

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN  
NATIONAL CONGRESS (SOUTH AFRICA),  
O. R. TAMBO AT THE WORLD CONSULTATION OF THE  
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, HOLLAND -  
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We have been asked to contribute to the process of consultation on how the churches should be involved in the struggle to combat racism in the 1980's. Of necessity we have to approach this subject both in a spirit of humility given the size and importance of the world Christian community as well as a spirit of frankness in recognition of the urgency of the need to abolish racism in all its forms.

Our own historical origins and our continued commitment to liberate ourselves make it inevitable that in the main we shall speak on the basis of the Christian experience in our country. We believe however that this experience is universal rather than national. Our words are therefore directed at the world community rather than the local.

In its extreme forms, racism is an institutionalised system of inequality between people who differ in genetic origin, skin colour and other inherited physical traits. Generally, it is a system of discrimination against black and brown people that came about when the countries of Western Europe invaded America, Asia, and Africa, conquered the indigenous populations, and enslaved some. As it affects the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas, racism therefore presents itself as a by-product of colonialism, an integral part of the process that led to the domination by European peoples of the rest of mankind.

Racism is thus not an autonomous social phenomenon. It is a product, a component part and a reflection of exploitative social relations, a form of expression of these relations and a means for their justification and perpetuation. It encompasses actual structural relations between people as well as psychological attitudes which pretend to explain these structural relations.

Therefore it would be logical to conclude that the struggle to combat racism must aim fundamentally at the elimination of all exploitative social system and at the eradication of racial prejudice. But, does this mean that the call for a struggle against racism constitutes a false perspective?

Our own national experience of racism leads us to answer this question in the negative, to affirm the necessity and urgency of the struggle against racism. Apartheid in South Africa illustrates the point clearly that racism as a system of structural relations among people and as an ideology has developed historically to the point where it has acquired its own internal dynamics which give it its own self-perpetuating existence.

The fact however remains that whenever it occurs, racism serves to justify exploitative social relations and is nurtured and entrenched by these relations. Therefore while it is perfectly justified and correct to speak of and wage a struggle against racism, it is also important at all times to seek a deeper understanding of this anti-human phenomenon the better to be able to remove its root causes rather than focus solely and exclusively on the effects.

Racism in South Africa is also a product of the colonisation of our people by European powers. In all the phases of its development, from the settlement of our country by Dutch mercantile interests, through the stage of direct British colonial rule to the post-1910 period of administration of our country by a white settler minority, racism has served three principal purposes.

The first was to justify the seizure of our country, our land and wealth by the colonisers. The second was to establish the basis for the transformation of the dispossessed millions of our people into instruments of labour for the enrichment of the colonisers. The third was to legitimise the exclusive concentration of political power in the hands of the colonial and settler oligarchy.

The system has allowed of no overlapping between the coloniser and the colonised. The owners of wealth, the exploiters of our labour and the governors of our country are drawn exclusively from among the colonisers. The colonised constitute the masses of the impoverished, the exploited and the voiceless. The colonisers are of course white and the colonised, black. This system is unique in world politics in the clarity and rigour of its racist demarcations, its pursuit as consistent and deliberate state policy and the brutality of both the conception, its implementation and results.

From the earliest days to date successive colonial and settler regimes have pursued as a principal objective of state policy the defence, entrenchment and extension of this racist and colonial system. Any changes that have taken place in it have been those in the direction of its further refinement to improve its effectiveness for the further promotion of white minority interests. The changes so loudly proclaimed by the Botha regime today also pursue this objective.

While the World Council of Churches and the rest of the world anti-apartheid movement must of necessity continue to respond to the new brutalities committed by this regime, we believe it would be wrong for us to start looking for "qualitatively new features" of apartheid in the 1980's with the aim of directing all or most of our attention at combating those features. The principal aim must remain still that of the destruction of the system as a whole.

We are convinced that the churches at home and abroad have an important role to play in the accomplishment of this aim. It is however common cause that in the period of imperialist expansion the church accepted as legitimate the concept of a civilising mission and for that reason justified the imposition of white colonial domination over many peoples throughout the world, including South Africa.

