



**ADDRESS BY THE REVEREND FRANK CHIKANE ON THE OCCASION OF THE
40TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIAKONIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ON
“KEEPING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE FLAME ALIVE”**

25 November 2016

Greyville Convention Centre, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)

The Chairperson of the Diakonia Council of Churches, Revd Ian Booth;
The Executive Director, Ms Nomabelu Mvambo-Dandala;
The rest of the Leadership of Diakonia;
Esteemed Church Leaders;
Leaders of the business community and civil society formations;
Community leaders; the people of eThekweni and the rest of the KZN Province;
Distinguished guests, brothers and sisters, comrades, ladies and gentlemen:

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Diakonia Council of Churches (Diakonia) on its 40th Anniversary and for its critical ministry and service to the people of this region and the country since it was launched in March 1976. May the Lord bless you for this great and extra-ordinary ministry, and, be blessed as you chart your way into the future.

Secondly, I must say that I do not ordinarily accept invitations for purposes of fundraising. But I am here today because I believe in the cause of Diakonia, that is, the pursuit of social justice. This is a cause worth supporting and investing in.

For this cause, which I will be speaking about this evening, I urge you to ‘overflow in a wealth of generosity’, as Paul said about Macedonians. That, even in their “severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme form of poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means ... and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part” in the relief of others.

As you know, for Diakonia, it is not only about relief for others, but it is for the cause of justice, especially for those who are kept or remain on the underside of our society notwithstanding our democracy, freedoms and the efforts of the democratic government since 1994.

I imagine that it is for this reason that you chose the theme, “**Keeping the Social Justice Flame Alive**” for this Gala Dinner. In its construct the theme suggests that the ‘social justice flame’ is either ‘fading away’ or ‘fading out’ apparently following the advent of our new democracy, on the one hand, whilst, on the other, the social justice challenges were and are persisting into this new democracy in a way that must worry all of us who care.

In this regard, the current vision of Diakonia, that is, ‘**a transformed society actively working for social justice**’, concurs with this perspective and requires of us to ‘actively’ **work** for ‘social justice’. Accordingly, we must congratulate Diakonia for maintaining its tradition of forty years ago when it was launched.

The second critical element of this vision is that it expects the society that actively work for social justice to be ‘**a transformed society**’. What it means is that one must have a ‘Damascus experience’ (like Paul) to be able to work actively for social justice. This, for me is the greatest challenge the country is facing, including the Church. The challenge is that we have leadership that is in the main traditional and is geared more on conserving ways of the past however retrogressive they may be. To be more specific, and in the sense of Diakonia’s vision statement, we have in the main untransformed leadership (or a society) that is trying to executive a ‘transformation programme’ which is almost an impossibility!

To counter this development today, and more than it was forty years ago, we need a ‘transformed society’ and leadership to play a ‘transformative role’ to enable people to ‘take responsibility for their lives and promote prophetic action on social justice issues’ as Diakonia’s mission statement asserts.

In this regard I would like to submit that the challenges we face today are related in many respect to ‘untransformed’ and ‘compromised’ leaders who are trying to transform apartheid South Africa to a non-racial, non-sexist, just, equitable and prosperous democratic society. The greatest mistake we made was the assumption that those who were involved in the struggle or who come from the tradition and history of struggle for social and (I would add) economic justice were by nature and definition ‘transformed leaders’.

We were aware of the challenges we were facing and would face to achieve the national strategic objective of establishing a non-racial, non-sexist, just, and equitable democratic society. We knew that what we achieved in April 1994 was not the Kingdom of God (as some thought) or anything like it. Nor was this an approximation thereof.

In his book, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* (1992), Charles Villa-Vicencio also assisted us to think of what we had as just ‘middle axioms’ that point towards what we struggled for and anticipated. He warned that the oppression we struggled to escape could happen again. Or to use our traditional struggle language, the gains we made in 1994 and beyond could be reversed as it seems like it’s happening today. It seems like we have to ‘learn again’ as to how to ‘resist evil and support the common good’.

In our analysis of the ‘balance of forces’ we were conscious of the **local and international forces** arrayed against our vision, especially the economic vision of an equitable society. But we were prepared to continue with this struggle beyond our political freedom in 1994. Here, we understood that it was going to be *Aluta continua*

(the struggle continues), *vitória é certa* (victory is certain), the rallying cry of FRELIMO movement during Mozambique's struggle for liberation.

The liberation movement which eventually became the governing party described the immediate task of a free South Africa as that of achieving the strategic objectives of what it calls (in revolutionary terms) the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) - 'the liberation of Africans in particular, and black people in general, from **political and economic** bondage' (Strategy and Tactics Document, 1997). This, we did not think that it would be like a walk in the park. We expected stiff resistance to the economic transformation project which is still the greatest challenge we face today.

We were also conscious that over and above the external forces of reaction (national and international) there was a **risk of being infiltrated** to implode the motive forces of the NDR from inside, but we did not develop adequate strategies to mitigate against this risk. Worse more, we did not anticipate that extra-ordinary **cadres** of the liberation struggle could be **corruptible and compromised** to an extent of working against the very objectives of the NDR (See Chapter 8 of my book, *The Things that Could Not be Said*, 2013. The Chapter is entitled "Warning Lights" with a discussion paper entitled "Threats and Potential Threats to the Achievement of the National Democratic Revolution").

