

Belydende Kring. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 18 November 1999. [disclaimer](#)

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DR MOKWEBO: Chairperson, together with me is the Executive of the Belydende Kring. On my immediate left is our chairperson, Dr Henry Thyse, and next to him is our Vice-Chairperson, Mrs Julia Tladi and also a member of our movement, Dominee Kwaho, who is also a member of this delegation this afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Are they all going to testify?

DR MOKWEBO: No, I'm going to be the one who makes the submission, but they can all speak in answering questions.

CHAIRPERSON: Well, then you are all going to testify. Will you please stand and Bongani Finca will administer the oath or affirmation.

ADMINISTERS OATH.

CHAIRPERSON: I do want to express our appreciation to you for accepting our invitation and we know the contribution that you have made in the time of the struggle and in sharpening people's perceptions and insights, theological insights but also thank you very much for your graciousness in agreeing to come in at the end of the day, tired, when you were expecting to be called tomorrow. Thank you very much. Over to you.

DR MOKWEBO: Chairperson, we appreciate as the Blydende Kring, to have this opportunity to make this submission, even so late and we are not in uniform. We appreciate the possibility and opportunity afforded us to make the submission. We are going to try to on the one hand, speak to our submission by highlighting some areas which we feel need to be highlighted, maybe others we will not be able to elaborately go into as a result of the fact that you have a our faxed submission before you.

The Belydende Kring was formerly called the Broeder Kring and established in 1974 in Bloemfontein in Mangaung. An organisation that worked primarily and exclusively targeting the Dutch Reformed Church family which was consisting of the four racially divided churches: the NG Kerk which was formerly for whites only; the NG Sending Kerk, which was established for coloureds only; the NG Kerk in Afrika, which was for Indians; and the Reformed Church in Afrika, which was for Indians. An organisation ...[inaudible] from within all the racially divided churches who had experienced that these churches were based on a biblical, astrological justification of apartheid as the will of God for South Africa, propounded by the NG Kerk which was called the Moeder Kerk and others were called the daughter churches. These individuals were critical of that system. They spoke out – remember the days of Dr Alan Boesak who was also a member and some point the chairperson of our

organisation, and many others who spoke out very clearly opposing that system, outside the churches, but also inside the churches, went to meetings with the NG Kerk and all our churches, spoke to the grassroots in the churches, had meetings with women's organisations to try to indicate that this situation which we found ourselves in wherein we were experiencing also suspicion from our communities by being called the church of Amabulu. There is still that kind of hostile attitude and we had to indicate that we are not the church of Amabulu, secondly that the white church, NG Church is not speaking for us.

That is why we build our church buildings, our resources in both our skills and also our buildings to make sure that we rebut apartheid theology, as was manifest in the mission theology that led to the establishment of all these churches. The experience of most of our members was also that the black churches, other churches, were also held hostage psychologically and financially by the "Moeder Kerk" so that for those critical in both the white church and the other churches, the experience of being left vulnerable and exposed to the activity of security force officials, some of whom came from ranks of elders in the NG Kerk. Some of the experiences made by members of the BK because of this kind of stance included among other things, as we have said, being ostracised by both the church and the people. In the NG Kerk, you were called a traitor because you were betraying the Volk. People like Beyers Naude. Remember a person like Reverend Conradie who died under mysterious circumstances and we hope the commission will help us unravel the way that he passed away. But he was seen increasingly, also by his family, as somebody betraying the Afrikaner Volk by having been a member of a black church or organisation.

And those in the these churches were seen as bringing suffering by being a member, that's most critical, against apartheid. In this situation, Chairperson, the BK provided a haven where people who were suffering because of their stand, found a home. And we built a very wonderful community of people across the divide of racial lines who began trusting each other, supporting each other both financially and in a human way. We went to families and we've got families and people with whom we are in communion because we believe that the unity struggle which we waged should also ...[inaudible] and the pains of becoming one should such be experienced by us if we have to preach it out and live it out.

