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'Right-wing tag water off my back'

SAPA

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu reacted wearily yesterday to the latest claims of a right wing agenda levelled against him by the ANC.

"I am old now," he sighed, asked for comment on the matter after delivering an address on reconciliation and forgiveness at the University of Pretoria in the morning.

"I let some of these things go off my back like water."

In its latest weekly online newsletter, the ANC said recent remarks made by Tutu, critical of the party, "coincided exactly with the positions taken by the rightwing".

The rightwing could now say it had a black Nobel Peace Prize winner on its side, the ANC said.

In his address to the university's Arts and Reconciliation Festival and Conference, Tutu said racism was still a problem in South Africa, and there were problems with reconciliation.

"But, quite certainly, things could have been a great deal worse. We are not yet there, but remember we are seeking to undo the ghastly consequences of three centuries of colonial and racist oppression. It would be totally unrealistic to think it can be accomplished overnight."

South Africans were the "masters and mistresses" of selling themselves short, Tutu said.

"We really don't know just how lucky we are to be where we are," he said. The rest of the world still marvelled at how peaceful the country's transition has been, and continued to derive inspiration from it.

"We have amazed a world which had expected we would go down the tube. We should stand tall and thank God that we are where we are."

South Africans were "quite blasé" about the country's stability and the remarkably friendly feelings between the races, but this did not mean there was no racism or ill-feelings.

Tutu cited Colombia, where he recently attended a symposium on restorative justice and peace. Colombians derived much hope from the South African experience, Tutu said, and asked the country for help.

"We have given them hope," he said. "If it (peace) could happen in South Africa, it could happen anywhere. That is what we mean to others out there."



WEARY: Archbishop Desmond Tutu stresses a point during his speech at the University of Pretoria yesterday.

PICTURE: KENDRIDGE MATHABATHI