

# ME Chronicle

Monday, 15 February 1999

---

## Towards trust, hope and equality

By Marina Bang

THE beating of a single Djembe drum, played by Amampondo's Mandla Lande, heralded the start of Multi Event 99 last night at the Breakwater Lodge on Cape Town's Waterfront.

In his keynote address to the 140 delegates, the Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, highlighted the precarious tension that exists in the task of nation-building; between working for good future results and meeting the immediate pent-up needs of those who have had far too little for far too long.

"We live in a world in which it is not fashionable to speak of, or for, the poor. Political parties are proud to proclaim that they speak for business, enterprise and the free market but embarrassed to speak of fairness, equity and justice for the poor," he said. "We live in a world in which money and riches are worshipped."

Ndungane said that only in faith communities – in South Africa's synagogues, mosques, temples and churches – does it seem possible to envision a different world and a different economy. He said he believes religion has a unique and significant contribution to make in the transformation of public policy.

"In order to survive we need to share a vision of society as ordained by God, and co-operate with one another towards its realisation; to search for common human values that bind us together and enable us to pursue common goals; to inculcate sound ethical and moral principles that are fundamental for a stable and healthy society; to create new partnerships of trust and hope where each individual is valued, loved, cared for and respected; to search for ways of living together respectfully, lovingly and creatively across our differences; and to bring good news to the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable."

"Religion can never be divorced from the social, economic and political realities of the world. In this respect there is a commonality between the religions of the world. Christianity makes clear that people can benefit from one another when they become partners with the living God. Judaism sees humankind as God's partner in the ongoing work of creation. Islam promotes religious witness and unity, and Hinduism, the essential oneness of humankind. Buddhism emphasises achieving higher forms of unity in a world of interdependence. Chinese spiritual traditions revere harmony as the supreme principle of nature and society," he said.

He called on all, whatever their religion, to inculcate in society a moral ethic that optimises the quality of life of everyone through the full realisation of the intrinsic dignity and worth of all human beings, responsible stewardship of God's resources and reverence for God's creation.

In closing, Ndungane told delegates that they have an opportunity to address issues faced by the broken world, to proclaim that the only economy that will work is one based on the beautiful vision of humanity which God showed through Jesus Christ.

"But it is not just a vision for the poor. It is a vision for the rich. It is a Jubilee for the powerful who need a new vision of the proper use of riches and the true value of people. Through this vision we are called to our full humanity. Only in this way will we see the emergence of communities and societies in which the worth of every person and culture is recognised, learnt from, built upon and developed.

"Our God, the God of the covenant, who remains faithful in spite of our waywardness, invites us to co-operate with Him in transforming society and making the world a better place for everyone. Only then will we ensure the creation of partnerships of trust, hope and equality, underlining our interdependence in a dynamic world."

\* \* \*

In his keynote address Jakes Gerwel, director general in the office of the president, (speaking in his individual capacity) commended Multi Event 99 organisers for their initiative to create dialogue between the government and those sectors that are outside of immediate government control, attention or responsibility.

“A progressive government and state – concerned with justice and people’s well-being – should be alert to and give life and voice to those interstices, those social spaces in human society which are not and should not be under the direct control of the government.”

Gerwel said South Africa was blessed for having had over many decades a political-intellectual public discourse of a variety, diversity and refinedness that challenged apartheid orthodoxy. He called for that elegance and refinement of conversation to be retained and linked with the addressing of the massive poverty that is “the most insistent social reality of our time and place”.

He warned of the dangers of not achieving such a link: on the one hand the decadence of a socially and culturally unconnected intellectual conversation and, on the other, the simplistic addressing of utilitarian demands for poverty alleviation, opening society to authoritarianism at the hands of whoever feels him or herself mandated to undertake this alleviation.

“We need to construct a convention of public conversation that is both caring and open to different possibilities; that is in search of partnership and co-operation as well as being critical and combative; that entrenches civic faith in the organs and institutions of the state and establishes a culture of critical vigilance.”