Therefore we faced ostracism from the official churches, both daughter and mother church. Some of our members experienced society cutbacks from such ministers and this led to the division of congregations and division of parishes to exert pressure and create a climate where such ministers would be ousted out by the congregation for being either political, highly suspect or undesirable in both the church and society. Our churches were planted with informers when we were preaching to make sure that such ministers or lay-members who were preaching also in our churches, would be highly suspect and being not accepted within the congregations. Yes some of us faced harassment, physical and psychological torture, intimidation, imprisonment of such people who were critical of the system in the churches. And the sad thing was that the society had believed in the membership of our churches. Critical thinking was dangerous and that to be Christian means to be submissive and obedient and quiet. A sad fact is that we have also division, which meant that some ministers were also

allowed to participate for instance in the public media. Some NG Kerk and Afrikaans ministers were allowed to preach on the radio. Others were not allowed because we were critical and there were structures in church to make sure that this doesn't happen. And there were many of our brothers and sisters who were in these structures and this division with a lot of suspicion and lack of acceptance, to make sure that this theology propounded by the NG Kerk be maintained also in the church and also by our church. Radio sermons and programmes on anti-communism were propounded from these groups, also within our church and those people who were not saying this were left out and branded as being communist and therefore to be fought against and be highly suspected. The integrity and credibility of critical persons, as I say, was highly suspect, seen to be dangerous, as communist. Especially by some missionary elements who belonged to the Broederbond.

Chairperson, we need to pause here to plead with the commission, because this strange marriage between the Broederbond and the NG Kerk needs to be also opened up. I am saying this because in one of the meetings in Bloemfontein in 1993, the late Professor Heyns mentioned in the meeting that had it not been for the Broederbond, the question of the new dispensation, the question of the liberation of our struggle would not have seen the kind of dimensions which are happening. Therefore we plead that the full truth about what happened, and why, would be disclosed. The commission to look into the questions of finding the way of the Broederbond and its members in this time. Opening it up and telling us what happened.

As far as missionaries and mission theology was concerned, in the experience of many in our constituencies, these missionaries represented the NG Kerk theology launching pads and strongholds, both within the life and work of church and theological training of our churches. We need to say this, Chairperson, because many mission stations were used as operation points for the military, for planning, for meetings of the generals of the SADF. We have many stories about this that can be told, Chairperson, and it would be very interesting if we can find a way of opening up this point and have it be known by our community in South Africa. The mission theology also represented economic impoverishment of the black churches, because whilst much funding was given in the names of missions, it only ended up in the pockets of the missionaries. Some even had inconvenience allowances for serving in the black institutions. This also was one of the things which we as members of the BK experienced from our own churches. Because whilst our churches made very relevant and critical decisions, it was also being held hostage by the theological and financial grip of the NG Kerk. Many of them would not implement those decisions. We have heard here about how churches pride themselves in terms of making good decisions, but not turned them out complementing them. We took it upon ourselves as members of the churches and organisations to try out and implement some of these decisions and therefore our goals include, among other things Chairperson, to organise for an organic church unity starting from the grassroots in congregations up to the whole structure of a church to that level. To embark on a priestly ministry to the victims of apartheid. Many of our people who were victims in this whole structure – we had to have prayer meetings, visit them, support their families, during this time

to make sure that they don't feel left alone and vulnerable to the activities of the police, as in many cases it happened. To pledge solidarity with all organisations who share the same visions and goal with us. That's why we became members of so many organisations. The SACC, the SAT, Abreksa, Christian Institution – precisely because of our commitment of the fact that we felt by doing that we would be able to give form and programmes and participation in solidarity to our goals.

