

Communicating commonality

SALUTING the vision of ME99 in his opening address, South African Council of Churches president, Bishop Mvume Dandala pointed out that until 1994 there was very little shared debate on religion's role in SA. He said he would have liked to have given conference the theme 'A call to harness the spirit of our nation'.

"Material gain could surely not have been what was cherished in the struggle for democracy. The core vision was the quest for nationhood, yet South Africa has not yet reached a point where people can claim a deep sense of nationhood."

"The Deputy President's call for an African Renaissance goes beyond the tangible and calls for something spiritual. It calls for an inner African Renaissance."

He said the challenge of religion was "to keep our story alive" so that the young could learn about the milestones of the struggle. 'At a relig

ious level we should be searching for ways to claim the heroes and heroines of the struggle as our forbears who became the founders of our nationhood. We need a process that celebrates this common nationhood, a celebration of our richness of diversity which goes beyond our divisions. No effort must be spared in communicating our commonality

'An agreement that South African people will never again suffer must be etched in the collective religious consciousness by incorporating the truths of suffering into the teachings and liturgy of religious communities."

Dandala urged the religious community to aggressively find ways of helping people realise that they are human together, before ethnic and racial labels are attached.

'We must use the premise that the government is our government and that religious communities can treat the government as a partner, not an enemy. Religious leaders can focus on educating and training people to function in civil society and look for formal avenues of dialogue with government in order to keep policies in line with ethics. We can face challenges together.