What is shocking lately is that cadres of the movement seem to think that they have the right to be corrupt as 'whites' were (to use their unfortunate generalised language), or to put it more correctly, as the apartheid regime was corrupt. The questions that are being raised are, 'why make corruption a black issue when whites (unfortunate generalisation again) do it as well, or have done and are still doing today'. They raise these questions as if there was nothing wrong in doing it!

This is demonstrated more starkly in the current State Capture debate. Instead of addressing the deep concerns of the people of South Africa about the rot that is in the capture of some of the State entities and organs of the State to advance personal or family interests at the expense of the people, particularly the poor, those who are affected and their supporters advance an argument that it is not the first time 'state capture has occurred'. White business did it! Here they draw in the Rupert family (whatever the merits of the case) in defence of the Gupta family (who are the subjects of the Public Protector's Report on State of Capture).

Listening to the debate feels like people are competing in the high stakes of corruption and of robbing the people (particularly the poor) of resources that would make a radical difference in their lives. In this regard, we must be ashamed of ourselves!

The greatest mistake we made, for me, was to assume that comrades- my comrades - with whom we were in the trenches together were '**angels**'. Many of those who were involved in this struggle thought that the cadres of the liberation movement were like the 'hosts of God', that is, the army of God for justice and peace – understanding that God was a God of justice.

In this 'angelic' world, as it was in the struggle for liberation, the hosts of God consisted of the 'cherubims' and the 'seraphims'. The cherubims were the guardians of Paradise in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8) or of the 'mercy-seat' in the Tabernacle with outstretched wings, (Exodus 25:17-22). The 'seraphims' on the other hand were forever in God's presence, forever praising God (Isaiah 6:1-8). In

this text, one of them, for instance, called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”. They are presented as the purifiers; with a fiery passion for doing God’s good work.

Within this perspective we did not expect that there would be ‘fallen angels’ among us who would be ‘enemies’ or ‘adversaries’ of that which we fought for. This has been pervasive and overwhelming in the last few years. In fact it is debilitating.

I for one, must confess that I was one of those who did not believe that the cadres of the movement could be corruptible or compromised to a level where they would betray the course (of justice and peace) and pursue self-interests at the expense of the people, especially the poor and vulnerable among us. Worse more, they are prepared to kill one another, even for the position of a Councillor as it happened during the last elections, especially here in this Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Some bring evil and temptation for us, especially to the younger generation, to abandon our former positions of social justice by seducing them into ways of falsehood and sin to lead us astray. What worries me more is that the role models in terms of leadership, especially in government, are just negative role models. As one of my sons said, ‘Dad, what do you expect from young people when their supposed role models are corrupt and suggest in the conduct and behaviour that the only way to do politics is to be corrupt?’

I am of the view that the time has come, and that time is now, to mobilise as many South Africans as possible – in the way we did during the struggle for liberation – to resist this trend which is gradually taking us back to the monster we fought against.

That is why the churches, through the national leadership of the Churches of the member churches of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the SACC have adopted a programme of prayer and action known now as “The South Africa We Pray For”. The Programme focuses on:

- (1) Healing and Reconciliation;
- (2) Poverty and Inequality and Economic Transformation;
- (3) Family Fabric which has been impacted negatively by the apartheid system and other factors; and
- (4) Anchoring Democracy which involves democracy education, election support and monitoring, dealing with corruption and so forth.

On corruption, for instance, we have set up what we call the “Unburdening Panel” which has received damning information about corruption and the capture of or efforts to capture State entities and organs of the State most of which is contained in Madonsela’s State of Capture Report.

What is shocking about this Project is how frightened people are who have information relating to this rot in the country. In the words of our General Secretary, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, in his report to the SACC, “it is amazing how frightened people are to have their stories heard in public. They fear for their lives, they fear the repercussions, loss of livelihoods ...” The shock here is that this is happening in a free democratic country.

Many of you would be aware of my involvement as part of the veterans and stalwarts of the liberation movement to intervene with the leadership of the governing party and thereby the country to impress on them to change the trajectory the party and government were following which will destroy our country. This is unusual for a Church leader in the traditional sense to do this. But for me it is important to ensure that our credibility we invested in the liberation movement (in history) is not used to advance a programme which works against what many of our comrades make great sacrifices for, excluding the ultimate sacrifice of death.

You will agree with me that we cannot allow this country which held so much promise for the people of South Africa, Africa and the world to be reduced to the morass of death and destruction in pursuance of the sectarian interests of the few against the majority of our people. If we don't, we will have failed our people and the generations to come.

This is where your theme comes in. We must keep the social justice flame that Archbishop Denis Hurley lit forty years ago. With his chosen motto, *Ubi Spiritus, ibi Libertus* (Where the Spirit is, there is liberty) he allowed himself to be used by God to give birth to this ecumenical organisation which was then just called Diakonia. Like a classical prophet he was ahead of his colleagues within the Church, including Rome. He was ahead of the community he belonged to, particularly whites during his time. He had the eyes of a mamba (mehlw'emamba) – as blacks within the area of his ministry would describe him, for he could see beyond what his contemporaries could.

