

INTER-FAITH COLLOQUIUM ON APARTHEID

**A response of world religions to
the situation in Southern Africa**

DECLARATION

*The Colloquium was organised by
the Rt Rev Trevor Huddleston CR
in co-operation with the
United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid*

Held in London and Windsor, United Kingdom
from 5th to 7th March, 1984

Full Participants

Buddhist

Nara Greenway (*Nipponzan Myojoji*)
Venerable Pemaloka Thera (*Mahabodhi Society*)
Venerable Teresawa (*Nipponzan Myojoji*)

Christian

Rev Wesley Ariarajah (*representing World Council of Churches*)
Rev Dr J Bowker (*Anglican. Professor of Religious Studies, Lancaster University*)
Father Heimeriks (*Roman Catholic*)
Archpriest Gennadi Jablonski (*Russian Orthodox Church*)
Ben Masilo (*representing All Africa Conference of Churches*)
Rev L Sjostrom (*Swedish Church*)
Dr John Taylor (*Methodist. General Secretary, World Conference on Religion and Peace*)
Rev Van Veen (*Dutch Reformed Church*)
Pauline Webb (*Methodist. Former Vice-Moderator of the World Council of Churches*)
Theo Witvliet (*Dutch Reformed Church*)
Mrs Jean Zaru (*Society of Friends*)
Dr S E M Pheko (*Doctor of Divinity, American Bible Institute*)

Hindu

Radha Krishna (*Secretary, Gandbi Peace Foundation*)
Anant Anand Rambachan (*Department of Religious Studies, University of Leeds*)
and Mrs Rambachan
Dr H K Ranganath (*Bangalore University, India*)

Judaism

Rabbi Barbara Borts
Very Revd Rabbi Rosen (*Chief Rabbi of Ireland*)
Rabbi Julia Neuberger (*Chairman, Rabbinic Conference*)

Muslim

Mr Ahwal (*Muslim World League*)
Dr Aziz Khaki (*Interfaith Co-ordinator, Council of Muslim Communities*)
Dr Hashim Mahdi (*Muslim World League*)
Ebrahimsa Mohamed (*Islamic Council of Europe*)
Dr Syed Pasha (*General Secretary, Union of Muslim Organisations, UK*)

Sikh

Professor Gobind Singh Mansukhani (*Federation of Sikh Organisations, UK*)

Traditional Religions

Mr Art Solomon

Delegations from Southern Africa

Namibian Council of Churches

Rev. Nathaniel Nakwatumba (*Anglican*)
Mr Erasmus Handuba (*Roman Catholic*)
Mr Samson Ndeikwila (*Lutheran*)

South African Council of Churches

Mr Gerrie Lubbe (*from the Christian community*)
Cassim Saloojee (*from the Muslim community*)
Mrs Y Sooka (*from the Hindu community*)

Delegation from the United Nations

H E Serge Eli Charles, *United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid*
Mr Enuga S Reddy, *UN Assistant Secretary General for the Centre against Apartheid*
Mr A Abrous, *UN Centre against Apartheid*

For further information about Inter-Faith Action against Apartheid, write to the Chairman of the Colloquium, Rt Rev Trevor Huddleston CR, c/o 13 Mandela Street (formerly Selous Street), London NW1, England. Tel: 01-387 7966

We met together from different religions of the world to respond from the viewpoint of faith to the fact of apartheid. We were united in concern at the suffering it causes in Southern Africa and the affront it presents to the moral conscience of humanity.

We were meeting at a time when dramatic changes are being reported from Southern Africa. We had the benefit of hearing directly from people living in South Africa and Namibia. Far from things improving, as some of us had been led to believe, we learned that the so-called 'reforms' are enshrining in constitutional form the structures of racial domination, and that South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia is being intensified. The policy of divide and rule is applied in both countries, by the implementation of the Bantustan policy and the setting up of so-called ethnic governments. People are dispossessed of land and reduced to economic servitude. Family life is destroyed and black poverty is widespread in the midst of white wealth.

