

Clerics to lead city march

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RELIGIOUS leaders and the so-called “poo protesters” are to come together to lead a march in the city centre in a few weeks’ time to support informal settlement residents’ demands for better living conditions.

They have likened it to the historic “March for Peace” in September 1989, led, among others, by the then mayor of Cape Town, Gordon Oliver, who signed yesterday’s commitment to the march.

The plan for a march came out of a meeting in Bishopscourt of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum, Andile Lili and Loyiso Nkohla from the peoples’ rights movement Ses’khona and representatives of the 86 signatories of the Call for Action.

The 86 signatories, including archbishops Desmond Tutu and Thabo Makgoba, issued a hard-hitting statement last week slamming “a group of political activists” who wanted to “promote a climate of hate” and destabilise the province through violent protests.

They warned that if what they termed a concerted campaign to destabilise the Western Cape was not stopped, it could spread across the country. But they also called on the authorities to make changes in favour of the poor.

They called on all South Africans to refuse to accept threats of ungovernability and rather promote human dignity and equality.

In the statement they mentioned Lili and Nkohla by name.

Yesterday, the Archbishop of Cape Town, Makgoba, led the meeting between the three groups.

The commitment to a march was signed by Makgoba, Lili, Nkohla, Oliver, Archbishop Stephen Brislin and Imam Rashied Omar.

Omar is the chairman of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum.

He said the meeting agreed:

l To work closely in constructive engagement with each other and various levels of government to seek and realise urgent solutions to the dehumanising realities affecting many poor communities on the Cape Flats.

l To hold a “Walk of Witness” in Khayelitsha today to see the conditions people live under and the frustrations they have.

I To undertake a march in Cape Town after Christmas.

“This will take the form of a highly disciplined march led by religious leaders modelled after the September 1989 ‘March for Peace’,” Omar said.

He said they would seek positive engagements with Premier Helen Zille and the City of Cape Town as well as the national government.

The religious leaders hope the agreement between them and protesters will defuse political tensions.

The group of 86 signatories will meet Zille and mayor Patricia de Lille tomorrow.

Omar said they were hoping a broadened summit early next year, which De Lille has already suggested, would “create a climate of hope rather than that of despair”.

Lili, who attended the meeting as Ses’khona chairman, said the religious leaders had been very helpful and had not treated them “like hooligans”.

“We have explained to them why we are fighting and they understand,” Lili said.

He said they shared a “common understanding” about their grievances.

Zille’s spokesman, Zak Mbhele, said the provincial government was working every day to improve the lives of the poorest of the poor.

“We will continue to do so and we trust that the ‘Walk of Witness’ will also result in the churches and other faith institutions contributing to interventions that go beyond symbolism,” he said.

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