

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DIGNITY, LEAVING NO-ONE BEHIND

IN SOUTH AFRICA AND BEYOND

Bishops court Colloquium, 12-13 June 2025

Hosted by
Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba
and Bishop Dr Sitembele Sipuka

Editor
Dr Renier Koegelenberg

EFSA | Institute for Theological &
Interdisciplinary Research

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**NS
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The Konrad Adenauer Foundation has supported several of the meetings of senior church and faith leaders over the years. This one took place between 12-13 June 2025, at Bishopscourt, the Head Office of Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town.

We are grateful for Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, who co-hosted the conference, as well as his support staff that assisted: Revd Abigail Hopley, Revd Canon Grant Walters, Revd Mcebisi Pinyana, Mrs Matlotlisang Mototjane, Ms Wendy Kelderman, Mr John Allen. Mr Charl Fredericks from the CDDC Trust also supported arrangements.

THE CAPE DEVELOPMENT AND DIALOGUE CENTRE TRUST (CDDC TRUST)

The Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust (CDDC) is a registered non-profit Trust. The Board of Trustees is currently chaired by Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Catholic Bishop of Mthatha, and President of the South African Council of Churches. Other trustees include Dr Andre van Niekerk, Prof. Leopold van Huyssteen and Dr Renier Koegelenberg.

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Generally speaking, the EFSA Institute attempts to promote consensus between different sectors, interest groups and stakeholders on the challenges and problems facing our society. It strives to play a facilitating role by providing a platform for public debate, even on controversial issues.

Both in its structure and function there is a dialectic tension between an academic (research-based) approach and the need to address specific needs of the church and other religious communities. This tension is embedded in the main issues facing the churches in our society. Some of its focus points are outlined below.

Firstly, the *development role of the church* and other religious communities: the eradication of poverty in South Africa; the role of religious networks in community development, in social and welfare services, and the development of community and youth leadership.

Secondly, the *formation of values in the strengthening of a moral society by the church* and other religious communities: the promotion of moral values such as honesty; support for the weak; respect for life and human rights.

Thirdly, the *development of youth and community leadership*: special courses for the development of leadership skills among our youth have been developed and are presented to support the building of a new society.

The National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD)

The EFSA Institute acts as Secretariat to the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD), which has several international partnerships focusing on strengthening primary health care, the fight against HIV/AIDS, TB and non-communicable diseases. The NRASD is a founding member and a partner of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

The National Church Leaders' Consultation (NCLC)

Launched in 2009 under the auspices of the NCLC as a joint venture between the EFSA Institute and leaders of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), when Bishop Ivan Abrahams was President of the SACC. It has continued to be led by SACC presidents, including Archbishop Makgoba, and today by Bishop Sithembele as the current President. Traditionally these rather informal consultations started with a reflection on our failures and weaknesses as churches, as society in our young democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

The joint National Church Leader’s Consultation (NCLC) and the IF20 G20 Interfaith Colloquium was held between 12-13 June 2025 at the Head Office of Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba at Bishops court in Cape Town. The roots of this colloquium lie in several earlier meetings of the core group of participants – at different conferences.

The process began in 2009 under the auspices of the NCLC as a joint venture between the EFSA Institute and leaders of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), when Bishop Ivan Abrahams was President of the SACC. It has continued to be led by SACC presidents, including Archbishop Makgoba, and today by Bishop Sithembele as the current President. Traditionally these rather informal consultations started with a reflection on our failures and weaknesses as churches, as a young democracy. They then sought to address the challenges we face in our churches and in our work in the broader society.

The almost “North–South Dialogues” that the EFSA Institute, the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) and the Protestant Academy of Tutzing co-hosted over several years.

Within the context of the partnership and formal agreement between the EFSA Institute and the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, which started in 2000 – as part of the Bavaria–Western Cape partnership agreement – a series of joint consultations (in Tutzing and Stellenbosch) focused on challenges and opportunities related to globalization, partnerships between governments, business and faith networks as well as on the importance of social entrepreneurship.

In 2011 this partnership was formalized at the start of the term of the Bavarian Lutheran Bishop, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, under the title “Shaping the Future Together”. Several joint conferences took place – including three conferences with the Social Chamber of the EKD that took place in Stellenbosch – on the challenges of poverty, the limitations of economic growth, and the tension between economic activities and ecology – addressing the need to care for the environment, and for transformation towards achieving an ecologically sound and sustainable economy. The consensus points were known as “The Stellenbosch Consensus”. The third conference was titled “Moral Leadership in Times of Crisis and Complexity” (2016).¹

The final building block was the virtual remarks of Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba at the 2024 IF20 G20 conference in Brazil – as a bridge to the 2025 G20 meeting in 2025, hosted by South Africa.

