

South African Council of Churches. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 17 November 1997. [disclaimer](#)

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome and Dr Mgojo is going to be leading you, but I presume that you have a statement that you want to read.

MS B BAM: Not sir, I will speak to the statement, because it is too long.

CHAIRPERSON: Oh, you are so wonderful. Thank you very much. Yes.

MS B BAM: But I'll use the same time set that you have allocated to us.

CHAIRPERSON: Of course, of course, of course.

MS S. BAM: Thank you very much. I would like to congratulate the planners through you for putting me first to speak. I think this is a change of the tradition of the church. But I would also like to remind the committee's planners that we are told that the first human being was in Africa and originated from South Africa, and it was a black woman that brought the whole humanity to its being, so it's not surprising that I am the first person to speak. It would also like to introduce the team, sir that is going to help me to do the presentation and answer questions. On my left is Eddie MacKew, who is the director of our justice ministries, and the next is Reverend Bernard Spong, who is our veteran in media and communication and on the extreme left is Lulama Ntshingwa, who is our organising secretary for this province, the Eastern Cape. I would like to say that I stand in line of great leadership in this position I hold of outstanding people who were the general secretaries of the South African Council of Churches before me. In the name of Archbishop Bill Bernard, John Reece and you sir, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Beyers Naude and the Reverend Frank Chikane. In fact, I had hoped that all of you would be the ones doing this submission as you were part of that history, and unfortunately because of the position you are now holding as Chairman of this, you are not able to do so. But I would also like, with your permission, to pay tribute to all the members of this panel. Without exception today, all the people who are sitting on this panel have been part of the South African Council of Churches, have made a contribution as individuals and have made a contribution as members of their various organisations. I would like to recognise them and say that the very reason they are members of this panel is because they contributed to the work of the South African Council of Churches and to the ecumenical movement in general. But to say, sir, as well, there are people in this audience, many people who I cannot mention by name and I will be speaking on their behalf, because the Council of Churches consists of twenty three members churches, of which three are observer members, and all of them are represented here. And so we are part of that tradition. There are many courageous people, sir, who have contributed to this. I cannot mention all of them, but our submission gives you the detailed names of these people. But I want to mention by name people like Reverend

Calatha, Reverend Gawa, who were in this province in the early days whereas people of the church and as church leaders took the leadership of the African National Congress and people like Huddleston, Breytenbach, Desmond and many more others. I would like us to remember today, as we make this submission, our colleagues and I am sure that they will be mentioned by Bishop Michael or Victor Africanda, S. Sothetsi and Delisa Matshoba ...[inaudible].

Thank you very much sir. The SACC has been in operation for twenty seven years, but it is important for us to note that even before 1968, when it was founded, there were some activities that had taken place, and some statements that the churches had made and I think that we have indicated that in our submission and we have made reference to those specific things that have been done. I want to mention just a few, and one of them being the important ecumenical conference of ...[inaudible].

CHAIRPERSON: It may be that there are people who are wanting translation. We have wonderful people sitting over there in case you want a translation or interpretation in heavenly languages. There are different heavenly languages, depending on who is speaking them. Please, if you do have a problem, just raise your hand and they will then supply you with one of these contraptions. Thank you.

MS S BAM: I had started to say that prior to 1968 before we were founded as SACC, there were some important events, and I will simply refer to them without going into detail, because they are very important and part of our history. In 1949, at ecumenical conference at which Chief Albert Luthuli spoke and at which a call was made to a franchise vote. This was a church conference. A very important statement of 1957 by the United Church, which stood against the proposed policy to curtail inter-racial worship. The good thing was that the clause was never enacted. Then of course, the history of the [] conference of 1960 which was not a conference called by the SACC. It was called by the World Council of Churches and it is important that at that time the Dutch Reformed Church had already pulled out of the Council of Churches as early as 1940. And of course there is the history of the formation of the Christian Institute of which we were part of the organisation that gave inspiration to that. We were not responsible to it.