What was arrogantly described as a civilising mission in South Africa was in fact the genocidal destruction of the Khoi and the San people, the land expropriation of the rest of the indigenous people, the obliteration of their culture in all its forms, the application of a consistent policy for the impoverishment of the black people and their transformation into labour units for the enrichment of the coloniser and the political domination of the majority by a white settler minority.

It is this brutal reality of colonialism and racism which the Christian church in South Africa and the metropolitan countries accepted as a civilising mission. Pursuing its purely evangelical mission, the Christian church continued to hold out the promise of the good life to the poor, the suffering and the despised, but only after death. By refusing by and large to do anything about the life of these poor masses before death, it got itself further involved in what looked increasingly like a conspiracy to convince our people to bear their earthly tribulations patiently and submissively in the hope of a better future in the world to come.

In the midst of the great upheavals that the process of colonisation brought about, with centuries - old social system destroyed overnight, it was inevitable that many of our people would reach out towards whatever seemed to offer them peace, stability and human fulfilment in the new conditions. Of all the institutions that came with colonial rule, the Christian church seemed the only one that offered peace, stability and human fulfilment. Our people in good numbers therefore placed their faith in the Christian church.

From this moment onwards and again almost inevitably, the history of the Christian church in South Africa is the history of a faith betrayed. We say almost inevitably because the church continuously refused to recognise the fact that the fulfilment of its black congregation lay in their liberation both from colonial domination and from what the church describes as sin.

While denouncing as sinful the covetting of their white neighbour's possessions by the black people, the church did not condemn as sinful the reduction of the black by the white into homeless and propertyless beggars. While issuing injunctions of forbearance to the black, urging them to eschew violence, it avoided condemning colonial state violence against the black people.

Many Christians among our people accept the meaning in its literal and direct sense that God made man in his image and gave him dominion over the earth. From the standpoint of these Christians, it must be obvious that the first and decisive task of a christian and all ecclesiastic organisations, such as the church, whose *raison d'être* is the defence and propagation of God's purposes, as reflected in the Bible, must be the accomplishment of this equal dominion of all men over the earth.

Looked at from this Christian perspective, colonialism and racism must surely be seen as seeking exactly to remove the colonised and discriminated against from the exalted throne on which God placed the whole human race at the very beginning of creation.

Colonialism and racism in South Africa as expressed in the apartheid system have placed in dominion both over nature and the black masses a white minority which claims it to be its divine mission to exercise this dominion over the black majority. Thereby not only does this white minority deny the universal validity of the thesis that "all men were created equal" more fundamentally, by appropriating to itself the right to subdue and by actually subduing the black people, the white minority in South Africa appoints itself to a station in the universe higher than that of God Himself, and transforms the Creator into a handmaiden for the fulfilment of its own diabolical aspirations.

For apartheid is truly diabolical, embracing as it does all systems of inequality - discrimination against all black people on ground of race, denial of our right to self determination, and our subjection to harsh and excessive forms of economic domination and exploitation - system of inequality which are consciously and systematically maintained and reinforced, aimed at ensuring that the whites do in fact multiply and fill the earth on the basis of

The more the church avoided placing on its agenda the uprooting of this system as an inalienable component part of its divine mission, the more justified the conclusion seemed that the Christian church was ineluctably doomed to betray the very faith which it professed.

To their credit, there were a few among the Christian leadership in South Africa who refused to take this path. These are men and women who read in the Scriptures a clear message that it was impermissible that he who had been made in the image of God should be debased and enslaved.

It is part of the proud history of the African National Congress that among its founders and early leaders are to be found such true Christians as:

- Rev. John Mube, first President of the ANC, minister of the CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
- S.M. Makgatho, second President of the ANC, METHODIST leader and lay preacher,
- Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, third President of the ANC, minister of the METHODIST church and president of the INTERDENOMINATIONAL AFRICAN MINISTERS FEDERATION, (Today known as IDAMASA),
- Rev. W.B. Rubusana, one of the four original vice-presidents of the ANC, co-translator of the Xhosa Bible and Vice-Chairman of the CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Finding it impermissible in the context of their Christian beliefs that he who had been created in the image of God should be debased and enslaved, these men and women and others of their time and since, saw clearly that their own efforts to secure human fulfilment and salvation lay also in their personal involvement in the struggle for liberation.

