

## A new beginning

IN his closing address for the Multi-Event 99, Jose Chipenda, general secretary of the All Africa Council of Churches, quoted Desmond Tutu as saying that Angola's problems would never be solved as long as Christians were excluded from the realm of power.

'Angola's lot has begun to improve with the liberation of South Africa and the independence of Namibia. What is happening in Angola shows evidence of the power of God.'

Chipenda called for the coming together of moral leadership, political life and cultural values for the upliftment of Africa. "Culture," he said "reminds us of our past and makes us proud of it. It is the lense through which we see the past. It tells us that people are not problems to be solved but mysteries to be explored. They are not vacuums to be filled but riches to discover. Through the projection of our love on others we can promote mutual respect.

"This one-dimensional borderless world is a problem for those who think culture can equip us for the future. How do we protect ourselves from unwanted guests, undesirable products and strange lifestyles crossing our borders? How do we defend the integrity of our nations and the value systems we've inherited?"

'A new beginning is called for. According to Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything. In Angola we need to do what has been done at ME99 but for now we must concentrate on working for peace. Angola is a precious golden jar whose scattered pieces must be united. For Angola to come together again we need to: (1) create a friendly atmosphere; (2) participate in clarifying our perceptions and getting to know one another; (3) learn to analyse the source of conflict; (4) to develop positive power; (5) create a common vision for what Angola should be; and (6) work for a common future. These are important if we are to live in peace and participate in the development of southern Africa. We have already begun this process among those who rule and those who are ruled, and the Church has been invited to participate.'

## The second revolution

THE DESTITUTE, the vulnerable and the powerless often feel the brutal effects of those who claim to provide moral leadership and who talk glibly about the voiceless, when they themselves have not experienced disempowerment. This was according to Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Yasmin Sooka in her response to Chipenda.

"The constitution provides us with one of the most powerful tools of democracy yet in its wake have come poverty, homelessness and violence.

'There is a natural tension between the government and religious leaders, both of whom feel they have earned the right to speak, the former because of a political mandate, the latter from the background of their religious tradition. Religious leaders feel they have earned the right to be consulted by government and the government plays lip service to this.'

Sooka asked where the prophetic voice of the religious community is. "Our society is a quilt of wonderful diversity which we need to embrace."

"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission process provided the valuable opportunity for us to examine ourselves, to ask whether we could've done better or more. Did we bear witness to the

morality that we claimed? The TRC tells the story of the suffering of our people over 30 years. It shows that the true legacy of apartheid is economic injustice and deprivation."

Sooka said we need to examine the existing programmes that we run to see if they're still relevant. "We need to give up some of our riches, our endowment. We have to share."

"I have been saddened that I've not heard any objection - either from religious communities, non-governmental organisations or community-based organisations - to the decision not to grant individual reparation to victims identified by the TRC.

"Will we have the courage to speak out against wrong. We must be vigilant that we do not just become the voice of government. What is our prophetic role? What can we do positively to contribute to the second revolution, that of the economic redistribution of resources. The time is now."

## The strength of diversity

COMPLEXITY, historical consciousness and roots, and values in the public sphere were the three points highlighted by Professor Bernard Lategan of the University of Stellenbosch in his response to Chipenda.

He said the complexity arose from the need to both reintegrate South Africa into the global community, as well as to reintegrate the torn-apart society within the country "Though we have lost our first naivete, we need to develop a second so that we can operate on faith and basic values."

Lategan said there was a need for an individual and collective history of consciousness. remembering that a search for roots can be both enslaving and liberating. "We need to use our historical consciousness in creative, liberating ways to shape society. We must find in our past, ways to include those who were excluded.

"Chipenda formulated explicitly that breaking of frontiers will cause us to be flushed with all sorts of values. There may be the tendency to withdraw to the safety of the support of a believing community We need to have an attitude of immunity and courage. Chipenda's six-point plan was not articulated in an exclusive sense but in an inclusive sense. Each religious community can contribute from their experience.

"Our conflict is not based on values but in the way they are articulated, strived for and satisfied. We need to expose stereotypes and diffuse them. People can support common goals without renouncing their own background.

"The challenge is to rethink our understanding of diversity, which is not a problem but a source of strength."