There have been some wonderful words of wisdom and the prophetic role remained very important to the SACC. One of the interesting facts in the development is that in fact blacks became very involved and very articulate after 1972. After the Government had decided that the SACC would be a black organisation. I think this was something that was not necessarily bad because prior to that the organisation had been led by white males which is the tradition of the church in this country. And so that enforcement of the government to make to make it a black organisation and recognise, by accident, the black leadership. This made it important because it was the blacks who themselves were part of the community which was suffering and the community that was in pain. There are very important in our history prophetic ecumenical statements that were made and I would like to just quote one of them. There are many, but I could not quote all of them. This one was made by Desmond

when he was general secretary between the years of 1978 and 1984. I quote what he said to the Minister of Law and Order of that time: "We must remind you that you are not God. You are just a man, and one day your name shall merely be a faint scribble on the pages of history. While the name of Jesus Christ the Lord of the church shall live forever."

I want to say that it is statements of that nature, of people of courage, who made this movement to be as involved as it remained, because of the burner or hope, where people never lost hope that one day there would be a change in our country. The SACC were able, they were never stopped from teaching, they were never stopped from writing resolutions. They were never stopped from meeting and having their annual conferences. And so their prophecy had a space, in spite of the repression that took place. In 1968 there was indeed a small beginning when a statement was sent out to the world and there were very positive responses. The rest of the world responded very positively. They were encouraged, less perhaps than that response at home. There were all kinds of confusing reactions from some of the South African churches at the time. But a very important project was launched in 1972 to start a project on Christianity in an apartheid society. I am delighted to see in the audience one of the persons who was part of that experience, Reverend[] I see you sitting over there. And a resolution on the Conscientious Objectors, this was a statement that came from the 1974 annual conference that was held by the SACC, and there was the wonderful idea of what they called non co-operation in the 1975. Now these, sir, might seem to be statements that were not as progressive or radical, but considering the context of that day and the repression and surveillance of the church, these were very, very important statements.

Then the declaration of Apartheid as a hierarchy, which was not a statement of the SACC. It was a statement of the World Alliance Reformed Churches in 1982. But this was very much the thinking as well as a concept that was shared by the SACC. Then there was a call to prayer at the end for the unjust rule in 1985. There was a very important statement in 1997 that came after the Lusaka Conference when many of our leaders were called to discuss with leaders from all over the world through the World Council of Churches. Then there was the controversial debate which almost really divided the churches, not only here, but also the churches abroad though they remained controversial until the very end of Apartheid. The statement by the ICT, in 1989, which also encouraged many people in the SACC to continue to work the road to Damascus. I do not remember at any time a document that was so important, not only for the churches in South Africa, but for many churches abroad, who took that document and felt that it did not only speak for our situation, but it also addressed many issues of the world, and many warnings that came through the church.

The SACC, as you know, was involved in many activities, and I will simply go through the list of these activities without discussing them in detail, as it will take a long time. I think one of the most important areas of work was in the area of justice issues. We had a division called the Justice and Reconciliation, and were concerned that the SACC and its member churches were on the removals. I hope that the same concern

would be now with the churches on the whole question of regaining land, which those people lost. The caring discipleship, the famous work of what was known as the Dependant's Conference and the thinking that went with that kind of work with people like Archbishop Ramse, who were part of that work. The legal department of the SACC, as you know did a lot of work and handled many cases, and worked with many lawyers. One of the biggest cases handled was the Delmas trial and I am glad to see that one of the panellists today was part of that experience. We also had a very important programme in the SACC, the Sanctuary Programme, where many young South Africans, were protected from the wrath of the police. Then we have the inter church aid work of the money that was going to community projects before people talked as much as they do these days about development. Already the money was made available to grassroots communities. The African Bursary fund, which functioned for exactly 26 years and thousands of South Africans, got an opportunity to go to school through that programme. The faith and mission remained a very important part of our work, because it was possible for us to do research work. There were other programmes, as you know that were important at the time. The home and family life programme, the youth programme, the women's day. I'm not going to say anything more on that. And then we had the Visitor's programme, which was important as we had to keep in touch on a regular basis with many people visiting South Africa at the time and they were not always in a position to relate to Government, so we were able to work with them. Then we had a problem of refugees, which we still do to this day because we have many people who are coming into the country who are not necessarily qualifying as refugees, and we refer to them as people who have been uprooted from their countries. Many more other activities we did on the Detainees Parents Committee. We were part of that and we were also part of the National Committee for repatriation of many South Africans who were returning to the country. In the late 90's we were also part of a group called AMSA helping the church and community to monitor elections and try and prevent violence.

