

Boesak, antiapartheid activist, is pardoned: Insisted he was innocent of fraud and theft

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Allan Boesak, a former church leader in the South African antiapartheid movement, has been pardoned after being convicted of diverting donations from development agencies to his own bank account.

Boesak, former president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, was pardoned by South African President Thabo Mbeki. Boesak is expected to be readmitted to South Africa's Uniting Reformed Church, the BBC reported.

Along with now-retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Boesak was in the forefront of nonviolent resistance to apartheid and used the platform of the WARC presidency, which he held from 1982 to 1991, to solicit international pressure to end South Africa's system of racial separation.

But in 1999 he was convicted of fraud and theft for diverting \$65,000 from Scandinavian church and development agencies—DanChurchAid, the Swedish International Development Agency and the Church of Norway—into his own bank account. He has consistently insisted that he is innocent.

Boesak was given a three-year sentence, of which he served one year, and was paroled in 2001, the BBC reported.

Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town said the pardon, announced January 15, was good news. "It will enable Allan to make a fresh start and enjoy the fruits of the struggle in which he played a big part," Ndungane told ENI News Service. But the main political opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, said that in the absence of any more convincing reasons it had to conclude that Mbeki's decision was "merely a pardon for a political crony."

Despite Boesak's legal difficulties, he remained highly popular in the now-ruling African National Congress. Before his conviction he had been South Africa's ambassador-designate to the United Nations in Geneva. There was speculation in South Africa that with his criminal record being expunged, a political role could again open up for him. -*Religion News Service*