

1979-07

EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY, BISHOP DESMOND TUTU,
TO THE SACC ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE, 1979 [July]

It is a matter for rejoicing and thanksgiving to God that very few people are still in detention as a result of the October 19, 1977 clampdown.

Some of those released have since been served with 5 year banning orders. So our joy is tempered with sadness at this blatant injustice, a further example of the erosion of the rule of law in our beloved country.

We still protest the arbitrary detention without trial and bannings which relegate people to a twilight existence as non persons. We appeal to the new Minister of Justice and Police to redeem the good name of his departments and of our country by restoring the rule of law as commonly understood in free and democratic countries.

Surely if you can ban people because they are such a terrible risk to the security of our beloved land, then the evidence leading to such punishment ought to stand the scrutiny of a court of law. We call on the Minister of Justice to lift the restrictions on all banned persons or to charge them before the courts of the land. That would be one of the proofs that we are entering a new era in the history of our beloved land.

We have the technical ability to feed many times over the present world population, but the spectacle of widespread starvation haunts our globe. We know what we must do, but perversely we seem unable to do it, as St Paul remarked so graphically in Romans 7 these many centuries ago.

We still have repressive regimes in South Korea, in the Phillipines, in most of Latin America, in Ehtiopia, in the revolting Central African Empire of self-appointed Emperor Bokassa - there is much evil abroad. I could go on.

/We must all celebrate

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 We must all celebrate the downfall of an evil man Idi Amin of Uganda, who in eight bloodthirsty years reduced a beautiful and up-and-coming country into a shambles. We all want to thank President Nyerere for being the saviour of the Ugandans.

We pray that all may go well during the period of reconstruction and reconciliation. It is salutary to note that the politicians have asked a Christian leader, Bishop Festo Kivengere, to head up the campaign to raise the moral tone and morale of Uganda.

There has been a coup in Ghana. While this rash of coups is greatly to be regretted, I think it does point to at least one thing and that is the desire in black African countries for democratic rule devoid of corruption hence the welcome each leader of a coup detat receives as a saviour. We note with joyful anticipation that Nigeria has been holding elections for a civilian government.

These are bright spots to illuminate the surrounding gloom. There are possibilities to be lauded in the new Israeli-Egyptian detente.

But overall the picture is still one of unmitigated gloom. Ayatollah Khomeini seemed to promise so much for Iran but the news from that country is only distressing. The world is facing a horrendous problem because of an escalation in the number of refugees, a substantial portion of whom is made up of children. Most have become refugees because of the cupidity of man and man's inhumanity to man.

Africa alone has nearly 4-million refugees. The Far East is spewing forth landless, powerless, homeless people at an alarming rate from Vietnam, Cambodia, etc. We have the heartrending spectacle of the boat-people drifting from one unwelcoming port to another.

We commend those countries giving refuge to these and others like them. But we want to issue a call to all nations that can do so, please, in God's name to open wide their doors and their hearts to these almost God-forsaken people. Let them at least double their present quotas to remove this scandal from the face of the globe.

I ask that this Conference should vote a token sum of say R10 000 to be split up between the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Christian Council of Asia for their refugee programs just to demonstrate our solidarity with those in want. South Africans are always very generous in the face of human need.

I appeal to our Government to make a substantial donation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees earmarked for the boatpeople if not for use among all refugees.

All of us hoped this time last year that we would have had happier news to tell about our sub-continent. Alas, very little has happened here to make us sanguine and look to the future with any degree of equanimity.

We are distressed with what we hear may be happening especially to the Churches in Mozambique and also in Angola. I doubt myself that you can ever have a genuinely secular society in Africa. For the African, the spiritual realm has an abiding reality and belief in the supernatural, in a God, is something we Africans appear to take in with our mother's milk.

/Hence communism

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Hence communism as dialectical materialism can never satisfy the deep yearnings of the African psyche. An African atheistic materialist is, I am sure, a contradiction in terms. There ought to have been far more Marxist and Communist nations in Africa considering the good preparations made for a communist takeover by the previous colonial history.

I think we should not underestimate the Communist threat, but lets not exaggerate it. There is also the parallel threat of the West extending neo-colonialist tentacles over Africa, prepared to keep in power repressive regimes so long as these served their economic and strategic interests as is the case of the United States with the Park regime in South Korea, which seems inconsistent with the Carter administration's admirable concern for human rights.

We are disturbed with what has happened in Rhodesia. People claim that the elections were free and fair. I would praise them for managing to hold elections during a civil war. But there are elections and elections.

These happened on the basis of a constitution approved of by the whites alone. It entrenches disproportionate rights for a very tiny minority. Four percent of the population controls nearly 30% of the seats in Parliament. This four percent has control of Defence, Finance, the Civil Service - I wonder what Bishop Muzorewa really controls.