¹ Unpublished papers, EFSA conferences: “The Stellenbosch Consensus – 20 theses on Globalization” (11-13 October 2010); “The Second Stellenbosch Consensus: 20 theses on Sustainable Growth” (5-7 February 2013); “The Third Stellenbosch/Franschhoek Consensus: Moral Leadership in Times of Crisis and Complexity” (23-25 February 2016).

The focus of this Colloquium was firstly the challenges that South Africa as a young democracy is facing, and secondly, the South African focus points for the G20 meetings that have taken place through the year, prior to the Heads of State meeting in November 2025.

This publication mainly includes the contributions to the Colloquium at Bishopscourt, but also three contributions to the IF20 G20 Interfaith Forum, 10-14 August 2025, Cape Town

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND BEYOND

In partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

As senior church leaders of different denominations, we met on 12 and 13 June 2025 at Bishopscourt, Head-office of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, 20 Bishopscourt Drive, Bishopscourt, Claremont, Cape Town to reflect on the challenges and opportunities to strengthen Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond. In this regard, the following items are addressed:

NCLC Statement

1. Background on NCLC consultations: 2009-2025
2. Human Dignity and Constitutional Democracy
3. National challenges threatening our democracy and human dignity
4. Human Dignity and Food Security, self-realization versus dependency
5. Empowerment and partnerships- active faith communities
6. IF20 Interfaith Forum in South Africa, August 2025
7. A call to action

Addendum of shared contributions

Consulted participants

NCLC resolution: church - business working group

We, as church leaders, gathered with our academic and research partners, at Bishopscourt to reflect on our role in strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

In order to tackle the challenges and obstacles of economic growth, to foster the creation of employment, to fight poverty and food insecurity in an active and responsible way, whilst caring for the environment, we have decided to establish a special church-business working group to facilitate closer cooperation in our continued national dialogue.

“I have come that they may have life to the full” (Jn 10:10), leaving no one behind, and a future for the next generations.

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)
Catholic Bishop of Mthatha; Chairperson: NCLC and CDDC Trust and

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town



1. Background of NCLC consultations: 2009-2025

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba summarized the dialogue that began in 2009 under the auspices of the National Church Leaders’ Consultation (NCLC) as a joint venture between the EFSA Institute and leaders of the SACC, when Bishop Ivan Abrahams was President of the SACC. It has continued to be led by SACC presidents (including Makgoba), and today by Bishop Dr Sithembele as the current President.

“Our dialogues have always started with a reflection on our failures and weaknesses as a young democracy. They have then sought to address the challenges we face in our churches, and in our work in the broader society”.

As we have reflected on our hope, the dangers and challenges faced by our constitutional democracy, we have repeatedly highlighted the points outlined below.¹

¹ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, “Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity”, 12 June 2025, Bishops court, Cape Town

2. Human Dignity and Constitutional Democracy

Democracy is more than just an electoral process. Democracy is the expression of an image of the human being ... it is based on the conviction that every human being has the same inviolable human dignity. Every human being is created equally in the image of God. This conviction, expressed in the Bible (Genesis 1:27), is inextricably linked to the commitment to democracy ... How people are treated is no longer based primarily on power, but on a right that protects all people equally.² That is why churches must defend democracy!

In our colloquiums of public theology seminars over the last decade, we have examined burning national issues and challenges facing South Africa and the world, focusing on the core values of ethical leadership in all sectors with the aim of creating just, peaceful and inclusive societies in which no one is left behind. These seminars reflect our longing that everyone will have abundant life, which should be enjoyed not only by the rich, or by those who are politically connected and have access to power; we want it to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of race, culture or social status.³

The prominent place of the option for the poor in the Bible is the exact consequence of the affirmation of human beings as created in God's image.⁴

Social justice is a key element of a biblical vision of democracy: Overcoming hunger and poverty is a priority, and the growing gap between huge amounts being spent on arms, whilst there is a lack of resources in the fight against hunger, is a moral scandal.⁵

Bishop Sipuka's challenge to prioritize food security during South Africa's G20 Presidency – a call for "Empowerment and Partnership" emphasizes: "As we come together today under South Africa's G20 presidency, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment filled with both great potential and pressing moral obligations. I stand here not just as a fellow church leader, but as someone who has first-hand experience in the Eastern Cape of the portion of the reported 15 million South Africans facing food insecurity. It's heartbreaking to learn that over 1,000 children lose their lives each year due to malnutrition in our beloved country. We can no longer accept the way things are."⁶

In his reflection on the Lord's Prayer, "Bread for All", Bishop Ivan Abrahams highlighted the following:

"the petition for "daily bread" comes before the petitions for forgiveness and protection from temptation

² Bishop Prof. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World – a global ecumenical perspective

³ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

⁴ Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025

BREAD has great symbolic power!

