

Council of African Instituted Churches. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 18 November 1999. [disclaimer](#)

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CHAIRPERSON: I think I should do this more frequently, and I am very sorry I was unavoidably delayed. I apologise. We will ask now the two representatives, Archbishop Ntongana - four? You have multiplied into four? You will introduce your colleagues and whilst they go up to the podium so to say, Archbishop Ntongana had already indicated to me that he wants to speak in Xhosa, and what is going to happen is that these wonderful people who deal with the technical side, are going to put the English translation through the loudspeakers so you don't need to have the contraption. Thank you very much, we'll see how that works. Let's just see how that works.

Archbishop you will please introduce your colleagues to us.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: Chairperson and your colleagues, next to me I have the General Secretary of the Council of African Instituted Churches, the Reverend Molisiwa. Next to him, they have just joined me, I will ask them to introduce themselves.

REV. GCALASHE: I am Reverend Gcalashe.

REV. JONASHE: Reverend Jonashe.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Could you please stand up to take the oath?

ADMINISTERS OATH.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much for your presence here. We know your contribution to the church even during the time of the struggle for liberation. We are very grateful to you and hand over to you Archbishop.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: Mr Chairperson of the Commission, and all those that are next to you. It is a great joy to us and a privilege to be called here. This was a sudden thing to us, a sudden invitation. We could have been a great number is we were invited in time. What would have been very good our children were going to come here with their congregation uniform. I thought I was in Khotso House here when I looked at this platform. I feel at home now. We were very busy Mr Chairperson during the very difficult time, especially from 1976 to 1988. However, because of the SACC, as we are also members of the SACC, our problem was not clear, because we are not standing on our own, but standing with other churches that members of the SACC. I won't be very long, the gentleman next to me the Reverend, will speak in English. My ancestors, my clan, refused that I write down a submission. We are people who believe in ancestors, we don't hide it. We are people who believe

in ancestors. We are people of the people. This is why we can heal people. We are able to heal. We pray for people we lay hands on them, we give them water, they are healed. This is the Zionist Church. Some of your own members, Mr Chairperson come to us in the dark and they go back to you in daylight, to your church. That's good to us, because that makes us one. It is uniting because our churches are different.

If the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Beyers Naude were not there, the cart would not be there. They started the cart together when the empire of ...[inaudible] was destroyed. It was very poor, had nothing. We still are very poor, we still don't have anything. We don't have an office, we have a shack within the office of the bible college, Ikhanya. We are asking for help from anyone who is able to do so. We don't even have a pencil or piece of papers.

CHAIRPERSON: Archbishop, we did not give you this opportunity to make an appeal for your church. Please tell us more about your work.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: Thank you. During the time of apartheid, it was very difficult for us because we served people on grassroots level. We work with people on grassroots level. Humble people, people who are illiterate. However, their churches are very big, they live in shacks. We hold churches in tents, in schools in our houses, in our garages. We take out our cars and we hold a congregation in the garage. This is the type of people we work with.

Our gratitude mostly goes to the SACC without them we would not have been able to get anywhere. We used to be beaten up. We would gather as a congregation and we would be beaten up. We were labelled communists. We would be labelled all sorts of names that I cannot use today, because we no longer use such names. It was very difficult. It was hard. They tell us this is not a church. Until our own people who were members of other churches would look down at us and talk terribly. Lastly, we ask for forgiveness for not having fought in the struggle, for not having been beaten up, detained and killed. Fight with the flesh and not the bible. We should have stood up for our people. We are cowards and we admit it. We are cowards because we did not stand up and fight. Some of us were taken and became informers and were used by the past system as we continued to struggle and hunger. I have my own example as I am going to write in my submission, Sicelo Hlomo and the rest, I could not even go to their graves. They referred to them as activists. We referred to their funerals as political funerals, therefore I was not allowed to go to those funerals.

I thank the parties that sheltered us, SACC, ICT, SABC and also the Anglican Church has always been there for us. It was not difficult to stand out at the time instead of what you believed in because there was a law saying if it's you, your wife, your child, the three of you are gathering illegally. You could not utter the words "the government" whatever you were going to say, whether you were going to say it's a righteous government or an ill government, you could not even utter "the government". I am going to use the late President, Jomo Kanyata from Kenya's

words. I was there the last week of August. He said "To those that I have sinned against, I ask for forgiveness." He did not say that those who have sinned against me must ask for forgiveness. Please continue Mr Chairperson with your commission. My request is that this commission must not end before the 1999 elections. That is my request. That is our request as CAIC. The gentleman next to me is going to talk about our church and the formation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you Archbishop.

REV. S MOLISIWA: I would like to thank the Chairperson for the opportunity that is offered to us as CAIC to make our own first time presentation in 100 years. I say in 100 years because actually the church I am about to speak about is 100 years old. This church was first founded by Reverend ...[inaudible], Reverend James Dwane, Reverend Mkoni, in the process Reverend Shembe and Reverend Engenas Lekganyane.

