

Priest describes interrogation by South African police

London (NC) — A prominent black South African priest said shots were fired behind his head and a "creepy creature or instrument" was put on his legs and thighs and bit his genitals during 30 hours of torture and interrogation.

Father Smangalis Mkhathswa, secretary general of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, said he was forced to stand — blindfolded, handcuffed and half-naked — for 30 hours. He said his interrogation was "punctuated by a string of insults, most of which would be too unprintable."

The priest's statements were included in an affidavit presented Aug. 28 to an appeals

court in Pretoria, South Africa. Excerpts from his statement were released by the South Africa Crisis Information Group, a London-based ecumenical information group.

Father Mkhathswa has been in detention for more than two months under state of emergency regulations imposed by the South African government June 12.

The southern African bishops have applied for an order restraining police "from further assaulting and/or torturing" the priest.

Father Mkhathswa's affidavit said that the morning of Aug. 20 he was taken from his cell in the Hercules police station in Pretoria. He said he was blindfolded, handcuffed and

driven to the countryside, where he was interrogated by several men.

"Without any warning, someone pulled down my pants and underpants to my ankles," the affidavit said. "My vest was readjusted in a way which exposed my genitals and behind. I was then ordered to sing two freedom songs of my choice. I obliged..."

The affidavit described the interrogation:

"I was left standing on the same spot for at least 30 hours — blindfold and handcuffs were always on. My genitals and buttocks were left exposed for at least 29 hours. A watery substance was smeared on my legs

and thighs — this together with the cold air caused much discomfort.

"Twice during the interrogation, shots were fired from behind and just above the back of my head. I have no idea what instrument was used to fire the shots.

"A creepy creature or instrument was fed into my backside. From there it would move up and down my legs, thighs and invariably ended up biting my genitals. When I cringed with pain, they would laugh."

He said he was asked why, as a priest, he participated in politics. Interrogators also referred to Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, an outspoken critic of the South African government and a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

"You and Bishop Tutu are not Christians. Otherwise, you would condemn sanctions," the affidavit said he was told.

"Why do you oppose the government? The Bible says we should obey all authorities, regardless of who they are," the priest said the men told him.

Father Mkhathswa said in his statement that at times he "lost all sense of time, distance, orientation or awareness." It said when he arrived back at the police station late the afternoon of Aug. 21, he could not focus his eyes properly for about 90 minutes.

Father Mkhathswa's secretary, Dominican Sister Celia Smit, also filed an affidavit with the court. She said when she visited the priest Aug. 21 "he was experiencing difficulty in standing up straight and walking. He had a stick in one of his hands and was using it to assist him in staying on his feet."

In Washington, Manus LeRoux, press and information officer for the South African Embassy, said he did "not have any knowledge of such an event." He said if such actions occurred, they were "illegal" and "certainly not condoned" by the South African government.

LeRoux said security officers charged with such actions would be liable for legal action and internal discipline.

He said, however, that "accusations of this kind are made all the time" and would take "centuries" to follow up on.

Torture of priest fuels protest against South Africa

By NC News Service

The reported torture of a prominent black South African priest drew international Catholic protest and intensified efforts by the South African bishops for his release from detention.

The South African government promised a Pretoria appeals court Aug. 28 it would not torture Father Smangalis Mkhathswa, secretary general of the southern African bishops' conference, but without admitting he had been abused.

The South African bishops planned to ask the court for the priest's release Sept. 1, arguing that his detention is illegal because he was tortured.

An outspoken opponent of apartheid who was once banned by the government for seven years, Father Mkhathswa was arrested June 12 at the beginning of a government-imposed state of emergency during which thousands of activists have been detained.

On Aug. 27, U.S. church leaders, including the head of the U.S. bishops' conference, Bishop James Malone, protested Father Mkhathswa's situation and called for increased international pressure against apartheid — South Africa's official system of racial segregation.

Bishop Malone said the U.S. prelates were concerned over mistreatment of many Catholic and Protestant church workers in South Africa who are "only doing what the

Bible requires." He said he hoped the reports of Father Mkhathswa's torture would "induce our own government to work more effectively with other nations in demanding an end to the apartheid system."

Cardinals John O'Connor of New York and Joseph Bernardin of Chicago also expressed concern over the South African situation.

Cardinal O'Connor sent his "prayerful support and admiration" to Father Mkhathswa in a telegram to Archbishop Denis Hurley, head of the southern African bishops' conference.

Cardinal Bernardin protested to South Africa's ambassador to the U.S., Herbert Beukes, that "the detention and harassment of church workers is a moral outrage and unacceptable."

The cardinal also said in a telegram to Archbishop Hurley that he would continue to press the Reagan administration to adopt economic sanctions against South Africa "until justice is achieved."

Torture of prisoners is "illegal" in South Africa, a spokesman for the country's embassy in Washington, Manus LeRoux, said Aug. 27. Such actions are "certainly not condoned" by the government, he said.

LeRoux also said he had no information on Father Mkhathswa's case and that "accusations of this kind are made all the time."

Cardinal Basil Hume of Westminster, England, called Aug. 29 for the immediate

release of the detained priest because of the "monstrous treatment he endured."

The cardinal also said he worried about "the treatment of less prominent personalities" in similar situations in South Africa.

At the same time, the Scottish bishops welcomed the decision of the Pretoria court to order the government to not torture Father Mkhathswa. They also called on South African authorities to "restore full liberty to this distinguished and respected figure."

The Vatican made no public statement on the case as of Aug. 29.

While the bishops and cardinals were filing their protests, Catholic demonstrators took Father Mkhathswa's case to the South African Embassy in Rome.

At least 75 Religious and laity protested at the embassy Aug. 28 and issued a statement calling on "all hierarchies of the churches to take positions of solidarity with Christians fighting against the system of apartheid."

Father Giovanni Novelli, director of Rome's Interfaith Center for Peace and a leader in the demonstration, criticized Father Mkhathswa's "inhuman torture by the South African police."

Father John Walchars returns to offer retreat at Cenacle

The Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal will be welcoming back Father John Walchars, SJ, when he directs a retreat for men and women September 19 to 21. Born in Austria, Father Walchars has traveled to Peking and Shanghai in China, Tokyo, England, New Zealand and Canada, as well as throughout the United States. A well-known author and member of the American Society of Contemporary Writers, Father Walchars has written *The Call from Beyond*, *Splendor and Shadow*, *The Unfinished Mystery* and *Voices on Fire*.

Included in the retreat will be presentations by Father Walchars, prayer and

time for quiet reflection, as well as sharing and celebration of the Eucharist. The offering for the retreat is \$55.

Father Walchars will also conduct an evening of renewal from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on Monday, September 22, with an offering of \$4.

A day of renewal will take place on Wednesday, September 23, from 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Those interested should bring a bag lunch; beverages will be provided. The offering for the day of renewal is \$5.

For reservations and information, please contact the Cenacle Ministry Office, 693 East Ave., Rochester, or call (716)271-8755.

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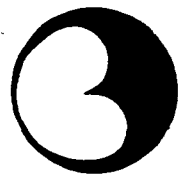
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