Apartheid is a way of life. It is also an ideology which is used to justify the maintenance of white economic military and political supremacy in South Africa and Namibia. It has been given religious backing by open or tacit acceptance in white, mainly Christian, circles. With the acceptance of the new Constitution in South Africa, the situation has changed. The government is attempting to co-opt the so-called Coloured and Indian groups as junior partners in this system of oppression. Religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims are being confronted more than ever before with the ugly reality of this ideology. They, together with Jews and Christians, will be impelled from their own spiritual traditions to refuse to collaborate with the apartheid system and to speak out in defence of the human dignity of all people in South Africa.

The newly accepted Constitution for the Republic of South Africa begins:

"In humble submission to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of peoples and nations"

and it states as the first of its national goals that it intends

"To uphold Christian values and civilised norms, with recognition and protection of freedom of faith and worship"

At the same time that it makes this appeal, the new Constitution re-establishes its political control over, and exclusion of, Africans. The appeal to God and to Christian values takes the issue of apartheid directly into the religious domain. This is reinforced by the fact that the mandate for Namibia was handed over by the League of Nations as 'a sacred trust': far from African life and culture having been protected as a sacred trust, the intervening years have seen a process of cultural and economic genocide.

The Religious Response

Religions are extremely diverse in their histories, and in many of their beliefs and practices. In the name of religion, people have been and still are engaged

in wars against each other. Nevertheless, religions are in complete and absolute agreement that all forms of organisation (political, social, economic, educational, ecclesiastical) which deny opportunity to people on the basis of race are wrong. Apartheid is such a system.

We can say this with unanimity because we all (though in different ways) affirm that to be human is to be responsible and accountable for what we do (or fail to do) with the opportunity of our lives and to create communities of care and love. Whether by Karma or by God, we are all men and women under judgement. As religions insist that human beings must accept such responsibility, so we must also insist that all people must have the opportunity, freedom and resources to exercise that responsibility. Everyone has the inalienable right to be human in this way. This fundamental right is denied under apartheid.

We recognise in penitence that in our own religious histories circumstances and institutions have been created — and in all too many cases still continue — which have been oppressive and destructive of opportunity, freedom and resources for some people. But religions have also evoked, among their own adherents, protest against those failures from individuals who know the truth of their religion as a matter of experience and conviction, and find in the prevailing practice a contradiction of that truth and experience — and of the very demands of the religion itself. Out of that moral struggle, people have learnt, through pain and suffering, to recognise more clearly what is wrong. They know that apartheid is evil — deeply, disastrously evil.

Insights from Particular Religions

During our discussions participants shared some of the insights from their own religious traditions. They spoke of their growing understanding of the relevance of those insights to the central question of the sacredness of human dignity and its total defamation in the doctrine and practice of apartheid.

In African traditional religion the names given to God indicate a monotheistic faith in one God Who is the source of all being. From this stems a sense of justice and a strong feeling of community. Widows and orphans are specially cared for and the community extends even beyond death to include ancestors who are honoured and live close to God. This faith gave stability to African society, but it was discounted, its value distorted and in some cases totally destroyed by the impact of conquest and colonisation.

The vision of Hinduism is one of the indwelling of the Lord as the self (atman) of all beings. In and through every living thing we can perceive and worship Him. Each one therefore possesses a unique and intrinsic dignity from which nothing can detract. Any system like apartheid which is not founded on this essential worth and value of the human being is a reflection of deep spiritual ignorance (avidya) and is based on the most superficial view of human nature.

In the eyes of Buddhists all are equal, irrespective of colour or creed. The

basic recognition of human rights is therefore integral to Buddhism. Freedom and justice are like the very air human beings breathe. Life without them is like a country without a spring: nothing grows nor flourishes there. The righteous way and the method of non-violence are for Buddhists the way of achieving equality in social, economic and political life, and eventually achieving the good of humanity.