We also had some problems, specifically to address this situation, Chairperson. We had a fund which we called the ...[inaudible] Support Fund, out of which we helped families and ministers who salaries were cut by the NG Kerk because of their stance. Our issue was not simply just to help them, but to support the kind of witness we stood for as ministers, as lay people in these congregations. This fund was transferred to the new United Church, before we became one. As one of the programmes that was needed to assist the church that in its unification, they must be able to address the question of poverty and the poor congregations and try to break the dependant umbilical cord on the white NG Kerk. We also had a programme to empower women, which is called the BK Women's Programme, through which the question of gender was discussed and in any way, that's how we changed the name from Broeder Kring to Belydende Kring, because in 1983 in Free Town in Johannesburg, the women constituents of our membership challenged us so critically about the sensitivity about women's issues to a point when we even felt that even the name that we carry, we could not continue to be Broeders. But we were also being confused with the Broederbond, and that was used against us as being people who are not honest in terms of secrecy, having secret meetings and so on. So we had to change our name from being Broeder Kring to Belydende Kring. We also had a scholarship and bursary programme. On this one, Chairperson, I would say that our experience has been that as a black church and other churches, with all the amount of money that was used for our training, for the past – since 1908 – until 1980 or 1988, we never saw any production of meaningful leadership in our churches, through the assistance of the white churches. But when we started this whole scholarship programme, we were able to produce more than 20 people with PHD's who have leadership and skills for our churches. Unfortunately some of them were not accepted by our churches, because they were regarded as having been trained abroad in America and imbibed the spirit of freedom and liberation theology. But this ...[inaudible] to our church and churches and our community and most of these people are holding very important and senior positions in the life of our church and also our society.

We wish to point out, Chairperson, that we are very disappointed that the situation of the NG Kerk as a submission of this statement, according to us has not changed much. In the publication of the document "Op reis met Apartheid" does not move the NG Kerk towards the kind of confession that would facilitate church unity with forgiveness and reconciliation and enable to facilitate it. We are saying this, specifically Chairperson, because presently in the Free State and Northern Cape there is a lot of dissent, a lot of struggle between the former NG Kerk and ...[inaudible]. And this struggle to accept unity is traceable to some professors, some ministers and some farmers in the Free State of the NG Kerk who are ...[indistinct] this initiative of

unification. Victimisation of congregations continues and ministers and general chaos and destruction of congregational property still continues in this whole struggle and therefore in a certain sense, we as an organisation are still not yet over this question of being one. We are still ...[inaudible] the struggle. Where apartheid still rides in our church and our people are every Sunday, we work closely with ...[inaudible] of our church to make sure that the input and the resources that are available outside of the churches were made available also to our churches.

In conclusion Chairperson, whilst we appreciate the opportunity afforded us by the TRC to make this submission, we wish to point out the following:

The continual denial of the NG Kerk to officially make a submission to the TRC holds hostage many Afrikaner civilians trapped in apartheid. So the point that we want to make is the official denial of the NG Kerk to officially make a submission to the TRC holds many Afrikaners hostage and the TRC as a form of confession as is pregnant with controversy. Whilst also the TRC is a judicial Commission, we wish to put on record that as far as NG Kerk is concerned, it is not primarily the physical implementation of the apartheid that constituted a gross violation of human rights, but the belief system, the theology, the religion that created the conditions where many perpetrators could operate with innocence, with joy, needs to be castigated. Even where no physical injury or torture could be measured or claimed to have occurred. We wish to point out also that reconciliation in our understanding and belief is costly, because it requires justice to be done and be seen to be done. Confessions of truth done with no sense of guilt, feeling, remorse and apology, with intent not to repeat these wounds, sounds very hollow and does not seem healing to both perpetrator and victim. Indeed we look forward to the day when our ...[inaudible] will indeed be seen to be seeking for justice and justice alone to be done.

In this light therefore we wish to recommend to the TRC that most of our members have suffered humiliation and - when they visited funerals and weddings of people who dying or dead in the NG Kerk and they were left out, they were cast out to sit at the back seat. We think that the NG Kerk owes an apology for this kind of treatment even to our members and also members of our communities in the Black Dutch Reformed Church. The TRC...NG Kerk confesses to having created a climate and conditions that made it possible for people to do the heinous deeds they did without any due regard for a life of the victims they victimised. And in conclusion Chairperson, that the TRC recommends that the present process of Land Reform and Restitution and Reparation, those are critically focused on the NG Kerk with possible intentions of symbolically compensating many families of ministers and lay people who have been victimised in terms of salaries and pensions as a result of NG Kerk actions as policies as we have mentioned about.

We deem it would be in the interest of the TRC process so the nation can hear some of the stories that need to be heard at some stage, if it is possible, but these stories abound of people who refused to be at the mercy of the NG Kerk for all during this time.

