

KAIROS SA THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CENTENARY OF THE ANC

A WORD TO THE ANC, IN THESE TIMES

We, fellow South Africans and Christian theologians, now wish to pass these words on to the African National Congress, as it prepares to celebrate its centenary during 2012.

We do so in a spirit of appreciation and gratitude for you and in a spirit of true friendship, where we can both congratulate you and raise some concerns as friends, and pray that these celebrations will be appropriate and not lavish, especially given the levels of poverty and inequality in our country. We do so, knowing that many members of the ANC are also part of the Christian community, and **this document is therefore written for our collective reflection.**

We also do so, knowing that many Christian leaders were involved in the formation and nurturing of the ANC over the years, and we therefore continue to feel a sense of responsibility for its existence and what it does. In 1912, the founders of the African National Congress dreamed of a different future for all the people of South Africa, where there would be no more coloniser and colonised, but where we would all be one: **One people, one nation, one country!**

Although there has been much progress in this regard, certain tensions and contradictions continue to militate against us fully achieving this dream. The effect of the 1913 Land Act, is largely still with us; the economic disparities are stuck with us; deep levels of poverty are staring at us.

We appreciate the fact that 17 years is not enough to reverse the legacies of almost 350 years of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. We are convinced that more could have been done, but we appreciate that much has been done to begin to reverse the historical legacies of this country.

We also appreciate that the ANC is the only party which has consistently insisted on non-racialism and unity in South Africa for most of its existence. Both of these are constantly under threat, from within the ANC and from without, and we would ask that you hold on to these values and renew your commitment to these values not only in words, but in practical action, so that our children and grandchildren can see this and follow this example.

We now spell out the following concerns for our country and for the ANC. These are our observations based on our discernment and what we have seen happening over the last 17 years.

1. **Factionalism within the ANC:** As the ANC prepares for its Mangaung conference in 2012, we see the continued factionalism and possibility that delegates will once again be asked to vote for one of two or three "slates". Such factionalism is often the direct outcome of a weak conception of participatory democracy in our political parties. Of concern to us is that disunity and factionalism in the ANC affects leadership, governance and service delivery, especially to the poorest communities. Moreover, quite often these internal battles are fought in the open in rather disrespectful even shameful ways and are often accompanied by violence, putting lives and livelihood of innocent people at risk. We are therefore also concerned that violence and threats of violence becomes a means for settling internal and national political disputes. Our message to the ANC in this regard is simple: **"A house divided against itself cannot stand." (Matthew 12:25)** All attempts must be made to avoid factionalism and this stand must be communicated from the top leadership to all the branches of the ANC. We will urge church leaders to communicate this message of unity through the church communication channels as well. We do not think that such divisions are in the best interest of the future of South Africa. This contestation for power seems to be able to serve self, sectarian interests or factions, not for the purposes of serving the people (particularly the poor).
2. **Our second concern is that to find the best possible route, maintaining our unity despite our diversity, towards economic justice and together closing the gap between the richest and the poorest in South Africa.** We recognise the temptation of some to hold

onto their economic privilege, and ask that a national dialogue about this matter be held as soon possible. We have started some initiatives in this regard, where we will urge those who have “said sorry” and who have begun to implement some initiatives to give effect to this, to also begin to “do sorry”, but to do so as a national project together with all South Africans who have much more than they need. The aim of this will be to contribute more significantly to closing the gap between the rich and the poor in South Africa, and to do so not merely as individuals, but together.

