



## DIAKONIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

### **BISHOP RUBIN PHILLIP – DIAKONIA AWARD 2010 CITATION**

I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10) has been the inspiration in Bishop Rubin Phillip's life.

His commitment to ecumenical faith-based work for justice is part of his very identity. Bishop Rubin has represented not only the Anglican Church but in a real way the downtrodden and marginalised.

Bishop Rubin has been promoting a culture of human rights as far back as any of us remember. He appears in many of the earliest photographs, attending meetings and standing at non-violent protests against apartheid - as he was a vocal and fearless anti-apartheid activist.

We can only tell a few stories, give a few glimpses of the many ways in which Bishop Rubin has put his faith into action.

From an early age, Bishop Rubin was involved in the Black Consciousness Movement. He was the Deputy President of the South African Student's Organisation (SASO) in 1969 when Steve Biko was President.

Diakonia's first efforts to focus public attention on the plight of detainees followed the detention of the Revd Sol Jacobs, a Methodist minister on the staff of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). A prayer meeting was organised in Medwood Gardens in June 1981, and there was Rubin Phillip, standing in solidarity with detainees, holding a poster naming the groups being prayed for - including the police.

When involved with the Durban and District Council of Churches, Bishop Rubin chaired the Durban work of the Dependents' Conference, an SACC programme. There he provided material, financial, psychological and spiritual support to political prisoners, such as those imprisoned on Robben Island, as well as their families.

His open protest did not go unnoticed by the regime. In the 1970s, Rubin Phillip was put under house arrest for three years.

In the 1980s, Rubin Phillip had to deal with forced removals. A specific example of this was the Clairwood struggle because the people did not want to leave the area to make way for industries

A highlight of 1988 was the declaration by the Durban City Council that the people of Clairwood would not have to move. Diakonia helped the residents organise an interfaith service of thanksgiving, in which representatives of the Muslim, Hindu and Christian faiths took part. Amongst the faith leaders taking part in this joyous occasion was Canon Rubin Phillip, who had grown up in Clairwood.

Bishop Rubin did not retire from working for justice with the demise of apartheid. In the midst of the jubilation and joy of celebrating the fall of apartheid, he prophetically saw human rights violations, corruption, and self-enrichment of the few elites looming on the horizon, and threatening to throw the nation back to the dark days.

In the post apartheid era, when he saw that justice was under threat, Bishop Rubin openly took a stand in solidarity with the victims, and has not hesitated to apportion blame where it belonged.

Believing that racism is still a reality in our society, Bishop Rubin played a key role in welcoming and working with the World Council of Churches' delegation to the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in August 2001. Racism and discrimination have always been at the centre of his consciousness. At the special service organised by Diakonia just before the opening of the WCAR, Bishop Rubin said: "Christians must acknowledge and confess that racism and intolerance still exist in the church."

In 2007, he and other church leaders issued a statement testifying to the brutality and political intolerance that the Sydenham police had unleashed against the shack dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo.

Believing in the genuineness of their struggle, Bishop Rubin has openly and unashamedly stood by Abahlali through their trials and tribulations, offering his full support. He supported their legal battle to have the KZN Slums Act declared unconstitutional.

Since September 2009, Bishop Rubin has released numerous press statements condemning the violent persecution of Abahlali in the Kennedy Road informal settlement, blaming political interference. He has repeatedly called for an independent commission of enquiry into the Kennedy Road violence of September 2009 'to establish the truth'.

Believing that a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, Bishop Rubin's commitment to justice and human rights saw him leading solidarity and advocacy work in support of human rights and justice in South Africa's neighbour.

With the escalation of the socio-political dynamics in Zimbabwe, Bishop Rubin together with Paddy Kearney, successfully obtained a court interdict preventing arms shipments destined for the brutal regime in Harare - with its history of blatant violations of human rights - from being transported through South Africa.

In 2008, when a wave of xenophobic violence unleashed in South Africa, Bishop Rubin campaigned for the protection of foreign nationals. Due to his strong efforts and advocacy, the foreign nationals received shelter and support from churches and civil society organisations.

His commitment to human rights and his influence did not go unnoticed by the international community. In 2009 Bishop Rubin was honoured with the International Bremen Peace Award in the Category Public Engagement towards justice and peace.

We could speak of what Bishop Rubin personally suffered as a result of his firm opposition to oppression, of being under house arrest, of having people you know well and respect deeply, die cruelly and unjustly as they did under apartheid.

His voice has been persistently clear about concern for those who needed justice, bringing them to the attention of member churches, challenging and mobilising them to plan an appropriate response. Talking of those who suffer, he said: "We owe it to them to amplify their call for justice." And so his prophetic voice continues to ring out.

There is so much more that could be said, but these few stories of Bishop Rubin's strong commitment to justice and human rights are why today Diakonia chooses to present him with the Diakonia Award.

Bishop Rubin you have served the discourse of human rights with distinction.

Diakonia salutes you, Bishop Rubin. We salute you for your outstanding contribution and your challenge to us and to the churches far and wide, to be in solidarity with those who are marginalised and who are suffering; for your support of those who are victims of injustice.

For us at Diakonia, it is to thank you for your devoted service to human rights, to justice and to democracy through many long years - from the days of the struggle against apartheid to the struggle against poverty, corruption and injustice.

And for this we honour and salute you!