

"Where the groaning of creation is heard"

PROBABLY one of the most vibrant and moving voices of the conference was that of Welekazi Sokutu speaking on behalf of community-based organisations.

Speaking as a "voice from the periphery of country", she described grassroots people as the foundation on which our democracy is built. "When we work for justice," she said "the base is broad and strong, but when we are apathetic the base becomes weak.

"It is our religion that makes us significant, religion found not only in church buildings but propelled into the public space as an agent of transformation. Our faith conviction is that we have a responsibility to others. Our faith and values drive us to be involved in transformation by mobilising our energy and resources into establishing organisations to alleviate some of the ills of the country - crime, violence, Aids, environmental disasters, unemployment and poverty.

"Can it still be said that religion is only a private matter? Can we afford to keep religion on the periphery of public debates? Because our socio-economic positions influence our interpretation of faith, the position of our community groups is likely to differ from those in leadership. Yet our position is valuable because it is at the grassroots that the groaning of creation is likely to be heard.

"These religious people have a vital contribution to make. As Margaret Mead said: 'never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'"