

Third Catholic priest arrested over milk

By **MSINDISI FENGU**

A THIRD Catholic priest has been arrested in the Eastern Cape for alleged possession of stolen infant formula.

Police, together with provincial Health officials, launched sting operations last week resulting in the arrest of priests from Queenstown and Dutywa.

Thousands of tins of baby formula, allegedly being ille-

gally sold, were confiscated.

Yesterday, a truckload on its way to Cofimvaba was stopped and infant formula worth close to R91 000 confiscated.

The goods were seized days after a 78-year-old Cofimvaba priest was arrested on suspicion of selling the formula, meant to be distributed free of charge. He told police a consignment was due for delivery yesterday, and this is what

was intercepted.

A similar incident happened in Queenstown last week when a 67-year-old Catholic priest was arrested at his church, also for allegedly selling baby formula.

A total of 1 400 tins were confiscated.

Another Catholic priest was arrested in Dutywa, where more than 1 600 tins of milk formula were found.

The Queenstown priest ap-

peared in court briefly and was released on R5 000 bail.

The case of the Dutywa priest was postponed.

Police spokesperson Warrant Officer Namhla Mdleleni said the Cofimvaba priest would appear in court today.

"We are going to continue with our investigations to find out if these items were indeed stolen," Mdleleni said.

Health MEC Sicelo Gqobana said his department

would work closely with police to investigate the alleged scam. "When we talked to this priest (in Cofimvaba) he gave us a (telephone) number of someone who claims to be a Nestlé official in Durban."

Gqobana said the official had informed him that Nestlé had an agreement with churches to store the formula for clinics.

"This baby formula is apparently intended to supple-

ment the ones provided at clinics. We are going to speak with Nestlé nationally (head office) and enquire about this issue. We are to arrange a meeting soon."

Gqobana said he was told by the Nestlé official that it was not "allowed" for churches to sell the baby formula. Nestlé's official spokesperson could not be reached for comment yesterday. — *msindisif@dispatch.co.za*