



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Media Release - March 1, 2008

Australia's Catholic Bishops welcome political agreement in Kenya and pray for a just and lasting peace

Australia's Catholic Bishops today welcomed a political agreement reached in Kenya and expressed hope that it would help achieve reconciliation among the country's people, and forge a just and lasting peace.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga have signed a deal to end the country's post-election crisis, in which some 1,500 people died and 600,000 fled their homes.

Australia's Bishops joined with their counterparts in Kenya, expressing hope that the deal would bring to an end two months of violence that followed contested election results in December.

"We have been deeply saddened by the violence in Kenya where people have been attacked, their homes and businesses burnt and property looted and destroyed," the Bishops said.

"The country and humanitarian agencies now face the urgent task of providing support to large numbers of internally displaced people in 13 dioceses in six of the eight provinces who are being forced to seek refuge in churches or cathedrals, schools, police stations, government administration compounds and trade centres.

"The Australian Catholic Bishops have been increasingly concerned by the continuing insecurity and political uncertainty in the country.

"We ask Australians to join us in praying that this new political agreement will signal an end to the violence and a path forward to a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

"We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Kenya and support the words of Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez (President of Caritas Internationalis) who stated that all sides in Kenya must work to stop the violence.

"The Australian Catholic Bishops urge all parties to this dispute to work with civil society and utilise the current goodwill being demonstrated by the international community not just to quell outbreaks of violence, but to take this opportunity to search for a just and lasting peace."

Caritas Australia, the international aid and development agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops, has already pledged with the support of AusAID \$420,000 to relief, trauma counseling and peace-building programs in Kenya as an initial response to the tragedy.

Media Contact: Debra Vermeer on 0414 880 475.