God Bless Africa, guide our leaders, guard our children and give us peace with justice. Thank you Chairperson.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Will you please just switch off your - .thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation and thank you for your concern about trying to note the fact that we have time constraints and again I just want to express our appreciation that you ready to come forward. Bongani Finca?

REV. B FINCA: Chairperson, I am not going to raise a question, I will use my time just to pay tribute to BK for the sterling work you did during the dark days of apartheid, which is very well documented. Your own personal sacrifices, especially yours, and many people who are members of BK, those who worked in the rural areas, outside the glare of the media and publicity. I think you challenged a number of us within the reform family.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Thomas?

MR T MANTHATA: I am sure that I am not going to sound very confident to you. I want to maintain that you have since found a common bond between yourselves and those in the Dutch Reformed Church, namely that of faith and language and that from that basis, I think you are better suited than anybody to bring about reconciliation amongst yourselves and this can even best be achieved very easily when you are likely to find or to create common projects amongst yourselves, because the primary thing that the TRC is after is so much reconciliation. Not just, you know, simple, sweet reconciliation without hackles, but hackles will be there and we accept the difficulties that you are talking about or you are referring to, but we nonetheless feel that there is this kind of a common bond between you and the Dutch Reformed Church that is of the white side, which can enable you to find a new way forward.

DR MOKWEBO: Are we supposed to comment on that? Chairperson we are not under any illusion that the question of reconciliation is a costly one. However, we are thankful about the fact that the United Reformed Church opened up the possibility at its Synod meeting in Bloemfontein this year, when they asked for the possibility of there being a TRC process in the relationships between the white church and the United Reform Church. But in that context, maybe we can meaningfully start facing each other and confronting this experience which we are going together. I am therefore not pessimistic that the possibility exists. I would, however, also caution to say that the experience which is happening in the Free State now and the Northern Cape, continues to bedevil this hope, because many of our membership are saying, "You can't trust these people. On the one hand they tell you that if you are critical, even under the new dispensation, we will withdraw your salaries, they still cut back your salaries." How can you - speaking of reconciliation experience this kind of situation? On the other - most of the problems we had to support this kind of witness which is very vital for reconciliation, has been ...[inaudible] of our churches. We are not seeing very much being done about this. They are in the hands, on the tables or in the files of our church, but we are not seeing them being actualised and implemented

and therefore it is only when our churches, especially the United Reformed Church, in our view because of our members have also agreed that they are going to now serve fully in the commissions and the lives of this newly born church, are hopeful that within this kind of situation we can make the kind of input which will create conditions where we can meaningfully enter into the kind of discussions which will make it possible that some ways can be found about creating bridges and reconciliation within the churches.

The sad thing, Chairperson, I must mention is that also we may succeed in our own experience because most of our churches were pockets within the larger problem of apartheid churches, but if you don't find churches in the coalition in the white church, who are willing to pay the price, who are willing to say we are not just critical in giving lip service to being critical, but we are willing to pay the price and sacrifice of what negotiation entails. That creates the possibility of having bridges in those contexts where we can meaningfully build bridges between us and themselves.

DR HENRY THYSSE: Excuse me, can I say something in Afrikaans? When I speak Afrikaans it comes from here and not from - you know.

