



Diakonia Council of Churches

Abahlali baseMjondolo Leader receives Award

S'busiso Zikode, President of the shack dwellers movement popularly known as Abahlali baseMjondolo has been conferred with *The Order of the Holy Nativity* by the Anglican Diocese of Natal.

The Order, awarded to lay people who have given distinguished service to the church and the community was presented by Bishop Rubin Phillip on 16 December (Day of Reconciliation) at St Paul's Anglican Church at a service attended by approximately 100 people.



Mr Zikode addresses the gathering after receiving the Order.

In his speech Bishop Phillip said the presentation of the Order to Mr Zikode was a recognition and affirmation of the work Abahlali are doing. "We believe that what they are doing is right. They stand for democracy and basic human rights. They are an amazingly organised movement", he said.

Bishop Phillip also said that the presentation of the Order to Mr Zikode was to send a clear message to politicians and authorities. "Our message to the authorities is, we are sick and tired of the way you are treating the poor. You are not honouring the democracy many of us worked so hard for. This democracy did not come cheaply", he said.

Bishop Phillip, a recent winner of the International Bremen Peace Award said, "We are angry that this democracy is being undermined by the very people who are meant to uphold it". He also had a strong message to the authorities. "The very people who put you into power are the very people who can pull you down. So, do not mess with the people", he warned.

In his acceptance speech, Mr Zikode thanked the church for standing by Abahlali at a time when they were being persecuted by their own government, and urged the church to continue preaching about the here and now rather than preparing people for heaven. "How can one preach about the next kingdom when the people you are preaching to have no food, and have no home to go to after the church service?", he asked.

Mr Zikode also urged Abahlali to be united and to continue with their protest and not give up in spite of state repression. "Nelson Mandela sacrificed his freedom for the people of South Africa. We are ready to sacrifice our lives as Jesus did, for the sake of our legitimate cause. The attacks on Kennedy Road are meant to destroy the movement. As Abahlali we refuse to be silenced", he said.



Mr Zikode chats with Bishop Rubin while his wife Sindy and child look on.

Earlier on Graham Philpott the Director of Church Land Programme described Mr Zikode as an ambassador of Christ who brings life and hope to the hopeless people of Kennedy Road. Richard Pithouse, Professor at Rhodes University, shared that by continuously detaining the Kennedy 5 without bail, the state was behaving criminally by going against the laws it has made. Updating the congregation on the situation at Kennedy Road, Mr Mzwakhe Mdlalose said the attacks are still going on and the residents of Kennedy Road live in fear.