Whatever we may think of the Patriotic Front it is obvious that any settlement which excludes the Nkomo-Mugabe axis is doomed to failure and cannot stop the destructive war with its high level of casualties. We are being brutalised because we no longer appear to be shocked by the casualty lists - or is it that most of these statistics refer to blacks. We get deafening protests when whites are involved, but only muted ones for blacks.

I want to reiterate that I and the Council I serve are opposed to all violence. I repeat - to all violence. We are committed to finding solutions that are reasonably peaceful and non-violent. We condemn all violence whether perpetrated by so-called terrorists or by Defence and Security Forces.

Our condemnation is not selective. We condemned the shooting down of civilian aircraft, but equally we condemn Defence Forces which in their hot pursuit campaigns kill innocent civilians. We have not heard South Africa express an outrage at this kind of violence.

We have heard little protest against structural violence in South African society - such as that of migratory labour or detention without trial, population removals and resettlement.

We are distressed at what happened in Namibia. Nearly everybody thought we were well on the way to finding a settlement that would have international recognition. Your Executive Committee instructed me to write to all parties concerned in the Namibian crisis i.e. the South African Prime Minister, Sam Nujoma, Dr Waldheim, to appeal to them not to do anything that would jeopardise such an internationally recognised settlement.

/Well, we are at

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Well, we are at a difficult period where we seem not to want to learn from the Rhodesian situation. It is good to note that the Western Powers are attempting another initiative.

The situation in our sub-continent poses, I believe, a real threat to world peace and must be resolved before it is too late. We saw how the USA and Russia were nearly at eyeball to eyeball confrontation in Angola.

A highly-placed US Senator told me recently that America was bound to be interested in what happened in South Africa because if a racial war were to break out in these parts it would have horrendous consequences for their own race relations in the USA. Racial injustice and oppression are highly volatile things and a conflagration could happen so easily God forbid.

We want to give thanks to God for SACLA which finished recently having brought together over 5 000 people. Those who organised it must be warmly commended for persevering against great odds while being sniped at from both the left and the right. Many may believe there was a shying away from the awkward and recalcitrant problems of our land, but I believe God was moving in SACLA and that some things have been happening. It was a miracle that SACLA happened and we pray that it may help to cause the miracle of justice, love and peace to happen soon in our beloved land.

We give thanks, too, at the exciting things that are happening in the unity negotiations under the aegis of the Church Unity Commission. You will recall that the negotiating churches have covenanted to unite. Now the exciting stage is that a service for the mutual recognition of one another's ordained ministries has been drawn up.

The Anglicans at the Provincial Synod will discuss the vexed question of the ordination of women. We must pray for them. It seems that the consensus in the Anglican Communion would be in favour of the ordination of women.

I support the ordination of women because I doubt that you can produce compelling theological reasons against it. I doubt too whether we can say we are concerned about its ecumenical repercussions with regard to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, unless we say at the same time what ecumenical consequences not ordaining women would be to the Churches which do ordain women and with whom we are at the stage of Covenanting.

I myself feel the ordination of women is also part of the total liberation struggle in which I hope I am involved.

Dr Koornhof has, I believe come as a breath of fresh air in a close atmosphere. We have already commended him for his courageous action in re-prieving Crossroads which the authorities were determined should be demolished. He has acted with compassion in saving Alexandra Township and with his moratorium about so-called illegal blacks. And we want so very much to believe him when he speaks about the death of apartheid.

He has wanted to get the logjam moving with his regional committees on the future of urban blacks. It has seemed that a light was appearing at the end of the tunnel, with the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions.

/But as much as

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But as much as we have wanted to see that change was happening, I am sad to report that I have found little substantial and fundamental change about. I have wanted to believe that Dr Koornhof's committees would be about real dialogue for change. Alas they are not geared for that.

Those who want to talk about dismantling apartheid would always be a frustrated minority for you are constrained to operate within the parameters of a system you long ago rejected as unjust and immoral.

The majority of your fellow members have accepted the system being on its payroll.

You were really dealing with how to implement apartheid, of course doing it humanely, making it more comfortable, but implementing it. And you must deal only with urban blacks, further reinforcing an unjust division of the black community which is already so painfully divided by Government policy on ethnic grounds - the old divide and rule ploy.

The regional committee scheme has exacerbated this debilitating fissiparousness in the black community. We understand that Dr Koornhof had to consider his constituency in doing something that was anathema to them. But black leaders, too, have a constituency and if that constituency repudiates them, then on what grounds could they continue to serve on the committees?

Two people have tried the Committees. Your President and Prof Nyambezi. After giving it a trial, they have resigned because they have seen it as an exercise in futility.