I am very disturbed because some of our living ancestors that I - because of the contact that we have with the TRC, we were hoping that they would be here in our presentation. My Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane and thanks that he had arrived, so I have heard from the report, and Bishop Modise, because in fact these two churches to us, they are a church that was founded 100 years ago. The founders of this movement of CAIC was not to divide Africans, it was to unite Africans. It was to unite Africans as a church in ecumenism, it was to unite Africans as faith in the inter faith. And now that we make our presentation in the absence of the two we feel the opportunity has not been quite positive, but we are happy that they are able to come.

Actually, our vision within the broader ecumenical family of churches has been citing the absence of ZCC and the IPC and other churches that are not participating in the household of one church in this country. And I'm glad that the moment had come that this issue be tackled as it is. The Council of African Instituted Churches was formed in 1976 and thanks to the Chairperson of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Mbilo Tutu, and Doctor Dominee Beyers Naude, and several others that were there to help to bring together the independent churches. We are the former Council of African Independent Churches that actually was able to change from independent rather as a council but opted for the word "Instituted" as one church of God with the other churches. We don't see relevance in being independent in the changing South Africa and the challenges of the changing world. The presentation that we would want to make in a formal way is definitely going to be faxed or sent to the TRC. We would want our presentation, our submission, to be made on record with the others, but from what we have, we are proud to say that we speak as victims. We speak as victims of apartheid. As a church, we are thankful for the elections of 1994 because actually the elections of 1994 covered the whole kind of nightmares that we as Africans had in this country, that were caused to us by the Afrikaner colonials. It is only twenty or less percent, that the religion is to tackle, and that is to come together. We need to come together and face the socio-economic religion and political matters of this country and together we will make it.

I am not going to dwell too much on what we would want to put forward as prejudices and injustices that were done to us. Much as was our President in prison and other colleagues, initiatives of an African were all at halt. Those which managed to get through either were puppetry somehow or other, but everything came to a standstill once we were in...we tried throughout the year, but those who were not legitimate and proper initiatives that a black person had to take and thanks to these actions, now that we are able as group of small churches under the bridges of our country, under the trees of our country in the diningrooms, in the sitting rooms, everywhere where a black person would find a shelter to bring together a number of people to worship. We are able to speak as one sitting together and calling on other brothers that according to us, are the "haves" we need to club together with them and prepare a motion and to prepare a council that will be able to speak for the independent churches. The Deputy State President has introduced to the nation a concept of African Renaissance. And we are for it and also say to ourselves that it is time that we as a church, we must begin to start up programmes for South African Renaissance. To be able to work together and move forward to the whole continent. We believe that it is time that the independent church, I refer to independent for other people to really know where we come from. Actually we remain instituted churches, it is time for us for these churches to send missionaries to Africa. Missionaries to the world. When are we going to begin if we are unable to work together and build a strong fellowship on ourselves that will be able to relate to matters that trouble an ordinary human being. We are unable to address matters that are very, very hard pressing individuals and ordinary people. Homelessness, we can't speak as a church about homelessness, because it is our people who are homeless and we are unable to come together and utilise resources and address those matters, so I will repeatedly say that we certainly were the victims. We were the victims of forced removals, of imprisonment, of massacres, of rapes on black women, of denials of basic education. You name them all, we in my President's words, are able to say, sorry to those - to a lesser degree, to a much more degree, atrocities were done to us. We should be a forum that people come to us and apologise to us. But indeed, together in the fellowship we have accept and welcome that people should come forward and tell the world what they did to Africans. Those injustices were done to us. I am not going to take too much time, Chairperson, I am calling on for these big churches and saying to them, "Come, let us work as one". As we approach the next millennium. My last word would be once people start talking to each other, misconceptions are eradicated and better friendships are forged. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Is there anything that your other colleagues wanted to say or will they participate in the question and answer? Thank you very much. Virginia?

MS V GCABASHE: Thank you Chair. I will start with you Bishop, I have just been reminded to refer to you as Archbishop. I am from a tradition where we don't have the hierarchy of Bishops. I would like to ask you, you spoke about the struggle you went through as your congregation, but you did not give us a history of how your

church was formed. [SIDE 2]Archbishop, I did not hear you talking about the foundation of your church. If you could briefly tell us.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: It is a very long story. However, I thought that the Secretary had told you in English because he talked about ...[inaudible]. I was under the perception that he covered all that up.

MS V GCABASHE: I thought that you would tell us that you were from white churches and started your own as the black man.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: She speaks English, she's from KZL. Some of the churches that emanated from the white church, some of us were actually chased away from the white church saying that they could not go on in the way that they did. Some were working under white priests who had immigrated into South Africa. They would collect money from the black congregation and they would take this money from the black congregation and give it to the white people and the black man would not get anything.

Ngwenya realised that he must be independent. He then started his own church. However, most of us black people were referred to as heathens. Our people said they would be independent and do their own thing at the side.

