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HANDLING INDICATOR

NO. _____

TO : Department of State

INFO : BELEM, BELO HORIZONTE, BRASILIA, PORTO ALEGRE, RECIFE
 SALVADOR, SAO PAULO

FROM : Amembassy RIO DE JANEIRO DATE: March 14, 1969

SUBJECT : Declaration by Brazilian Bishops on National Situation

REF : Rio de Janeiro 1388

Enclosed is a free translation of the February 18 Declaration by the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) in which the hierarchy announced the official views of the Brazilian Catholic Church on relations with the government, the need for reforms, the position of the Church and the Fifth Institutional Act. The document, the first official Church statement since IA-5 was issued on December 13, 1968, was drafted in São Paulo during a three-day meeting of the CNBB's Central Committee. It was signed by 24 CNBB Central Committee members including Brazil's three cardinals, Archbishop Eugenio Salles of Salvador, Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife and Archbishop Vicente Scherer of Porto Alegre (see enclosure for complete list). The bishops' statement was presented to President Costa e Silva in Petropolis on February 21 by Cardinal Jaime Camara of Guanabara and Bishop Aluisio Lorscheider of Santo Angelo (RGS), Secretary General of the CNBB. Several days later it was released to the press and published.

The official Church position regarding current national developments follows closely along the lines of private remarks by Brazilian liberal bishops as reported in Rio's A-88. From a close reading of the CNBB statement, it is obvious that its drafters attempted to frame it as moderately as possible, avoiding polemics and provocative language. However, that the position the hierarchy assumed was far from enthusiastic support for the course the government has elected came through clearly. The kind of cooperation

Enclosure: Declaration by Members of the Central Commission of the CNBB dated February 18, 1969

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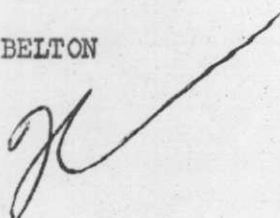
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the Church pledged is at best conditional. According to the bishops, the Church in Brazil is prepared to collaborate with the present government, providing that the exceptional powers assumed by the government through IA-5 are exercised on behalf of a far-reaching social and economic reform program designed to transform the existing elitist structure of Brazilian society. Their emphasis in the document is on reform. The Church also bluntly rebutted and rejected statements made by various military leaders since December 13 that the clergy confine itself exclusively to spiritual concerns. In assessing the significance of IA-5, the bishops expressed both unequivocal disapproval and concern that the measure opened the way not only for the violation of fundamental human rights but also for the kind of isolation of the government from the people which might provoke the growth of dangerous subversive activity. They also called for the early restoration of democratic government. Considering the realities of the present Brazilian political context, the Church, short of provoking an unproductive confrontation with the military which virtually no one advocates, could hardly have expressed its sentiments in a clearer, more forthright manner.

In some respects the CNBB document signifies a truce between the Church and the regime. In the Church's view, the burden is now on the government and the military men who control it to justify their assumption of dangerously sweeping powers by producing serious reforms which the Church has espoused in papal social encyclicals and in the statements which resulted from the 1968 Medellin conference. Though the CNBB declaration makes no threats or predictions, implicit in it is the willingness of the bishops to move into opposition to the regime, should no measurable success in reforms result within a reasonable period.

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