Prayer and worship became an important feature because it was the only way in which people could share their pain, to pray with one another and it was through this programme that they were able to sustain the work they were doing spiritually. The programme to combat racism of the World Council of Churches was not our programme, but we got a lot of inspiration and support through that programme because many churches around the world could be informed of what was going on through us. There were many protests that the churches organised, all around the country. It was also a great boost that Archbishop Desmond Tutu as a general secretary in 1984 received the Nobel Prize. The change now occurred in the late 80's because the churches continued to negotiate with the government. Many meetings were set up with the government, but also the churches at that point became confrontational. They had to use that method because the response was very poor from the government. You might recall the famous history, which many of you in this room were part of, when you all went to parliament in February 1988, and it was the most important move that the churches of South Africa ever took. That was then followed by the "standing for the truth" campaign, where again many of you in this room participated. At that time the movement had changed and there were many

other interventions and I do want to remind many people in South Africa that the Peace Accord in fact, the midwife to the Peace Accord, was the SACC and its leaders. Finally then that programme then was taken over by the government and other agencies. Then we went through very difficult times during that time, as you are aware, as there were many difficulties that the country was facing. There was already a very hostile reaction from the government after the 1968 statement. The Eloff Commission was probably one of the hardest things that the SACC had to go through. It was good that the SACC had to go through this as it showed a response, which was positive and overwhelming for many of our donor partners. There were police raids, not only in Khotso House, but in homes of many of our staff members, our supporters, many of our church leaders. Constantly people were being detained, tortured, and as I mentioned earlier, some of the people died. Of course, the media was constantly being that they couldn't report all the things that they wanted to report. Bernard will say more on that. Then the bombing of Khotso House, which you know has been publicly owned by those who bombed Khotso House, with a hope that the work we were doing would come to an end and the poisoning of General Secretary Frank Chikane and by God's grace, Frank Chikane lived. I think this is a great story of God's power, because when he was poisoned and everything had been tried, we were informed by the doctors in the United States that Dr Frank Chikane would not live, because they had been unable to really diagnose him. At that point, we were lucky that Bishop Tutu was able to get some of the Bishops from the United States and the Anglicans to go to Frank, and he received his last rights from the Anglicans. I think this is quite an ecumenical experience for him, and I think that's why Frank lived. Needless to report, we had difficulties to get Archbishop Tutu from his retreat, to ask him to do the job. There was an interesting thing that they did once. St Barnabus College, some of you might recall that the police had an idea of spraying a chemical so that those people who were coming to the National Conference would all be affected by that chemical. I don't know how many people in this room remember that. What I do remember, in spite of that chemical, is that Buti Thlagale had to preach that night, and he survived the chemical, as many of us did.

There are many things that we did, sir, it is a long history, which we hope to write. I want to go on some of the things that were important and the kind of impact that I think [SIDE 2] country where many, many of our staff persons, many clergy, many lay people went and were very close with the families, and were counselling these families and giving them all kinds of support. But there was also the constant challenge which was important, that the churches of South Africa all the time had to reflect and to retreat, and really begin to coin a kind of theology that was emerging from the kind of work they were doing. The greatest challenge and weakness perhaps of the SACC was the SACC tended to be always reacting to the government, rather than being proactive. There wasn't the time and the space for people to sit and plan the strategy very, very careful because there was a lot that was going on. The second weakness is that the SACC tended to act on its own, as SACC because some of the churches, though at times supported statements that were made, they did not always support the strategy and the action. It was not possible for the SACC to pull the churches with them on every action and all the time. So there was a conflict always in the family, not

always in agreement with the actions that were taken. Very little patience was there on trying to persuade other churches to take part and the feeling is that if only, if only the time had been taken to persuade more churches in South Africa to really be in the struggle maybe we would have shortened the duration of this long, long time of repression in this country.

CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, the total time allocated to this submission is 45 minutes and you have taken 20, and that includes having Xhosa.