Ek moet erken in skaamte dat ek kom uit 'n gemeenskap en uit 'n kerk familie wat legitimacyd verleen het aan 'n regering wat apartheid die lig laat sien het. Ek moet erken ek kom uit 'n gemeenskap en uit 'n kerk familie uit wat legitimacyd verleen het aan 'n drie kamer parlement sisteem. Ek moet erken dat ek kom uit 'n gemeenskap en 'n kerk familie wat 'n verontmenslikende en 'n mensondeerende, dis nou "dehumanising and humiliating" dat ons toegelaat het dat so 'n sisteem nog kon voortgaan. Ek wil net beroep doen van hierdie platvorm dat Belydende Gereformeerde Litmate nie weer moet toelaat dat ons deel he aan so 'n sisteem, dat ons die muishonde van die wereld weer moet wees nie. Ons moet 'n Suid Afrika daar stel wat vir die wereld gaan wys dit is hoe ons Ubuntu of medemenslikheid kan uitleef. Ons het dit binne ons as kinders van Afrika om dit vir die wereld te wys. En daarom voel ek dat on kan maar nie net hier kom, en selfs die NG Kerk kan nie maar net kom en se ons belei, ons is jammer dit was 'n klein voutjie, maar dat ons beslis iets daaromtrent gaan doen en dat die kerke iets daaromtrent gaan doen. En ons kan nie se ons is jammer nie en se nou moet ons maar wegspring en die een, en ons word verwag om almal saam weg te spring, terwyl die ander persoon reeds 100 meter voor ons is, en nou moet ons almal saam wegspring. Daarom sal daar erens gelykstelling moet plaasvind. Hoe dit gedoen word het baie mense voorstelle gemaak, wat die BK heelhartiglik ondersteun die afgelope twee dae. Ek wil 'n beroep doen on die NG Kerk familie, dis die vier apartheids kerke, dat hulle sigbaarheid moet verleen aan die eenheid van Kristus, nie vir mense nie, dat hulle sigbaarheid moet verleen aan die eenheid van Kristus, dat ons nie die volgende millennium in moet gaan as verdeelde gereformeerde belydende familie, en ek weet dat daar oorwegings is en dis nie geestelike oorwegings, dis nie godsdienstige oorwegings nie, dis ander oorwegings. 'n Mens wil amper se 'n verskuilde agenda waarom hierdie eenheid nie sigbaar is tot noe toe nie. Want ongelukkig is sommige van hierdie kerke, die NG Kerk familie sommige van ons lidmate, sommige van ons Predikante nog steeds besig om na die vleispotte

Egipte, alhoewel dit nie vleispotte is, te verlang in die hoop dat hulle die ou sisteem op 'n stadium weer in na 1999 kan voortsit. Daarom is my verlanke dat nie NG Kerk familie werklik waar alles in die stryd moet weg, om die sigbaarheid, om die eenheid van Kristus sigbaar te maak. Baie dankie.

CHAIRPERSON: Baie dankie vir u oproep en u woord, ons waardeur dit baie. Wil u ook iets gese het?

DOMINEE KWAHO: I want to appeal to the Dutch Reformed Church to take us seriously. If I say us I mean the blacks particularly of the Dutch Reformed Church family. To stop interpreting the lives they want against the lives God wants us to live. When you talk with the Dutch Reformed Church you find people who can ...[inaudible] and seemingly who are very serious confessing, but some of us who have been living with them, learned that they are good in confessing but to continue with their confession, to implement their confession is another struggle. And should you remind them of what they confessed you are seen to be a dangerous element. Die "Swart Gevaar" - you name them, they have been mentioned here.

So my appeal is, let them be faced with God, not with us. Let them be faced with God.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. We obviously hope that all of us are aware that we stand under the judgement of the cross of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ and as we said yesterday, we all are aware that we have fallen short of the glory of God and that we each must stand before this heavenly throne and be as honest as we can be and open to the movement of God's holy spirit, each in our different denominations and our different faith communities, thanking God for the grace that God has provided each one of us, and the challenge that God has issued...[TAPE ENDS] ...[inaudible] that need to be addressed, but that there are still things that we still need to do, the acknowledgement of the past and the commitment to bring about real change in the circumstances especially of those who were the victims and we have heard many wonderful things since we began yesterday and we want to give thanks to all of those who have participated and who have made themselves vulnerable in coming here and we hope that that appeals that are made will be received in the spirit in which they are made because I hope that we will all be aware that we do not come to put people in the dock, we must put ourselves in the dock. Each one of us must be ready to examine themselves and as I said yesterday, we want to confess our sins, not the sins of another and let the other be moved too, to be willing to acknowledge the wrongs that they have done and that we should be ready to repent, be ready to ask for forgiveness, ready to give forgiveness where it is required of us to do that and that we should hold hands and be ready to tackle the problems that we all are aware of in this beautiful country.

Thank you very much indeed for your participation, your contribution which we know will continue for the good of God's church, for the extension of God's kingdom and for the service of God's people. Baie dankie.



Can we just have a moment's silence before we break and then I'm asking Joyce to close with a prayer?

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