

# Zimbabwe: Promotion of Equality, National Healing, Cohesion and Unity

## Introduction

I have been asked to be discussant to the presentations of Hon. Sekai Holland and Fr. David Harold-Barry. Hon. Holland is the Core Chairperson of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration and Father Harold-Barry is the Director of Silveira House, a Jesuit institution dedicated to the training of community leaders over a very long time. The topic we have been given in our session includes many issues (equality, healing, cohesion and unity) - each of which could occupy us for a long time. I consider it a sign of desperation that we want to talk about everything at the same time. We are like fire fighting. Indeed Hon. Holland's presentation came across to me as saying that the Organ was an institution established to fire-fight. When its members were appointed, there wasn't even a clear mandate, she said. The danger of fire-fighting is that we have no time to think of long term issues, digging deep to identify and respond to root causes of our problems and to plan ahead. Yet if we are to survive, we must deal with root causes of our problems even as we deal with immediate problems. Fr. Harold-Barry looked at various international contexts to come up with ten considerations that are important for healing and reconciliation to take place. He said that there has to be a desire for reconciliation which drives people to breakthrough to each other to discover common humanity; that healing must go beyond perpetrators and victims to beneficiaries and victims; that there will be a tension between the demands of truth and those of

justice; the process has to come from below and animated by an independent outsider; leaders will need to make bold risky decisions and individuals and subsidiary groups have a role to contribute to the process; and then there is a fullness of time when the process will mature and reconciliation happens. Applying these considerations, Fr. Harold-Barry seemed to be sceptical about the process as initiated in Zimbabwe. He seemed to undermine the confidence in the process expressed by Hon. Holland. I agree that not enough has been done to give us confidence that root causes of historical divisions and conflicts, social and political wounds, deep inequalities of power, wealth and dignity in Zimbabwe are being tackled. I focussed on the poverty of our imagination. I looked at the intellectual tools and our emotional responses and concluded that they were too narrow and too shallow to help us deal with the challenges at hand.

## Dealing with Root Causes

We need to talk about equality because social, political, economic and cultural inequalities threaten to destroy our nation which is deeply wounded and need of healing. Our nation has been divided and therefore greatly needs cohesion and unity. We must, as Fr. Harold Barry emphasised, discover our common humanity and work towards the common good. The fundamental source of this need is in our history which has operated at a number of levels. We lost, in our history, our sense of the common good, or may be we never had it. But at the various levels indicated below, we system-

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atically undermined the importance of the common good and our common humanity which might have built up cohesion, unity and social equality.

1. how we have thought – habits/cultures/patterns of thinking
2. how we have cultivated our feelings and emotional responses
3. how we have conducted ourselves – behaviours/actions
4. how we have organised ourselves – institutions, systems and organisations

Our ways of thinking and beliefs about ourselves, about others and about our relationships, expressed in our cultivated feelings and emotional responses have informed the way we have organised our society and how we have behaved in the world. These patterns of thinking and feeling have been more divisive than cohesive, more of separating us than bringing us together. We have been separate racially, by ethnicity, gender, age, class, language and in terms of political parties. A lot of these divisions are social constructions presented as natural. These divisions have prevented us from imagining Zimbabwe as a home for all of us.

We therefore suffer from the poverty of our imagination of what kind of society we need and want. The dominant visions and values of what Zimbabwe ought to be which we have used so far have been too narrow. The concepts, ideas, beliefs that we have developed to think of ourselves, others and our relationships have been too narrow. The narrowness of our visions and values and the aridity of our emotional responses have led to the inequalities, divisions, disunity and violence that has characterised our society. Unless we tackle this narrowness of our imagination and the shallowness of our emotional responses, we cannot establish unity and cohesion in Zimbabwe. Without a sense of unity and the common good we cannot achieve healing and reconciliation.

## The New Paradigm of Politics

We cannot promote healing, cohesion and unity without dealing with the hurts/wounds of history. As Ambassador Albrecht Conze, pointed out, the world is moving from the old politics of confrontation, division and fighting to a new politics of engagement, dialogue and cohesion. Scientific and technological revolutions have not only transformed the way we gather information and communicate, but also our ways of thinking, organising, acting and being in the world. With the end of colonialism, liberation struggles and the cold war, along with the collapse of really existing socialism, has come new conceptual paradigms that encourage new social and political behaviours and cultures. Binary oppositional approaches are being challenged by more inclusive politics informed by more nuanced sense of history and social analysis. Sharp conflicts between the white world and the black world; between the colonisers and the colonised; between men and women; and between the youth and the old; between humans and the rest of nature, are being transformed into collaborative global fights against racism, exploitation, oppression, poverty and injustice. Transformative efforts across cultures, religions, economies and ideologies are building global standards for the respect of human rights and the environment. It is therefore, no surprising that the world can now produce a Barak Obama, not only as an American president, but as a world leader who brings new hopes, approaches and sensibilities to world politics. Obama, even if he turns out in reality to be a disappointment, represents the shift from the politics of confrontation to that of engagement; from the politics of the “clash of civilisations” to that of dialogue between civilisations and cultures. Zimbabwe cannot escape this new movement.