As early as 1906, one of the predecessors of the ANC, the South African Native Congress passed a resolution which, inter alia, said:

"Congress believes that Ethiopianism (the African independent church movement) is a symptom of progress, brought about by the contact of the natives of Africa with European civilisation making itself felt in all departments of the social, religious and economic structure".

It is therefore little wonder that among the leaders of the African National Congress and its official chaplains are to be found the leaders of this "Ethiopian" movement. For this movement represented not only a struggle for equality within the Church, but more significantly a struggle to reorientate the Christian Church as a whole such that by espousing the anti-colonial and democratic aspirations of the majority of the people, the church would once more bear true witness to the greatness of man.

It is a measure of the profundity of the damage that the church brought upon itself during the process of the colonisation of our country that even today we still have to make the same point that was made by our predecessors 75 years ago that Christianity must inevitably concern itself with progress "in all departments of the social, religious and economic structure."

Yet another organisation that preceded and laid the foundations for the formation of the African National Congress, Imbumba yama Afrika formed in 1882, drew attention to another issue which remains with us to this day. To quote one of its founders writing in 1883:

"Anyone looking at things as they are, could even go so far as to say it was a great mistake to bring so many church denominations to the Black people. For the black man makes the fatal mistake of thinking that if he is an Anglican, he has nothing to do with anything suggested by a Wesleyan, and the Wesleyan also thinks so, and so does the Presbyterian. Imbumba must make sure that all these three are

represented at the (forthcoming)  
 conference ..... In fighting for  
 national rights we must fight  
 together." (S. Mvambo in Karis/Carter :  
 "From Protest to Challenge, Vol. 1 p. 12)

The question that was raised then and which we raise today, is the necessity of the unity of the Christian community in the struggle against colonialism and racism. Looked at from a different dimension this constitutes a call for the practical recognition of the ecumenism of the Holy Scriptures as opposed to their separate, denominational interpretation.

Given our historical experience, which has made the African National Congress play the role of virtual incubator of the ecumenical movement in our country, certainly among black Christians, it is natural that we should make this call for Christian unity in the struggle against racism. It is also natural that we should raise our voice against those within the Christian community who intentionally or otherwise are working to undermine the degree of unity achieved around the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism.

Even more disturbing is what seems to us a veritable offensive on the part of certain Western church circles to disengage the World Christian community from the struggle to combat racism; to separate and oppose one to the other, the temporal and the sacred, the material and the spiritual; to deny that the Church has a task to create such conditions that mankind can, without distinction of race or nationality, "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and subdue it".

As a people we know that this constitutes a reversion to the principles and practices of the colonial church, justifying the perpetuation of racism and inequality and resurrecting the concept of a civilising mission. This is a church which exhorts the slave to remain on his knees and on his knees to pray for the peace and prosperity of the slave master.



We are of course not surprised that it is at this moment that the principles and practices of the colonial church are being raised anew. We are not surprised because it is at this moment that it has become clear to all that real change in South Africa is both imminent and inevitable. Therefore powerful political, economic and military forces in the West feel that their interests in an African country which is central to the success of their global strategy are threatened.

These forces are naturally fully aware of the role that the Church played in the colonisation of our peoples when ministers of religion blessed the arms of the coloniser and damned the indigenous people for bearing arms to resist the rape of their country. At this moment of crisis for the apartheid regime, these Western circles hope to activate the Church to play the same role all over again -

to bless the arms of the oppressor and to damn the oppressed for bearing arms in the struggle for liberation.

These Western forces feel an even greater sense of urgency to achieve this goal given that the Church had at last begun to identify itself with those who fight for freedom and thus added enormously to the strength of the active forces of change and, as we have said, on recruiting this community to the side of reaction.

Yet the present epoch calls for a church that is closely allied with the poor and the oppressed. It demands Christians of the calibre of Camillo Torres, the heroic Colombian priest who joined the guerrilla forces of that country in struggle against the tyrannical Colombian oligarchy of the 1960's. This is a church which must exhort the slave to rise from his knees and to assert what the Bible bestows as a right "to fill the earth and subdue it".

The victories that have been scored in Southern Africa which have left Namibia and South Africa as the only countries which are as yet unliberated as well as the heightened offensive of our people within South Africa and those of Namibia, are forcing the Pretoria regime to devise new strategies for the preservation of the apartheid system. By bringing about peripheral and inconsequential changes, the Botha regime hopes to give the apartheid system a more acceptable face as

well as to delude our people and the rest of the world that the racist regime has started a process of amending this criminal system out of existence.