3. **Our third concern relates to the security and intelligence forces and the maintenance of a proper order and structure within these forces and the link between this (or the lack of this) and the increase of criminality:** For us, this is one of our biggest concerns at the moment. What has happened in various other countries (where the intelligence and security forces are manipulated for the benefit of a faction in society) is not what we want to see happening in South Africa. Politicising security forces is a recipe for instability, violence and conflicts between opposing forces within one State.
4. **Corruption:** The “arms deal” seems to have been the new South Africa’s “original sin” and we are happy that this is now getting the attention it deserves. It diverted our attention, our energy, our time and our resources away from focussing on the poorest of the poor. Corruption negatively impacts on the psyche and morality of our people, particularly that of the youth (who now believe that this was the only way to make quick money without much effort). Corruption seems to have now spread into party political activities where corrupt means of campaigning/contestation for power (votes, support, etc.) are used, thus compromising the leadership before they even go into government. How political parties are funded is also a concern that we have, and we urge greater transparency in this regard lest we discover that things happened in our elections that the general population would not have approved of.
5. **Maintaining a real social cohesion in the country:** The strong leadership given by President Mandela towards building social cohesion in South Africa must continue. We thank God for his example, and call on all the leaders of the ANC to continue in his footsteps, not only for ourselves but also to serve as an example for and to honour expectations expressed towards us by the rest of Africa and for communities across the world.
6. **The unsustainability of an opulent “American dream” lifestyle:** this is sometimes popularised in South Africa and becomes our nightmare, since to reach this so-called dream, often means self-enrichment and quick enrichment at the expense of the poorest and at the expense of the ecology. South Africa’s recent hosting of COP17, on the eve of these centenary celebrations, must spur us to a decisive position and culture in this regard.
7. **The relatively poor standards of education for the vast majority of the poor in our land:** Relevant and effective education is required for intellectual and industrial productivity in a competitive world; as Nelson Mandela has said: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
8. **Making solidarity with the oppressed across the world a key to our international relations:** People across the world, especially those in Africa as well as the Palestinian people, look to us for strong support. We come from a history where we called on the world to promote sanctions against an unjust regime and we call on the ANC to continue with this legacy to ensure that justice for people rather than trade become our first priority.
9. **Respecting the constitution of the Republic:** Our constitution is hailed as one of the best in the world and is constantly being interpreted by our Constitutional court. A healthy democracy needs checks and balances, and even though this may be frustrating for you at times, we ask that the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Constitutional court and the decisions emanating from it, be held in the highest regard by us all.

We urge for more direct communication between the Church leaders and the ANC government to resolve whatever tensions there may be and to develop a common understanding of the relationship between church and state. We will also have to advise churches to be careful in promoting or opposing any particular political party, including the ANC.

There is a worrying trend within the ANC to co-opt and promote Church leaders who clearly do not have a liberatory perspective (but who might be involved in charity or development or be willing to uncritically bless the ANC). We simply want to hold this up to the ANC as a mirror and ask it to reflect on this matter, in its own interest and in the interest of the best values and morals as we move forward to build South Africa.

Earlier this year we were profoundly disappointed with the actions of the ANC government which led to the Dalai Lama not visiting the country in response to an invitation from Archbishop-emeritus Tutu. What happened here is an example of choosing Mammon above God. We feel that a national debate about this should be held. We will encourage this debate within civil society and hope that the ANC will take note of the outcomes of this debate. We do not wish for the ANC to be “like all governments” across the world: we call the ANC to higher standards, those standards which will make us as citizens proud of it, otherwise we will not be able to justify any support for the ANC.

Kairos SA is clear that, at least in the South African context, we will focus over the next ten years on **closing the gap between the richest and the poorest in South Africa**, by attempting to empower both. Both the rich and the poor must not think that it is about disempowering the rich in order to empower the poor and neither is it simply about charity from the rich towards the poor, while leaving the poor disempowered. A key component of this will be to work for the eradication of corruption that undermines our hard earned democracy.

The poor in our midst have begun to lose patience at their entrapment in the cycle of poverty and our inability to assist them to be lifted out of this. No amount of memory of past struggles will lift the poor out of poverty.

The worship of Mammon (money) is one of the key signs of our times, for all people everywhere on this planet, and we need to take a strong stand against this in our country if we want to ensure our future together.

Our prayer today is that despite all its present problems the ANC will continue to inspire hope by learning from the past and by taking decisive action during this centenary year to begin to eradicate corruption, factionalism, selfish individualism, power struggles, ill discipline and most of all the scandalous neglect of the poor.

May God bless all in the ANC who are genuinely trying to do this.

* This is an extract from a document prepared for the ANC centenary by Kairos Southern Africa. For the full version and the current signatories please see www.kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com