

Nestlé apologises as priests cleared

NESTLÉ South Africa has apologised for confusion resulting from the sale of infant formula which led to the arrests of three Roman Catholic priests in the Queenstown area recently.

The Rep reported ("Police investigate sale of infant formula" May 6) that the Health Department had raided the St Theresa's Roman Catholic Church, culminating in the arrest of a priest, following the alleged illegal sale of infant formula.

Related charges against priests in Cofimvaba and DUTYWA were dropped.

Health Department Sizwe Kupelo said at the time the formula was meant to be given to underprivileged children for the free. The tins had a "not for resale" sign on the side.

In a joint statement by Nestlé South Africa and the Eastern Cape Health Department this week, Nestlé indicated that a thorough audit of the missions had been undertaken.

Nestlé spokesman Ravi Pillay said the company was

aware of the confusion created by the "not for resale" signs on the packs sold to the missions.

"The Department of Health has an existing contract with Nestlé to supply it with baby formula that is also branded 'not for resale.'"

Pillay said the Nestlé Orphans and Vulnerable Children Assistance Program (Novcap) was launched in 2008 in partnership with the provincial departments of Social Development. The programme aims at assisting non-governmental organisations to gain access to infant formula at a reduced price for orphans and needy children.

Novcap currently has 70 beneficiaries, 63 of which are orphanages or places of safety and seven which are churches.

"In light of the recent developments regarding the unintentional non-conformity of the conditions associated with the Novcap programme and the subsequent arrests of the priests, Nestlé South Africa has reviewed the pro-

gramme concerning the churches."

The company would, in agreement with the Eastern Cape Health Department, request for the uplifting of remaining stock from all places concerned and for the replacement thereof of retail packs should institutions continue with the Novcap programme.

Pillay said in future only state-approved institutions and Novcap orphanages will receive the 'not for resale' packs to assist authorities with traceability.

Managing director of Nestlé South Africa Sullivan O'Carroll apologised for the company's part in "this unfortunate set of circumstances that led to the arrests of the Roman Catholic priests."

Health MEC Sicelo Gqobana said he was "ecstatic" that an amicable solution had been found which complies with all parties involved in the interest of all people of the Eastern Cape and regrets the inconvenience caused."