Zimbabwe as a nation-state has always, since 1890, been monopolised by a few. It has always been a colonial fort, a laager protecting some against others. Our lives have been moulded by institutions and processes of war, surveillance and suspicion. We were therefore steeped in the old politics of confrontation. This is reflected in

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our economic arrangements which have promoted inequalities. Our media and education systems are dominated by narrow concepts to analyse reality. We perfected the language of hatred, strategies of destruction and a culture of humiliating others.

#### **Missing Universal Solidarity & Common Good**

Culturally, we Zimbabweans, black and white, black and black, men and women, adults and the youth, humans and the rest of God's creation have never, as a nation, lived under comprehensive solidarity with one another. Because of this history, we have never thought and felt while inspired by a comprehensive idea of the common good. Our solidarity has always been limited by racism, ethnicity, sexism, ageism and abusive exploitation of the environment. Our cultural, social and political imagination struggles to deal with the language of love, practices of cooperation, reconciliation, unity, cohesion and the common good. It takes time and effort to develop the social and political virtues of respect, dialogue, cooperation and unity. The cultivation of virtue is not simply an intellectual exercise. Virtue is cultivated in practice and in real situation. So even if our Prime Minister declared the principle of reconciliation in 1980, he and all of us had never known this virtue in real life. Whites had never lived with blacks as equal and capable of demanding their share of wealth and dignity. Men had never really considered the implications of treating women, the youth and the environment as their equals. Blacks had never considered the implications of treating whites as legitimate Africans. Then, of course, there the invented divisions of the Shona versus Ndebele and the indigenous versus the migrants. It is therefore not surprising that social and cultural unity is illusive and the Global Political Agreement is faltering even on issues that have been agreed on.

We therefore need to more deeply interrogate our history to see how our history shaped our self understanding and how we have responded to the world. We must get

out of the intellectual and emotional forts that we have built for ourselves. Appropriately reformed media and educational systems can help this spiritual transformation. We need an inclusive Zimbabwean story that expresses an inclusive spiritual and ethical perspective inspired by the common good and a sense of unity and cohesion. We need leaders who have moved away from the old politics and are capable of inspiring the nation to get out of our forts and to come together to re-build Zimbabwe. We need leaders capable of offering a vision of the Zimbabwean nation-state that encourages all Zimbabweans to develop a sense of self which does not depend on seeing the others as demons or outsiders. We need to recover the humanity of others in the stories we tell about our selves. (This is a point emphasised by Fr. David Harold-Barry). This will help us to avoid such programmes as the Murambatsvina, Gukurahundi, the divisive and chaotic Land Reform Program, and the denial of citizenship to thousands of people who were born in this country.

Hon. Sekai Holland of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration, in her presentation gave us a very positive interpretation of the work of the Organ. She claimed that all is going well and that comprehensive consultations have been held in the country and internationally. I have no doubt that the Organ has done some very good work. But we have to avoid the danger of manufacturing success. Many people I know don't know of the work of the Organ. As we heard yesterday, many people are still marginalised by the educational system, the health care system and the citizenship act. Many have escaped to live in foreign lands and they still feel alienated. The media still churns out hate language and many people are still waiting to see how their wounds can be healed. A lot still needs to be done.

Hon. Holland claimed that she and the other members of the Global Political Agreement are the leaders that we need. She emphasised that people who feel marginalised should fight for their rights. She said that Mugabe was not given power on the platter by Ian Smith and neither was Tsvangirai

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given by Mugabe. They had to fight for power and so should everyone. There many people who are not in a position to fight in the way Morgan Tsvangirai fought Robert Mugabe. For example, how do workers fight in a country that has 80% unemployment? How does a poor, unemployed, out of school migrant suffering from AIDS fight for anything? Hon. Holland seems to still be embedded in the old politics of confrontation and is happy for its rules to continue. She ignores the fact that we heard, in this conference, reports of how many people are still paralysed by marginalisation. Her analysis ignores the fact that our historical experience has narrowed our vision and impoverished our emotional responses.

We need political leadership which can change the type of politics that we run; leadership that listens more to the people and takes a bottom-up approach to development. We need leadership that recognises the role of leadership in struggles for dignity for all. If Tsvangirai fought for power, it does not mean that everyone should fight for it. But Hon. Holland is right that leaders should be able to inspire people to be involved, to participate in the construction of the world that they are to live in. Leaders we need are the ones that can support communities and yet also challenge them out of their political and cultural forts. If the Global Political Agreement is to succeed, it must mark the end of the kind of fights that Ian Smith, Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai fought. Those kinds of fights are not necessary in a civilised world. The cruelty that Mugabe endured under Smith and the brutality that Tsvangirai suffered in the hands of Mugabe are not necessary in the modern democratic world. We need political leadership that can help us banish forever that kind of politics from our nation.

I look forward to a more inclusive politics in which no one will be too uneducated, too poor and too unhealthy to participate. We need a new national spirit in which the old binary oppositions are sanitised and transformed, and people are healed to bring a sense of the common good. Some of the healing and reconciliation will be tackled directly through strategies like the Organ. But

some of it will be tackled indirectly through the improvement of the economy, reform of the legal, security, educational, health and social services.