MS S BAM: Thank you very much. I was just on the last part of the weaknesses, where we were not at our strongest. As a result of the lack of planning and strategy, we were caught totally unprepared as SACC, for the change. We were not aware that apartheid would come to and end so very quickly. I think finally to say that we were not able to document a lot of very, very important events, the case studies and people's experiences, which we now feel is very much needed as we begin to talk about the history of the SACC. Finally to say as SACC we are committed to working for the healing of the nation, but we do know that there can never be reconciliation in this country without justice. That there can never be reconciliation in South Africa when we have so many people who are poor, without homes. That there can never be reconciliation in our country as long as those who have are not prepared to share with those who have nothing. And I think that this is a challenge to us as a church. That we do not only expect people to forgive, but that those who have must share what they have with the poor. We have really made a commitment, our option is for the poor and we remain committed to the prophetic word, and to the moral reconstruction of this nation. Thank you very much sir.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very, very much. We are deeply grateful for taking us in such a, I was going to say masterly fashion, but now I don't know what is the appropriate term, in this skilful way. Giving us such a wonderful overview. Thank you very, very much. Now you are saying that Bernard is going to - yes please.

MR BERNARD SPONG: Thank you for the opportunity, sir. Obviously I just want to talk a little about communication, which was one of the strengths and one of the great weaknesses of course, of the Council of Churches. There was the whole disinformation and misinformation campaign that went on by the government. There's the way in which that forced the SACC to become an information centre in itself, in the establishment of the press agency. Trying to tell the world what was happening. And it may be that one of the things that happened with the Council of Churches was that we gave so much information to the rest of the world that somehow or other there were people in the country who were not knowing what the Council was about. Okay, we had many things that obstructed this information. We had the obstruction of course of the fact that the mass media was not open to the churches, the Council of Churches' churches. We had the opposition in some ways, in some of the churches, so that the messages couldn't get down to grass roots, and what eventually happened was that the communication network became a communication network more of individuals in many ways. Sir, I don't know, I mean

I look at this row of people and think how strange it is to be talking about the SACC, but I wonder whether you would agree with my assessment, but in many ways there was a contradiction in the name and activities. That the Council of Churches was a Council of Churches as one level in that the leaders and representatives of the churches made the decisions, but in fact the action was by individuals from those churches who were actually committed to the cause and the struggle against apartheid and were prepared to make that stand.

That network of communication that stretched overseas brought us many, many partners. People that we would want to publicly to express gratitude to, as I know you would, sir. The people who supported us at the Eloff Commission. The people who would support us by their postcards and their odd words that would flood into Khotso House at various times. It was that network, it was a national network of communication, and finally, sir, one of the things that I would like to say, because I believe that this relates to the future of the work of the communication of the Council and the churches. Because the churches have a network which reaches into every corner of this country, the churches have been able through the years to know the vibe of the country; where people are, and been able to speak this out. And let us hope to God that the present government is going to have ears to hear, in a way that the past one didn't. I think of two instances, sir, I think of your own letter in 1976 to the then Prime Minister, about the situation in Soweto and how many lives could have been saved. What could have happened in our country if only there had been ears to hear, and eyes to see at that time? And the other one is of course the Bisho massacre. Reverend Finca was very much involved with Frank Chikane in pleading with those who were concerned, saying "we know what the situation is, we know what can happen" and then had to see that bloody carnage that happened at that time. The churches are in touch. The churches need to realise that they are in touch and need to realise the responsibility of being in touch, to put that message to the authorities and to the people of the land. I thank you sir.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very, very much. We are very deeply grateful to all of you and to the many others who you represent as you sit there. There are so many who were involved with you and we can see the hand of God in all of what happened. Even in the most awful things. Now we see that we needed to remember that wonderful thing in Revelations: in the fullness of time. In the fullness of time, the things of God happen. Thank you.

DR K MGOJO: Thank you very much for your input, which has been done very well. There is just one question I want to put to you. It was very clear during the time of the struggle that there was the SACC on the other side, fighting for the liberation of the people. We had the government on the other side, fighting the retention of apartheid. Now we have moved into a new era with the people who have been our partners. We know that the SACC has been partners with the liberation movements and the government we have now is made up of those people who were partners when we were fighting for the freedom of this country. What attitude is going to be taken by the SACC in dealing with the new government? You have spoken about the

prophetic ministry etc. Is there any change in the direction of the SACC when dealing with this government?