MS V GCABASHE: Thank you. I will now ask a question that any of you may answer. I will continue to speak in Zulu. I hope you understand me. Now that you were successful in leaving the white churches because of the oppression that you experienced, I would like to know is there something substantial that you are doing in your churches now that reflects the fact that you realised that you were oppressed. What are you doing within the communities to reflect the way you perceive things.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: When you talk about the community I am very glad. If you go to the depths of Soweto even a cat will tell you where Ntongana's house is, because I wanted these people to come and fetch me, even though I was scared for my family, I wanted to stand up and these people to come and fetch me. If you read the New Nation in 1985 or 86, I wrote an article there. It was in English. I said: "If Jesus Christ was here on earth today, he would be in prison." I have this article at home. I am part of the community. I stand for the community. Nothing goes on in Soweto without my knowledge. There is only one thing that our churches cannot handle. Our Bishops do not want to raise funds. They want ready money for themselves, they want other people to raise money and they enjoy that money. If you don't raise funds, how are you going to enjoy money, you'll be stealing other people's efforts. I have answered you.

MS V GCABASHE: Thank you. General Secretary, you mentioned the problems that besiege our communities like socio-political problems, religious problems. My question to you is how in your church are you addressing those situations?

REV. S MOLISIWA: Madame Chair, we have the associations of these churches from ...[inaudible] mountains down to the coast, South and East, from Cape Town to Kwapuma. We network with them all. The problems we are from time to time faced with is the problem as the Archbishop had put it that the culture of fund-raising and the culture of giving seems to be not very real so that we can address these problems. But in fact I understand that one. I actually become very pained to see that we participate in some other structures put in place by the government, but some departments of governments and the ministers. Where we participate in involvement, but when situations or resources are made available, we have been made to experience a very bitter situation because we are unable to address these problems that we are faced with because the problem is we are unable to raise fast enough good resources, but where we should get resources, we experience bitter, bitter, bitter, treatment when it comes to having such help. We get problems.

MS V GCABASHE: My next question and indeed my last. You have come up with a phrase that is very close to my heart: African Renaissance. I have heard that you have had a problem of funding. Could you just briefly share what your own, what if you had that funding, what does African Renaissance mean to you. What would you do to promote this? Barring the fact that you don't have funds to do it, but what are your thoughts?

REV. S MOLISIWA: Madame Chair, AIC constitutes in excess of 15 million adherents. 15 to 20 million adherents. That is AIC in South Africa and there is - we vary with the number of the followings that individual churches have, but those that are able to club as our council in small groups, we are able to, without correct statistics because those resources of streamlining our statistics, we do not have. We would want to see a project coming up, a project of a centre where we would be able to begin a theological college that would enable to bring awareness to our people and from that particular point, we would be able to filter into these other real, real, domestic problems of poverty, homelessness, even jobs from that particular centre. We would want to see a centre coming up. Thank you.

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: I wanted to add on to what the General Secretary of CAIC has just said about a centre. We attempted to get a centre some years back at Orange Farm. Then Orange Farm was still - people were not quite sure if it will be a place where people will live and so we missed an opportunity because of my late brother (of course to accuse somebody who is silent in his grave is very wrong, I'm not happy when I have to do it) but I am pressurised to do it because we were there and money was there to make a deposit on the plot there. We could have even ploughed on that plot, there was a house and electricity and water, but one other Bishop turned it down and said no, this is a farm, this is out. You know there were very few Cuckoos there then, but now when you go to Orange Farm, you see that we missed an opportunity of having established a centre there that would cater for the African Independent Institute what have you, and we do have CAIC which was the brainchild of both of us and we begged with TEEC that they give us ...[inaudible] that we start this one for our people, because they haven't got a standard of education so

as for them to take theological studies with the TEEC, most of our people in the SACC know about this. As a result the Khanya Institute was born, but it has experienced problems because some other Bishops who want to fill their stomachs...of course I don't want to get into that.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes it would be a very good thing not to get into that because they don't have a chance of answering back.

REV. M XUNDU: Can I ask a question? Our aim here is to show what has been done by the churches in the liberation, or what is it that they have omitted in their actions. It might happen as a church that you failed to go on and fight apartheid. Perhaps that opportunity is for you to check and see your mistakes. Maybe your people are not supposed to be councillors so that you can be free. Secondly, the African Americans worked very hard in their churches to develop the spirit of Ubuntu, self determination. What activities, what have you done to show that you are actually people who are concerned with development?

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: I thought I had covered that part because I said ...[intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: Let me help you there. You are telling the truth. Just switch your mike off. He has already answered that question. Is there any other question? We thank you very much friends. I remember that you were with us in Cape Town where the church leaders were marching to parliament. I was actually giving Mr Xundu an answer to that. All right Joyce?

MS JOYCE SEROKE: Archbishop Ntongana it looks like the women are in the forefront in your church because they also pray for the people and also heal the people. Why did you leave the women behind?

ARCHBISHOP T W NTONGANA: Chairperson, I didn't want to come here because I knew that the women here are going to have that question. My wife is the President of the women's' organisation. We wouldn't be here, both of us, because you know of our situation, if we can be here both of us. We are not going to expose ourselves in front of the people. You as a person, you know our situation. Why are we here? There are a lot of women. If you also want to be ordained, you can come to us, you can be a Bishop, you can be an Archbishop, we don't have a problem with that. Because the women can pray for the people, they can have their own congregations. It looks like you want to take away our church members from us.

CHAIRPERSON: In conclusion I was saying thank you. You may stand down.

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