich and poor. The battlefield of South Africa has moved to the challenges of the labour market.*

In this regard the church has a pivotal role to play and is the bearer of the only real message of hope. The answer and the solution is not to be found by either of the idols of socialism or unbridled capitalism, but in the true Biblical message of vocation, an honest day's work, and fair and honourable compensation. "The labourer is worthy of his reward".

He furthermore pointed out the risks related to the current trend of the transformation agenda overshadowing and often impeding that of reconciliation.

Both the presentations garnered great appreciation, constituted a core part of the discussion and were also negotiated in the requests the meeting made for the SACC to take up with the government and other institutions.

1.2 Testimony on legal action against religion in schools

The Deputies immediately reacted to the disclosure of a particular organisation's intended legal action against six schools' policy on religion.

A meeting was held with representatives from the Dutch Reformed Church, the Hervormde Kerk, the APK, the Chairman of Fedzas and the legal representatives of the schools. It was decided to collectively offer testimony, via the Reformed Conventicle, and possibly act as friend-of-the-court in the upcoming case.

A set of guidelines were formulated, according to which the churches could offer testimony, for the sake of giving united testimony.

Due to limited time, the Chairman of the Deputies released a personal statement that was widely and comprehensively reported in the media and also participated in interviews on a range of radio stations in this regard.

At the time of the writing of this Supplementary Report a workshop was set to be held on the subject of religious freedom in schools by the South African Council for Religious Rights and Freedoms (CRRF). The Deputies delegated two brothers to take part in the workshop (the Deputies already received the instruction to become involved in the activities of this council – see 2.2.5 of the Report).

The outcome hereof may possibly be reported at the Synod.

Decision: Points 1.1 and 1.2 noted.

2. Matters that the Synod decide on

2.1 *Recommendations*

2.1.1 The Synod is to comment on the work of the Deputies.

2.1.2 The Deputies are to seek channels through which to review and testify with other churches about matters related to this instruction of the Deputies, while remaining independent.

2.1.3 The Deputies are to increasingly do their part in countering the opposition to religion in schools.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.1.3 approved.