MS B. BAM: Yes. We coined a phrase, which is not acceptable to a number of people. We call it critical solidarity. In fact that phrase came from discussions we have had precisely on discussing how we are going to relate to the present government. The problem we have is that we are coming from a tradition of protest and we have understood ourselves to be the people who are watching the government. The method we are using is not always the method that the country appreciates. We used in the old days the press as the major channel for us to register our protest. Now we are using the channel of negotiation with this government. We realise that if we talk to them through the press, then there is no dialogue. Everybody builds a defence. And so our method is that we negotiate with the government and we discuss with the government some of the things, which we feel the government is not doing correctly. But there is also a lack of ecumenical position on the part of the churches. A number of churches seem to prefer to dialogue as denominations with this government, and wanting their denomination to be the one that the government recognises and works with and that is weakening our position. And so we don't have an ecumenical position, and an example of that is over this whole question of the land. We don't have an ecumenical position. To say to the government we are not in agreement on the whole question of compensation. How do we involve the communities in South Africa on the issues of benefits? In some ways the SACC's position is not as clear because of our membership. We are much more diverse now in our outlook on issues, whereas apartheid was easier, because the beast was there and the beast you could see. But now, as churches, we have different positions. For instance we couldn't address the government ecumenically on the issue of abortion. On issues of homosexuals, and those are some of the issues that are very important to some of the churches, and not to others. There are those who feel that we have to address the government more on issues of poverty, and issues of correctional services. So in other words, our position as the SACC is not as clear as it was, but critical solidarity remains the main concept that we affirm.

DR K MGOJO: Thank you. The second question that I want to put is coming from your very statement about the non-nationalism, which I think that even during the time we were facing this, the SACC did say that maybe the churches need to speak one language. Hence there was the inauguration of the church leaders meeting, which was just a consultation to see that things did happen. The churches spoke in one voice. Is that group still in existence? So that maybe the churches could discourse on these things even before they could go to the world and speak about these issues. Is that organisation still there, of the church leaders?

MS S BAM: In fact sir, it is even larger than it was during your days, because we have had a number of churches who have joined the SACC after the liberation of the country. So in terms of the size, the church leaders' forum is much, much larger, but the impact we can make as church leaders is not as strong as it should be. We are hoping that we have this one common cause and that is poverty. It is our hope that

now that we have finally found a common cause that can bind us together and enable us as churches to speak with one voice, we will again be visible and audible to the public in this country.

DR. K MGOJO: Because of the constraint of the time, I want to ask this very important question: There has been a complaint before that we get the support for the SACC from the overseas donors and there was a cry that maybe we need to come back home and challenge our churches back home to support all the programmes of the SACC. Has that begun in this new dispensation? Are there any problems, and if there are any, what are those problems?

REV WESLEY MABUZA: Thank you, Mr Chairman. It is very true that the SACC got a lot of its funding from assistance from abroad. That is still true. Just in October we met our funders or partners, and it became clear that the SACC is in crisis. It is in financial because the kind of pledge they offered the SACC is very little. That is a clear indication that therefore we need to come home and appeal to our member churches. Mr Chairman, as you know, the churches themselves in this country are struggling to survive as denominations. We think that that is going to be a problem. However, we are beginning, as the SACC, to engage the churches to come up with priority programmes. Programmes that will impact on the lives of people and that is a process, but that process is in place. We are engaging the nation in what is called programme audit, so that at the end of the day we take those programmes that will be effective to the congregations. We will need to acknowledge the fact that even local funders as well as foreign funders are most keen to fund the government, so in that case then the government becomes the main funder. And at this point, as you have heard, we are having what we call, you know this kind of solidarity, critical solidarity, with the state. We think that we will need to begin not only with the member churches, but also with the local government, with the local private sector and with the local agencies that can afford to give money to the church. But your question is: are we in a position to be coming to our churches? Yes, it's true. We are debating with our churches to actually fund the programmes that are important to the lives of the people of this country.

DR. K MGOJO: The question now - I'd ask many questions, but we don't have time. You have just spoken, Mr Spong, about communication. I think the mistake that has been made by mostly church organisations is that communication is done in a foreign language in some of the constituencies, which is English! When we are speaking about churches, the majority of grassroots people, the ordinary people, want to see the text in front of them in their own languages. What strategy are you going to use when you are communicating with these churches, since you want support from the local churches?