It may interest you to know that Archbishop Hurley was one of the white servants of God who humanised me to make a difference between whites as people and the injustices they were perpetrating as a collective or beneficiaries against black people then. The other two white servants of the Lord who had such an effect on me were Dr Beyers Naudé and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston.

But this legacy that Archbishop Hurley left us requires of us to be transformed first, as he was – from a classical white South African brought up within the racist perspective of his generation to an advocate of non-racialism, justice and peace. He had his own 'Damascus experience', particularly during the time he attended the Vatican 11 meetings in the early sixties.

Accordingly, we also must go through our own 'Damascus experiences'. There is no way that one can be a social justice activist if one is not transformed to reflect the very values of social justice one is fighting for.

As we have said already, the vision of Diakonia is 'a transformed society actively working for social justice'. We have already said that one can't have an untransformed society or community or individuals to work actively for social justice. The same applies to Church leaders, members of our churches, the nation's representatives in all our legislatures throughout the country. For if one is transformed one cannot be corruptible or easy to compromise.

But the challenge here goes beyond leaders to the people themselves – the citizenry. If the society is not transformed it will give you a Donald Trump in a perfectly democratic way to work against the very objectives of social justice. I must say that South Africa is at risk of ending where the people of the United States of America have ended. One thing we must understand is that when the frustrations of the people reach levels where they feel they are rendered ineffective to change an

overwhelming power that they feel is causing them enormous pain or are unhappy about, they will support or vote for any demagogue who might seem likely to save them. It is said that this is how Germany ended up with Hitler!

The fact that the overwhelming majority of South Africans claim to be Christian (some put it at 80%) is a huge indictment to the churches and on those who claim to be Christian in terms of the transformation of its own membership. If we are of such numbers then we must expect that many of the corrupt and compromised lot belong to our churches.

The strategies the SACC has adopted to address these challenges are based on the same radical form of ecumenism that Archbishop Hurley pursued leading to the establishment of Diakonia. This radical form of ecumenism was a break with the tradition and history of denominationalism which has built walls of separation between the members of the Body of Christ, that is, the Church and weakened the impact of its ministry to the people. It is based on the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ for all those "who will believe in me ... that all of them may be one ... as you are in me and I am in you ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).

We are called upon not just to destroy the barriers which separate us, the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14) but to destroy the walls of separation between our churches, including churches that are not members of the SACC.

This new form of ecumenism which we call 'Ward Level Form of Ecumenism' or 'Ward Based Ecumenism' turns our traditional models of ecumenism on their heads. It is ecumenism from the bottom or the underside as opposed to the traditional 'ecumenism of the leaders'. It starts with members of the Body of Christ, the Church, at a local level being 'brought into complete unity' in terms of Jesus' prayer (John 17:23). This expression of oneness in the Body of Christ at a local level is critical for the world 'to believe' that Jesus was the sent one of God. A demonstration of 'complete unity' at the local levels where the pain of the people is expressed in a stark way will make the world know that God loves them as God loved his only begotten Son (John 17:23).

This is a radical concept of being church that works for justice; the common good of all humanity. It is a call for us to return to the roots of the early church which was expressed in the form of local presence with the people.

To actualise this, the SACC Central Committee has decided that:

1. The Secretariat of the SACC develop a booklet on this form of ecumenism which will also serve as a 'tool kit' on how to set-up or create such forms of ecumenism at a local ward level;
2. The President of the SACC send a letter to all churches in South Africa to encourage them to consider participating in these ward level forms of ecumenism to serve the people in a more effective way;
3. National Church leaders in various provinces be encouraged to facilitate meetings of leaders within the provinces together with the Provincial Councils of Churches (where they exist) to establish such forms of ecumenism;

4. The Clergy with particular wards be encouraged to take the initiative to establish such local forms of ecumenism. One of the areas of focus will be on bringing together all the ministers' fraternals/fellowships and associations which exist in many townships to work together to establish these forms of local level ecumenical expressions; and
5. These ministers' associations are organised into provincial and national structures for effective coordination in terms of the ministries they carry out together.

The strategy is to ensure that all the programmes the SACC has agreed on together with the National Church Leaders in the form of the 'South Africa We Pray For' are executed at the local levels. As we said earlier, these will include acts of healing and reconciliation; poverty eradication programmes; family fabric; transformation of the economy; and anchoring of democracy.

This call really is a call for us to be prophetic, as Archbishop Hurley was by breaking out of the current traditional forms of ecumenism and take a step into the future of the unknown. We must pray that God give us eyes that can see beyond what our entrapments do not allow us to see. We need the courage to move from our positions of comfort to new experiences and spaces where God would like us to be.

The place where God wants us to be is beyond where we are. It is ahead of us. And, we will only appreciate it if we went through our own 'Damascus experience – be transformed to be able "to play a transformative role enabling people to take responsibility for their lives and to promote prophetic action on social Justice' matters that affect our society as per Diakonia's mission statement.

I THANK YOU.