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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FROM: Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa
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SOUTH AFRICA BANS SPEECH BY AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

South Africa has prohibited recordings of a speech by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, American civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Long-playing records of Dr. King's address were distributed to 1200 church and community leaders throughout South Africa early in July.

The Publications Control Board announced the banning on August 19 without giving a reason.

Dagbreek, an influential Afrikans-language newspaper, reports that a police spokesman said that there would be no hesitation in prosecuting people found in possession of the record.

The records were pressed and distributed by two young South Africans, the Rev. Dale White, an Anglican priest who is director of the Wilgespruit Christian Fellowship Center near Johannesburg, and Bode Wegerif, an executive in a Johannesburg publishing company.

Dr. King's "Address to the Churches" was originally given in St. Louis in October, 1964, at a meeting of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity. In it, Dr. King warned against sleeping through a social revolution and called on the churches in America to cleanse themselves and society of racism.

Father White and Mr. Wegerif obtained a tape of the speech from the Right Rev. C. Edward Crowther, Anglican Bishop of Kimberley & Kuruman, who is an American citizen.

Dr. King made a statement by telephone to the Rand Daily Mail, a liberal Johannesburg newspaper: "It is indeed unfortunate that a speech dealing with morality, racial integration and brotherhood can be declared undesirable.

"The Church has a prophetic role to take a stand against racial segregation and injustice wherever it exists. All too slowly the Church is marching toward the realization that it has the responsibility to be the healer of society, just in the manner that Jesus went about healing souls."

Bishop Crowther, who is on a speaking and preaching tour of the United States, said today in New York: "I am afraid that the banning of the Martin Luther King record does not really surprise me. In a monologue society such as South Africa, the injection of even Christian dialogue is considered to be a threat. It is very sad and incomprehensible to Americans, but par for the course in South Africa today. I had hoped that the record might have stimulated the dialogue which South Africa desperately needs."

Other South African religious leaders reacted to the record with praise. Roman Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban said: "Dr. King was certainly speaking from deep conviction. What he said was very relevant to the racial situation in his own country, and would be to any country which has similar problems."

Alan Paton, prominent Anglican layman, stated: "My impression of it was very good."

Mr. Fred van Wyk, secretary of the Christian Institute called the address "excellent and dignified - although the situation in this country is somewhat different."

A Johannesburg Methodist minister declared: "It wakens churchmen

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up to the fact that they may be sleeping through a revolution - not only in theology but in many other spheres as well."

Dagbreek comments that "Dr. King's talk is regarded as dangerous propaganda in a country where racial segregation is the accepted norm." Dagbreek goes on to state that the King record is regarded as undermining the South African way of life and its distribution is planned as a follow-up of Senator Kennedy's wind-of-freedom speech at the University of Cape Town in June.

Mr. Wegerif and Father White have protested the banning of the record.

"Our intention in distributing the record was to promote discussion of racial issues from a Christian standpoint.

"If there is anything subversive or unchristian in Dr. King's address, we challenge the authorities to make it known. Otherwise we, and most of the 10,000 people who have heard the record, must conclude that the Government has been frightened by the effectiveness and eloquence with which Dr. King calls on the church to examine its attitude to the racial question."

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