

CLAMPDOWN

Yesterday was the 25th anniversary of the pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, which led to the indiscriminate shooting of protestors and the establishment of martial law.

The Chinese authorities filled the area with security personnel, restricted access to foreign journalists, and searched anyone in the immediate vicinity.

The result is to stifle talk about democracy or human rights. And indeed many young people growing up in China have never even heard of what happened in Tiananmen Square.

I thought of this when I heard the news that in Nigeria police had attempted to suppress the marches demanding the release of the 200 schoolgirls still in captivity.

There are many who think not enough is being done to rescue these girls. Others there may be activity and negotiations behind the scenes.

What seems certain is that banning peaceful marches suggests indifference to the girls' plight – something that the Nigerian government seem to have finally conceded.

Few of us have a real understanding of what is going on in Africa, but I think there is one thing that people of goodwill can agree on – that the pressure must continue to ensure that action is taken and that these girls do not become another forgotten news item.

The Bible encourages us to be aware of the world around us, to face up to our history even when it is painful, and in the poetic words of the prophet Amos, to *"seek rivers and oceans of justice and fairness."* (Amos 5:24)

Such words have inspired human rights and changes in individuals like Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu and in groups of people living in places like Romania and Nicaragua, and continue to inspire today.

I believe these words also speak to the universal human spirit and the need for truth and justice and fair societies.

Ordinary people have a right to be heard, a different point of view has a right to be expressed, the demand for freedom and human rights – including freedom for innocent captives, needs to be heard and acted upon.

And if we have the good fortune to live in a free country, and if our own girls are safe, we must stand in solidarity with those people around the world whose cries for justice still await an answer.

June 5 2014