



CREATING A SOCIALLY COHESIVE SOCIETY

10th Annual Diakonia Lecture

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Our revulsion is unending as we hear again those chilling whispers in parts of KwaZulu-Natal that the foreigners must go. Our fear is that this scourge in South Africa displays the greatest form of hatred known to humankind - the hatred of the self. In the eyes of the attackers the cake has become too small for the assumed primary beneficiaries of the new democratic order to share.

The integration of fellow Africans into South African communities remains unfinished business. Very worrying is a reluctance to accept that free enterprise follows the creed of eat or be eaten. In truth xenophobia in South Africa is fuelled by ignorance as it is by sinister agendas. Xenophobia today sees minorities as enemy, the newly arrived, foreigners and those who line our streets with their aggressive commercial enterprises.

In a recent song African foreign nationals are accused of stealing and asked to leave by a KwaZulu-Natal Maskandi artist raising temperatures yet again. In my involvement with the recent xenophobic attacks in KwaZulu-Natal it was clear they are fuelled by a number of factors. As we visited the camps along with the leadership of the city and province, it occurred to me that there is ignorance and convenient amnesia over Africa's role in liberating South Africa. Sometimes, as is the case of this artist, it is a combination of commercial opportunism and insensitivity.

Africa's quest for total liberation convinced the world that colonialism and racial oppression were barbaric. Then the world was convinced of the necessity, justification and urgency of the struggle to end these evils.

Let me make a bigger point. Africans, on the continent and the Diaspora, must be allowed into every African country, of course following all legal routes. For the African Diaspora, there must be a right of return. Those that were stolen from Africa and sent to the Americas and Caribbean as slaves must be allowed to return home. It is a no-brainer.

Barring or seeking to control African movement in Africa is unworkable in the face of economic integration led by the people themselves and only delayed by politics, power and patronage. Where there is economic and political instability, refugees will cross borders, risking death and arrest. Desperate circumstances lead to desperate measures. Capital seeks profit. entrepreneurs seek economic opportunity.

Social cohesion does not seek to build one homogenous nation out of the number of people that populate it, but recognises the diversity of the parts that form that whole. Through social cohesion we can build a winning nation capable of participating at all levels around the world.

So who are the objects of a social cohesion project in South Africa? Primarily, it is the majority, historical victims of apartheid - black people and women. Social cohesion must address the majority with due regard to the rights of all minorities. This is where the problem persists. Black people in South Africa and the rest of Africa continue to be victims - according to the latest statistics, of rampant crime in their townships. They are victims of gang violence, of taxi wars, of taxi accidents and of rape, witchcraft and xenophobia. They are victims of unemployment and are forced to beg for the crumbs falling off the tables of the political and economic elites.

Black people were so dehumanised by apartheid that they continue to eliminate each other at the slightest provocation today. What mindset says a business dispute over taxi routes is never resolved until blood flows through the streets?

Having said this, why is there silence when an industry that ferries over 60% of daily commuters receives no subsidy from the state compared to the buses and trains? At the same time the injection of capital into South African Airways (which owns Mango) means that the taxpayer's money is used to outcompete and destroy the low cost-

airlines. This subsidy talks to the continued support of the lifestyles of the rich and the continued oversight of the needs of the poor.

Social cohesion is about narrowing the distance between black and white, closing the gap between rich and poor, and giving hope to the hopeless. It is about empowering women to rise to their highest. No nation can rise higher than its women and empowering women is the surest means to peace and the upliftment of a nation. If we can secure the majority in their homes, provide jobs and business opportunities to the majority and educate the masses, then most of our problems will be solved. It is also about accommodating the newly arrived, the newly returned, those on the margins because of their language, culture and previous nationality.

A re-born South Africa must enshrine the values that are far superior to those that it is replacing. We must forge a unitary state out of the ashes of apartheid, and address class polarisation with the values of socio-economic justice and freedom for all.

To build an embracing South Africa our reference must extend beyond apartheid. South Africa like most countries has experienced the following forms of migration at some point:

- The first wave of Africans migrating down south from the source of the Nile
- The migration of Europeans into Africa during the exploration and colonisation period
- The migration from rural areas to the city
- The release of long-term prisoners, the return of exiles from across the world where they had been fighting apartheid often with spouses and children born in other countries
- The second wave of African migrants from economic war zones and countries such as Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo etc.

Understanding the political and socio-economic impact of these waves on our country and continent is important to appreciate the challenges and to craft an adequate response. What were the pull and push factors behind these major shifts?

We must know who needs to be socially cohesive, why and how. Maybe we need to know who must be socially coerced. Used well, social cohesion can be a bridge to national and continental unity, a means of recompense and redress, an adhesive for growth and development and a true force for transformational change.

Improperly implemented, the concept of cohesion can become social engineering or become mere philosophy and opium for the masses. South Africa's internal cohesion is important, but it is unsustainable unless it is linked to Africa's destiny. There must be regional economic cohesion, political alignment and free movement of people, especially Africans across borders.

Addressing the 22nd Summit of the African Union in 2013, Chairperson Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma told delegates of a letter she had written to Kwame, an imaginary friend in 2063. The letter speaks of an Africa with high-speed rail, an economically cohesive Africa made out of independent, yet interlinked countries and economic regions and a free people.

According to this dream, Africa will be a Confederation of African States, have regional manufacturing hubs in Congo, Angola and Zambia, as well as silicon savannahs in Rwanda, Egypt, Nigeria and Kenya. This new Africa will guarantee women equal access to education and business ownership, have one common language, and have the highest levels of education in science and technology. Dr Dlamini-Zuma says Africa in 2063 will lead in renewable energy, with hydro, solar, wind and geothermal energy, in addition to fossil fuels. Africa must rise.

Our people and governments must work hard towards it. Socially cohesive nations win rugby world cups and host FIFA World Cup tournaments. Socially cohesive countries provide economic opportunity for all and attract the best minds to run its institutions. Socially cohesive nations are happy nations and have diminishing levels of crime.

In the words of the Chinese President, Mr Xi Jinping to the United Nations a few days ago, history is a mirror. We review history to shape our future. President Xi Jinping said we must be independent as we remain interdependent with and

secured by a common future. President Xi said independent collaboration and unity in diversity is the basis for a win-win situation. We must reject the old adage that one's gain is the other's loss and winner takes all.

Disputes of whatever nature can be resolved through transparent dialogue. I believe that South Africa and Africa must agree that the gap between rich and poor is unfair. Inequality is the basis of wars and suicide bombs across the globe. It is responsible for the continued marginalisation of the new members by the old members, the castigation of the new arrivals by old arrivals. It is unjust. It is unsustainable. It must end. Together let us work for a better South Africa, and a prosperous Africa. SIYA VUMA!

- *Yaa Ashantewaa Archer-Ngidi is founder of the Institute of Afrikology , Chairperson Africa Day Committee and Director of Siyavaya Afrika Consultants. This is an edited version of the 10th Diakonia Lecture she delivered on the occasion of the awarding of the Diakonia Human Rights Award to Bishop Mike Vorster on 29September 2015*