I have written to Dr Koornhof to say I am interested in real dialogue - face to face with him but that he must give us something to show for agreeing to sit down with him - to abolish (really abolish) the pass laws; to abolish Bantu Education (the old draft bill was rejected by the Church leaders' meeting which I called); to stop the removal and resettlement of people and to help in the call for a national convention. I am awaiting his response.

The Wiehahn Commission represented a significant step forward which has been nullified very considerably by the resultant draft legislation especially on the issue of unionism for migrants and commuters; the veto on new membership of industrial councils.

The Riekert Commission is a very clever instrument to give a few blacks increased privileges while turning the screws on the bulk of blacks as we have seen in recent days. The heart of apartheid is that blacks must be regarded as birds of passage in the land of their birth.

This matter of our South African citizenship is quite crucial. It is the nub of the matter. Removals and their consequences the resettlement camps, are a direct result of the apartheid system.

You remove excess blacks, many being the superfluous appendages, the illegal blacks. You remove them from sight and so they are out of mind. You solve the problem of the blacks by declaring that they are not South Africans even if physically they are within so-called white South Africa.

/The bantustans

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The bantustans enable the Government transfer the problems of unemployment and poverty and lack of housing to the rural areas where people are dumped with not the slightest chance of being able to make a living. They are being dumped where they are unlikely to find employment.

Many have been removed from jobs and homes to eke out a miserable existence in the bantustan. I have visited some of these resettlement camps. I have been shattered by what I have seen and I hope that our Christian conscience will not permit any of us to want to see this policy continued once we know what is happening there.

In Zweledinga in the Eastern Cape, I met this little girl who lives with her widowed mother and sister. I asked whether mother received a pension or any other grant and she said, "No".

"Then how do you live?" I asked. "We borrow food," she said. "Have you ever returned the food you have borrowed?" "No!" "What happens if you can't borrow food?" "We drink water to fill our stomachs!"

This in a country which exports food. That child will haunt me and I cannot take it any longer.

Christians are going to have to ask themselves seriously just how long they think fellow Christians can go on bearing this kind of anguish without exploding.

Christians are going to ask themselves what Jesus wants them to do in such a situation - a Jesus who said, "in as much as you did it or did not do it to the least of these my brethren you did it or you didn't do it to me".

Christians are going to ask themselves whether that is the kind of South Africa they can defend. South Africa is our motherland and we love it passionately. We will defend it, but not as it is.

I find it galling in the extreme that persons who during World War II supported the enemies' cause to the extent that they were, some of them interned, that people with such a dubious record of patriotism should now want to reas us lessons on patriotism. They thought then that South Africa was not worth defending and often we recall soldiers in uniform were turned away from many white Dutch Reformed Churches. And yet our fathers and brothers gave their lives then for this our country.

We, too, think that South Africa as at present ordered, is not worth dying for, but South Africa is worth dying for our kind of South Africa; a non-racial South Africa, a more just South Africa where everyone of her inhabitants has full citizenship, a South Africa where there would be a more equitable distribution and sharing of the good things of life, where all her citizens participated in political and other significant decision making, participated in power sharing and that South Africa is coming.

The Info Scandal points out what many have been saying. Apartheid is a corrupt and evil thing and the surprising thing is that it has taken so long to be clearly manifested. We are just surprised that THE CITIZEN actually continues to exist. We hope one day the Christian League will be able to tell us as we have told them where it has been getting its funds. I am sure they can't have anything to hide.

/We live in a

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We live in a society at present which is selfish and grasping. We live in a society that is broken and divided and fragmented. We live in a society that is uncaring and without compassion, in which the law is eat or be eaten, and survival of the fittest. We live in a society whose members have no real fellowship one with another, who look on one another with hostility, anxiety and fear, each group in its own little ethnic ghetto.

And we the Church of God are the alternative society, a different kind of society. We have not always lived up to our calling. But God calls us to be a new, a different kind of society.

We must desperately urgently become and be seen to be a sharing society. We must love our brothers and sisters and really begin to share the spiritual and material things that God has given into our stewardship.

We must be a caring and compassionate society, caring for the weak and the powerless, especially to empower them; caring for the downtrodden and the disadvantaged and poor, becoming the voice of the voiceless because there is where we find Christ particularly; urging our more well-to-do to let God use them to do his miracles of love and compassion.

We must be a reconciled community working for justice and reconciliation for we were given the ministry of reconciliation. We must be what we are - a fellowship where the middle wall of partition has been broken down.

I pray we will not become separated and divided from one another. I fear we may become divided from one another on racial lines because on too many key issues, e.g. the WCC, investments, Dr Koornhof, etc., you are sure to find the majority of whites on the one side and the majority of blacks on the other.

We believe in God, not a far off God, not an uncaring and aloof God, not a powerless God. This is His world. He is in charge and His purpose is to unite all the separate and divided things and peoples of this world to unite them in Jesus Christ.