In other words, Botha and his henchmen want to project an illusion of change in order to ensure that the substance remains unchanged. That substance is national oppression, the super-exploitation of the black people and fascist repression to ensure that the people do not rise to regain their right to determine their political, economic and social destiny without let or hindrance.

The church that the oppressed people of our country demand is one that openly, publicly and actively fights for the political, economic and social liberation of man, as part of the world forces engaged in the process of bringing into being a new world order for those who are discriminated against, for justice, peace and social progress.

In this year 1980, the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, which contains the demands of the vast majority of the people of South Africa, it would be appropriate that the WCC adopts the Charter as its own perspective of the future South Africa which it is committed to help bring about. By this act the world Christian community would have taken an important step forward in joining hands with the world forces for genuine change in South Africa and helped to reaffirm the right of our people to determine their future.

The struggle for the realisation of the demands contained in the Freedom Charter means that the Church has to reassess its role with regard to the South African struggle. That process of reassessment must lead towards the conclusion that it is insufficient, and indeed wrong for the church to view its participation in the struggle for the eradication of racism as that of a philanthropic institution.

Our movement and our people deeply appreciate the aid given to us by the WCC for maintaining refugees and other forms of humanitarian assistance within South Africa and would like this aid to continue and increase. But we are arguing that for the WCC to stop at this form of assistance is to renege on its tasks. Indeed there is a sense

in which the continuing handing out of alms to alleviate suffering is encouragement to the recipient to acquiesce in his condition. On the other hand this gives opportunity to the alms-giver to avoid confronting and changing the fundamental situation which gives birth to the need for alms.

The Christian Church in South Africa is called upon to produce its own Camillo Torres's. It is called upon to join in with other patriots to mobilise the masses of the people, including the millions of worshippers, to engage in struggle to change the fundamental situation which has given birth to the need for alms. The Christians of South Africa have need to recall the example of a Christian liberator represented by John Dube, Sefako Makgatho, Z.R. Mahabane, M.B. Rubusana, A.J. Luthuli, Ambrose Reeves, Trevor Huddleston, D.C. Thompson and others and follow in their footsteps.

Many among the present generations of South Africa, whom it is perhaps unwise to mention by name, have already heeded this call and are to be found at home and abroad among the ranks of the political and military fighting forces of our people.

They and all of us will both feel and be stronger if we know that the rest of the world Christian community stands with us and is actively engaged in striving to accomplish the following programme in addition to what we have already mentioned:

- increased moral and material support to the African National Congress and other patriotic forces of our country, for the transfer of all power to the people;
- severance of all political, economic and cultural links with the apartheid regime of South Africa;
- ensure strict observance and enforcement of the UN Security Council arms embargo against racist South Africa;
- urge member churches of the WCC and all countries to withdraw investments from South Africa;

- encourage member churches of the WCC to contact and cooperate with one another at regional and local levels with the purpose of enhancing and strengthening the Programme to Combat Racism;
- the education and activation of every single Christian throughout the world to raise their level of personal and collective involvement in the struggle to eradicate racism;
- encouragement of the Church in South Africa to be fully involved in all aspects of the struggle against apartheid, for a democratic South Africa.

The masses of our people have risen in their millions in defiance of the brutal terror of the apartheid regime to wrest power from the racists. The young and the old, men and women, rural and urban people, believers and non-believers are waging political, military and economic battles to bring about the future which they themselves described in the Freedom Charter. Through the Free Mandela campaign they are asserting their right to decide who their leaders are and are thereby expressing the total rejection of leaders appointed for them by the oppressor.

It is these masses, the main and decisive force of genuine change in South Africa, that we are asking the WCC and the world Christian community to encourage, assist and support in all their endeavours.

Only thus can the Church be true to its professed ideals, tend to all the needs of its flock, both material and spiritual and once more claim with justification to personify the body of Christ the Liberator. When those who worship Christ shall have, in pursuit of a just peace taken up arms against those who hold the majority in subjection by force of arms, then shall it truly be said of such worshippers also;

blessed are the peacemakers for they  
shall be called the sons of God.