INTRODUCTION

This monograph aims to chart the development of the moral regeneration campaign, and assess its relevance to the national crime prevention effort in South Africa. The campaign was initiated by former President Mandela in 1997, in an engagement with religious leaders from various faiths in South Africa. It has since taken on a variety of forms, and its messages have taken on political, religious and secular, ethical, and nation-building aspects. The campaign for moral regeneration, albeit difficult and diffuse, has been an interesting and unique effort in the context of crime prevention and the rebuilding of social fabric in post-apartheid South Africa.

While this monograph focuses on the moral regeneration campaign supported by the South African government, it is worth noting that there is a range of initiatives generated by NGOs that could also be described as contributing to moral regeneration. These include early childhood development and parenting-support interventions; restorative justice initiatives; various youth development programmes, especially those aimed at assisting teens with the rites of passage into adulthood; or projects which aim to divert and support young people who are at risk of involvement in crime. Elsewhere in the government sphere, efforts by the Revenue Service and by municipalities to encourage payment of taxes and service charges could also be described as contributing to the development of a new morality, but these will not be examined here.

This monograph will also focus on the crime preventative aspects of the moral regeneration initiative, noting that, although the campaign has been strongly focused on the reduction of criminality, this is not its only content. We are therefore not engaging with the full breadth of the campaign as it is currently evolving. It should be noted that the campaign is dynamic and changes direction and emphasis from time to time. This monograph should therefore only be taken as a reflection of developments up to the end of 2004.

CHAPTER 1
THE LINKS BETWEEN CRIME AND MORAL BREAKDOWN

There appears to be some consensus that there is a moral crisis in South Africa. Politicians, religious leaders and social commentators have all spoken about the breakdown in morality. The most commonly cited evidence of the crisis is crime – specifically crimes involving violence or those which involve citizens avoiding their basic duties and obligations to the state or to each other. The moral regeneration initiative was one response to this crisis, emerging in parallel to countless initiatives aimed at reducing crime, some of which have themselves contained explicit appeals to morals, values or ethics. The moral regeneration effort has, though, remained separate from the various crime prevention policies and programmes.

The link between crime and moral breakdown is a very old one in social theory, pre-dating modern western sociology, but most famously espoused by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim at the turn of the 19th century, and then by 1930's American sociologist Merton, in their theories of anomie or 'normlessness'. Durkheim described social systems of moral regulation as being in a critical or chronic state, near collapse, with severe consequences for individuals:

People are not endowed at birth with fixed appetites and ambitions. On the contrary, their purposes and aspirations are shaped by the generalized opinions and reactions of others, by a collective conscience, that can appear through social ritual and routine to be externally derived, solid and objective. When society is disturbed by rapid change or major disorder, however, that semblance of solidity and objectivity can itself founder, and people may no longer find their ambitions subject to effective social discipline. It is hard to live outside the reassuring structures of social life, and the condition of anomie is experienced as a 'malady of infinite aspiration', accompanied by weariness, disillusionment, disturbance, agitation and discontent.¹

The concept of anomie as a crisis resulting from social change, echoes with the explanations of crime put forward in South Africa's national crime prevention strategy (see chapter 2). However, sociologists are generally ill-
disposed to Durkheim’s term anomie, arguing that even at their most devastated, for instance in conflict-torn and transitional societies like Sierra Leone, Bosnia or Rwanda, people are able to sustain a measure of social organisation, and do not necessarily descend into a state of ‘normlessness’.

More recent criminological theory suggests that the problems of moral breakdown are not specific to conflict-ridden or post-conflict societies, but instead are a key feature of late modernity:

The last third of the twentieth century witnessed a remarkable transformation in the lives of citizens living in advanced industrialised societies. ... a world of structural unemployment, economic precariousness, a systematic cutting of welfare provisions, and the growing instability of family life and interpersonal relations. And where there once was a consensus of values, there was now burgeoning pluralism and individualism. "... Market forces generate a more unequal and less meritocratic society, market values encourage an ethos of 'every person for themselves'; together these create a combination which is severely criminogenic. Such a process is combined with a decline in the forces of informal social control, as communities are disintegrated by social mobility and left to decay as capital finds more profitable areas to invest and develop. At the same time, families are stressed and fragmented by the decline in communities' systems of support, the reduction of state support, and the more diverse pressures of work. These the pressures which lead to crime increase... Civil society becomes more segmented and differentiated: people become more wary and appraising of each other because of ontological insecurity (living in a plural world where individual biographies are less certain) and material security (a world of risk and uncertainty)."

Although Jock Young’s description refers to life in advanced industrialised societies, much of it would be equally applicable to urban South African life. It sketches some of the structural context within which themes of morality and crime prevention have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa.

The role of moral degeneration as a risk factor for criminality has also been emphasised in the ‘restorative justice’ movement in recent years. Australian criminologist, John Braithwaite, one of the leaders in rethinking crime and punishment, touches on morality when he talks about situations “where conscience is not fully developed, approval of others is the primary motivator [for committing crime], not punishment or fear of punishment”.

CHAPTER 2
POLICY CONTEXT

The South African government’s 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) linked the then-burgeoning crime problem most strongly with the process of political transition that the country underwent in the early 1990s. In its analysis of the crime problem, the NCPS pointed out that the transition from authoritarian to democratic government had had significant implications for social cohesion and values:

"The period of negotiated transition is one in which there appears to be a vacuum of legitimate social authority. When added to the extensive destruction of the family, the school and even the workplace as vehicles of social cohesion during the preceding era, the cumulative experience of many South Africans has been of a society without any cohesive fabric or legitimate sources of authority."

The process of consensus-building during the negotiation phase – and even subsequent to the April 1994 election – was considerably less efficient and rather slow... in the building of legitimate, consensus-based vehicles of social authority, social norms and socialisation processes.

The NCPS recognised some of the complexity of the problem of norms and values:

"The transition to democracy has understandably served to emphasise new freedoms in South African society, ....in the absence of adequately engaging with residual cultures of violence and intolerance, and frequently failing to anticipate the expectations or sense of entitlement associated with these new-found freedoms. ...The necessary culture-change is a slow and gradual process and demands a targeted focus on the development of the norms and values needed to underpin any orderly democratic society."

In its strategy to tackle crime, the NCPS consisted of four ‘pillars’ – each one a particular arena of attack against the factors which create or facilitate