

ARCHBISHOP TUTU WELCOMES BASQUE PEACE PROGRESS

CAPE TOWN: Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has welcomed the announcement by Basque separatist movement, ETA, that it is to disable its arms stockpile, and encouraged the ETA and Spanish Government to intensify their work to create conditions for sustainable harmony and reconciliation in the region.

Peace processes by nature require of all stakeholders an earnest commitment to make necessary concessions, to take risks, to overcome hurdles, to find one another, to develop a climate of trust.

In South Africa, following 350 years of colonial and apartheid hostility, it took several years of see-saw negotiating to reach consensus on the establishment of a democratic and inclusive state.

The ETA decision to put all its arms beyond operational use is a brave one. It is an important confidence building measure. It opens the door to the possibility of lasting peace.

But for the Basque people to know lasting peace will require both the ETA and Spanish Government to walk through the door. Let this opportunity not be squandered.

Putting arms beyond use will require the collaboration of governments and state agencies. Human rights issues need to be addressed and the victims of violations satisfied.

The continued incarceration of political prisoners requires urgent attention. The release of Arnaldo Otegi, Secretary General of the Basque pro-independence party SORTU and leader of the peace process, would be an important step. There are presently more than 500 Basque political prisoners dispersed across Spanish prisons, many of them

held hundreds of kilometers from their families and communities,” Archbishop Tutu said.

South Africa’s peacemaking experience is formally represented on the Basque peace process’ International Verification Commission by former cabinet minister and freedom fighter, Mr. Ronnie Kasrils.

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This statement was released for the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation by Oryx Media.