Jews, Christians and Muslims all agree that human beings are made in the image of God and share a common human lineage. Human conduct must be based on the sanctity of human life and a sense of human community. Racism ignores the image of God in the victim and distorts it in the racist. The prophets of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Prophet Muhammad all called for justice for the poor and oppressed and spoke of the judgement of God against those who did not act justly. Therefore the representatives of all three of these faiths spoke unequivocally of their condemnation of apartheid.

Jewish history, with its long experience of discrimination, persecution and destruction, and especially the Holocaust which was predicated on racial grounds, places a particular responsibility upon Jews to oppose such denial of human dignity wherever it occurs. Jesus, demonstrating the values of the Kingdom of God, identified Himself with the suffering of the poor and the struggle of the oppressed. Christians are therefore scandalised by the claim of apartheid's proponents to be defending Christian values. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has declared that 'apartheid is a sin and the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy'. That heresy is perpetrated wherever Christians, through possessive interests, support the apartheid regime or practise racism in their own societies. In Islam no distinction can be made among human beings except on the basis of merit in the sight of God.

That merit must be earned by right conduct. Islam, which in its way of life observes the strictest equality of all people, has a fundamental contribution to make in opposing all forms of racism and racial discrimination.

These different emphases simply reinforce the single point, that there is a fundamental and unanimous moral and religious opposition to apartheid, and that this opposition calls for action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Action within our particular religious communities

Each religious community at local, national and international level needs to develop:

- a) Information and education channels about the effects of apartheid upon their co-religionists and upon people of other faiths in South Africa, Namibia and further afield.
- b) Spiritual and theological reflection upon the implications of apartheid for their commitment to justice, human solidarity, cultural integrity and religious freedom.
- c) Intentions of prayer and meditation, the sharing of resources, promotion of hospitality and encounter in order to keep alive people's concern for the victims of apartheid.
- d) Continued appeals by religious leaders, assemblies, groups and individuals to Governments and to public opinion in order to promote respect for moral imperatives for justice and equality.

2. Action shared between religious communities

Existing inter-faith groups should be strengthened and new groups established. In particular encouragement should be given to efforts in South Africa to promote inter-faith co-operation. All of this may lead to:

- a) Developing attitudes of respect and understanding between all faiths and cultures in order to undermine all self-serving exclusivism and discrimination.

- b) Increasing resources for humanitarian aid in educational, medical and social services; additional help should be sought from all religious communities inside and outside South Africa and Namibia.
- c) Learning from the experiences and convictions of each religious community as to how to use every permissible method to oppose apartheid and to refuse compromise or collusion with it.

3. Action of religious people together with movements for human rights and peace

Religious people need to work and desire to work with all people of good will; they have valuable partners in many existing groups for human rights and peace; such co-operation may strengthen:

- a) Awareness about the growing confrontation arising from the policy of apartheid and about the grave implications of South Africa's military and nuclear build-up which threatens the peace of the whole world.
- b) Recognition of the need to support conscientious objection in a society where the powerful are as liable to be dehumanised and brutalised by apartheid as are its victims.
- c) Sympathy and outrage about the sufferings of all oppressed people, and drawing attention to the plight of political prisoners, of those who have been condemned to life imprisonment or to death.

- d) Counteracting the insistent and insidious propaganda in favour of apartheid by political, but also by some religious groups within and outside South Africa and Namibia.

4. Active solidarity by religious people with those suffering under apartheid

Religious people of all faiths should be prepared to work for and suffer with the victims of apartheid; appropriate forms of action may include:

- a) Support for those struggling in Namibia and South Africa for self-determination and for political freedom to organise and express their political rights and convictions.
- b) Support for rights to property, including equitable land distribution and ownership and respect for places of worship and burial grounds.
- c) Support for the policy of isolating the apartheid regime by boycotts in trade, finance, cultural and sporting activities, tourism, emigration and other areas.
- d) Opposition to that most sinister form of collaboration with the apartheid regime, namely the supply of military and nuclear resources.
- e) Continued prayer and meditation with and for those victimised by apartheid and also those spiritually imprisoned by their own ideology of apartheid.