

QUEST FOR PEACE IN AFRICA

President Nelson Mandela

We are all too aware that peace is more than just the absence of war. The dark clouds still hovering above our landscape, particularly in Lesotho and Angola, are matters of serious concern. Thus we sought to examine how we could further co-ordinate our efforts to bring about lasting peace.

We should not, for a moment, forget the mothers and fathers, the children and grand-children who yearn for our urgent intervention to bring them more than just a respite from war. They deserve lasting peace and lasting security. Only in this way shall we deserve the accolades often heaped on us as leaders.

Weaving all the ideals of peaceful resolution of conflict, human rights and good governance together is the vexing issue of security. For, it is not merely good logic but the reality of life, that, in the end, society's freedom from hunger, ignorance and disease is, more often than not, the dividing line between war and peace. The pursuit of the collective well-being of humanity; to ensure that all persons live life to the full, is an ideal whose time has come.

Humanity is suing for a new world order, premised, above everything else on this objective. The task is daunting and the obstacles unlimited. But that quest has so captured the imaginations of peoples that it can no longer be concealed behind fancy rhetoric.

Africa deserves all these rights. Its children deserve as much of a regular diet of protein as any other. They have the right to computers and instruments of modern communications. Like children elsewhere, they are born to play with gay abandon confident about a bright future.

Certainly, colonialism and the selfish ordering of world affairs--past and present - have undermined Africa's development. And it is only just that Africa should demand her fair share of world resources; that we should challenge the untenable global division of power and wealth.

But Africa has long traversed past a mind-set that seeks to heap all blame on the past and on others. The era of renaissance we are entering, is, and should be, based on our own efforts as Africans to change Africa's conditions for the better. If Africa's children, like all other children, should shelter a light of hope in their hearts about what life can offer, then we, as their parents and leaders, deserve to be judged by the same standards as anyone else.

In this regard, we face the urgent task of deepening the culture of human rights on the continent. We are called upon to ensure that our social structures reflect the will of the people. Our approach to issues of political power should proceed from the premise that it is an expression of popular will and not a mysterious force wielded by a chosen few.

This applies to all African states. It is even more pertinent to those states which, by the sheer size of their population and the attention accorded them by world media, are seen as standard-bearers of Africa's political culture and mores.

From this flows many challenges. For instance, how do we ensure that civil society in its various forms becomes an active participant in formulation and implementation of policy! How do we, individually and collectively, utilise rationally and to maximum effect, the resources

the continent possesses! How do we eliminate the scourge of political and religious intolerance!

These, we are aware, are questions that Africa has firmly and boldly put on the agenda. Our confidence in the continent as a whole, our challenge to the malaise of Afro-pessimism that seems to grip developed countries from time to time, is that Africa is set on a course to ensure thorough-going democracy, good governance, peace and all-round security for its peoples.

We dare say to the world; recognize the historical millstone that weighs around our necks; acknowledge and assist us to deal with the depths from which we have to launch our revival; but do not judge us by lower human standards.

The continent's challenge is one that equally faces South Africa. For, behind the glitter of city lights, the halo of a relatively advanced technology and the smoothness of paved roads, lies the reality of a rate of illiteracy that is among the highest on the continent; poverty, homelessness, landlessness and malnutrition that beset millions.

As such, if we appreciate the efforts of Africa's leaders to re-order the continent's affairs for the better, it is because they underpin our own humble endeavours. We are fully conscious that our programme to build a better life for all our people will benefit from a continent and sub-continent redefining themselves, as much as it will contribute to that effort.

We can only succeed if we work together, in as much as we worked together to succeed against apartheid. And for the enormous sacrifices that Africa endured to complete her emancipation, we in South Africa shall forever be proud and grateful.

Never again shall South Africa be the fountain-head of conflict in the region and further afield. Never again shall our country be the source of armaments used to suppress communities and to wage aggressive wars against neighbours. Never again shall we spend our people's resources to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Democratic South Africa is committed to full equality in our relations with our neighbours and all other nations.

In promoting peace and preventing conflict, South Africa will work hand-in-hand with our neighbours and through multilateral forums such as the SADC and the OAU. In this regard, we welcome and are part of the OAU initiative for an early-warning mechanism and the shift from conflict-management to conflict-prevention.

However, we do recognise that while governments have an important role to play to foster a culture of peace and tolerance, it is crucial that civil society takes an active part in these efforts. It is for this reason that we appreciate the ACCORD (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes) initiative.

Perhaps we should all help develop a network of all such initiatives on the continent. Through such a continental network, we can strengthen Africa's monitoring capacity, research on how to prevent and eliminate conflict and impart the skills of mediation. This would draw on work of this kind that is already being done in many parts of Africa by research centres, universities and other institutions.

As such, the continent could develop creative and effective peace and human rights instruments, characterised by co-operation between governments and civil society.

* The original, unedited version of this article was delivered as President Mandela's acceptance speech on the occasion of the presentation of the Africa Peace Award, Durban, 18 March 1995.