MR BERNARD SPONG: Sir, the fact is that there is no strategy of that kind. It is one of those issues that constantly comes before us. There are plans, which may be heard in other ways during the time of this hearing: about ecumenical newspapers, about new ways of being able to touch the whole church. And one of the reasons for this kind of thinking is the way in which there are so many language, 11 languages,

recognised. The cost for printing, the time for translating, all of this means that in the kind of crisis that you've heard of costs, the SACC finds itself unable to say that it can publish its material in all of these languages. But at the same time, let's say that one of the publications of the SACC recently on the reconciliation services, the ideas of the liturgy for those services that bring people together, to be able to look at reconciliation and symbols of reconciliation. Those services have been printed in the different languages and made available to the people. But no, what we have to do possibly much more in the whole religious constituency, is be able to get into the new forms of information giving, which are the community broadcasting, and be able to go into those places, so that the voice of the church, the voice of religious communities is not heard in a foreign language within the narrow confines of that which is called religious. But in fact it is the voice of the religious community speaking in the areas and arenas, in the arenas of the public, and it is in that way sir, as the church begins to train its people to be able to broadcast, to be able to speak, to be able to write in these ways, so that we don't just confine ourselves to that religious message, but a religious message that is a reflection upon what is happening in the different communities. And that, to me sir, is the only way in which we are going to be able to overcome the great difficulty that you have mentioned.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. I have to ask me colleagues on the panel. Bongani Finca?

REV. B FINCA: Thank you very much your Grace. I would like to raise a question, which I have not seen being dealt with in the submission, and that's about the reconciliation of the church itself in South Africa. My observation and I don't know if it is correct, I would appreciate your comment on it. My observation is that the SACC was not only under attack from the government, the apartheid government, but the most painful attack was that attack which came from churches in South Africa. Churches who opted to be outside the structure of the structure of the Council of Churches. And I think that that attack opened very deep wounds in the church itself in this country. I don't know if the church is going to be an agent of reconciliation, to reconcile the nation. How is it hoping to do that without going through a process of not just papering over those wounds? The Chairperson of this commission likes to constantly refer to the fact that you have to open up those wounds, deal with them and not just put plaster on them because they will...what? They will fester. I would like to find out is the church in South Africa ready to confront its own reconciliation in order for it to be an agent of reconciliation?

PROF. DAVID MUSOMO: Thank you Chairperson. One thing that we are in agreement on the panel is that that question is a very painful question for the church. It's a very difficult question to answer. Because the truth of the matter is that we cannot give the answer that should ideally be given by the church, where we recognise that yes, we have not dealt adequately with reconciliation in the church. During the short period of the life of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we have tried to involve more churches in programmes on reconciliation in South Africa and have become, through that process, painfully aware of the lack of preparedness. The lack of

will, amongst so many of us, professing Christians in this country to deal honestly and sincerely with reconciliation. We are, however, not giving up hope, we are not despairing. We would want to tie that with a broader development that is happening, where at the All Africa Conference of Churches, the theme was "troubled but not destroyed". We are troubled by the lack of willingness, but we don't despair. We believe that the opportunities are still there for us. We are still alive, we are still under God's grace and it is possible that we could do something. In very small endeavours, we are beginning to confront that challenge in particular communities. It is at this time not really something worth mentioning, but we believe it is with those very small lights shining through, that eventually we will be able to overcome the darkness. But we would say that it is imperative that we repeat the call that the challenge is still on the church within our society today, to do much more than we are presently doing with regard to reconciliation.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Any other...? Thomas?

[INAUDIBLE. NEXT SPEAKER'S NAME INDISTINCT]

MR T MANTHATA (?): It could have been mentioned, perhaps I've missed it. You talk about addressing the issue of poverty. I would love to know what strategies, actually, is the SACC employing to address the issue of poverty?

MS S BAM: You know, our approach is quite different from probably the way we have worked before. The approach is that this particular programme should be owned by the churches and this is important. That's why we refer to it as the poverty commission of the churches, and I think that I want to emphasise that, because we want that it should be possible for a number of churches who are not affiliated to the SACC to be part of this activity, they don't necessary have to be affiliated. So that is an important strategy. The second one is that because of that approach, the plans of the work and what we do, we get together with the member churches, who are already in their own small communities working on poverty, so that we work from the grassroots to the commission itself. So it's a new approach, a little slower than the ones we have tried to do. We are trying to do it in a way that it would be possible for the poor people of South Africa to participate and they can only do that if the programme itself comes from the level of congregation, rather than for us to design plans of combating poverty on a national level. We realise that is a weak approach. The second approach is that we want to work with the government on this. So we are in conversations with some of the MEC's of the provinces, so that we can have joint projects and programmes on the provincial level as well as on the local level. So our strategies are several fold and of course the third strategy is one of dealing with economic justice, because we realise that we can't isolate poverty from the structures, economic and political structures. That's why we have another programme that deals with that and looks at questions of debt as part of the whole holistic approach to poverty.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much.

MS JOYCE SEROKE: In your self-critique analysis in the submission, you mentioned that the SACC served the practical needs rather than the spiritual. What is the SACC going to do now about addressing the signs of the moral decay and collapse of our value system that is now prevalent in our society, perhaps as a result of your not addressing the spiritual needs of the people.

MS S BAM: Yes, I was hoping that no one would ask that question. And when it came towards the end, I was very delighted, because we have been asked by the government many times, I don't know how many times, that the churches have a responsibility in South Africa, and the religious groups to really work on the question of the moral reconstruction and the question of values. This is a very, very difficult area and we have not been able as the SACC, I have to say it, to design a project, or design a programme of dealing with it, because it has to go back to families and communities. It has also tied up very much with our history; it's also tied up with our schools. So it is a very, very large programme. We have tried to revive a programme, more in the area of women taking the responsibility of what we call "holistic approach to health". That's very general. And by health we try to embrace precisely those questions of values and spirituality. Because we feel that as women and mothers, we have an opportunity of being with our children at an early age, so that we can in fact begin to plant these values at that age, even the basic social skills. But I don't know, I think that some churches have now started programmes in their own youth groups, and that is the hope. But we just don't have a general programme for the nation on this issue.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. May I just take issue with yourselves for accepting Joyce's premise that the SACC previously didn't address the spiritual needs. What do you mean? I want to differ very strongly! Because the needs, I mean you would not be incarnational if you said we were not dealing with the spiritual needs of the people, but that is not the point I wanted to make. Just maybe two points before you step down. It may be possible in dealing with the question of the reconciliation between the churches, which Bongani was talking about. It may be possible to handle that by our own readiness to confess our weakness. I was speaking about how we in the SACC were often harsh in our condemnation of the white Dutch Reformed Church. Remember we used to say to them: "Why don't you address the government on this or that issue?" And they said: "No, we have addressed them, but *agter geslote deure!*" Now it struck me on one occasion, this is not name dropping and so on, that I was sitting very early on after Madiba became President, I was sitting with him at a meal and I was telling him some of the things that were bugging us already. And I stood outside of myself and said, "You see, Tutu, you are doing exactly the sort of thing that you were criticising the other people for!" Because it isn't easy, and you've got to accept it, it isn't easy to criticise people you like and people with whom you have been working in the struggle. And I think we should acknowledge that we were often arrogant in the way in which we spoke. It may be too, that we have to acknowledge that we were somewhat self-righteous. I mean our cause was right! But in a way, sometimes we came across; we should say and acknowledge that we might not have made things easy for other people. And in our readiness to be self-critical,

we might get other people willing also to acknowledge that there were things that they might have done differently. The last point I want to make is that I am glad I am a retired Archbishop now, because it was easy in many ways to know what was church. You know, when you were in the against mode, it was easy. And as you say, we were able to be united and we had no doubt about our identity. Now, we are at a loss, and God said okay I would like you to leave it to younger people like Mgojo and others let them now deal with what is a critical issue. What does it mean to be church in South Africa today? And this crisis of identity is one that churches are going to be needing help with and maybe one of your major concerns as the SACC. But thank you very, very much and since you are stepping down as General Secretary may we acknowledge you and give you just a special clap. Let's give her a clap! APPLAUSE.

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