It is the marker of poverty – the bread line

It speaks of friendship, hospitality, covenants and community – breaking bread together

It is the symbol of hope and opportunity – cast your bread upon the waters

It captures security and responsibility – the breadwinner

It signifies basic needs – bread and butter issues

It is the symbol of God’s gift of life – Jesus the Bread of life.

It is both important and significant to note that the collective pronouns, “us” and “our” are used in the petition for our daily bread. There is no room for individualism and selfishness ...We ask God for bread not as individuals but as a community”...

A theology of bread means working for a world without hunger. Hunger in a world that produces more food than can be consumed is a scandal and blight on the witness of the Church...

Bread is what we need to sustain life. The Church is called to ensure the just distribution of the earth’s resources.

Whenever we pray for our daily bread, may God fill us with prophetic zeal, fire in our bellies and the marrow of our bones to work for a more just use of the earth’s resources.⁷

Likewise, the quest for justice is inseparably linked with human dignity as a core value of democracy – for example, the global fight for climate justice. The impact of pollution and climate change affects the poorest nations the most, although their contribution to the problem is the least. The same applies to intergenerational justice – what will be the consequences of our lifestyle for our children?⁸

Faith is never (only) private, but always public – always called to engage the world. The church or faith communities are not the servants of the state, but neither are they its adversary. It is the conscience of the nation, holding state, market and society accountable to the demands of the Kingdom of God.⁹

Democracy thrives when it has a strong civil society – allowing for free discourse, for constant dialogue between representatives of politics, business and civil society – a lesson

⁷ Bishop Ivan Abrahams, Bread for all – a theological reflection, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025

⁸ Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World.

⁹ Dr Gustav Claassen, Faithful Witness in troubled times: strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa through Faith -Based Engagement with the State, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

learnt from the dictatorship under National Socialism in Germany¹⁰ Church Academies have institutionalised dialogue: “Through discourse, we promote the search for solutions in civil society. Our work is interdisciplinary, intercultural and international. Our work is characterized by the idea of developing compromises and finding consensus. And we are committed to combating nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia.”¹¹

Reflecting on twenty years into our democracy, former Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron concluded: “We now know the limits and the evils of power, including insidious looting of public assets for private gain.. but we have a practical structure to create our future.. The constitution affords a pathway to healing and integration ... It offers us a framework within which to repair our country, to restore, to redress and reconcile. It is up to us to claim the opportunities it offers ... it is one that has a claim to our fierce commitment.”¹²

3. National challenges threatening our democracy and human dignity

3.1. A new vision and hope are urgently needed: in a country with diverse cultures, religions, and a political history of many conflicts, restoring hope through creating an inclusive national vision for a new society in South Africa – a home for all, as envisaged by Chief Albert Luthuli, a nation in which the human dignity of everybody counts;¹³

3.2. Violent crime is out of control: in a country in which too many people are attacked, robbed and murdered every day – with more people dying than in many countries at war;¹⁴

3.3. The inefficiency of our judicial system: in a country in which most of those implicated in corruption, fraud and mismanagement – especially highlighted by the Zondo commission's report on State capture – have not been prosecuted successfully. This weakens trust in democracy;¹⁵

3.4. Our democracy weakened by economic stagnation: there is a failure to transform the economy, for real transformation: democracy has largely transferred political power from property owners to non-property owners – mainly the African middle-class professionals. Non-property owners who control the state use their political power to transfer the economic surplus from potential investment in the production sector to consumption by the ruling political elite using the tax system and awarding

¹⁰ Rev U. Hahn, A German Church Academy Perspective, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² E. Cameron Justice. A personal account, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2014, p. 284

¹³ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

themselves inflated public sector salaries.¹⁶

We need to build an economy which creates jobs: and income for all of our citizens. Our population growth is consistently higher than the economic growth rate, South Africans are getting poorer every year. Our failure to transform the South African economy destroys social cohesion, alienates minorities and majorities alike, and drives our young talent out of South Africa to other countries that appreciate their skills.¹⁷

3.5. Democracy threatened by voter disengagement: a combination of different factors resulted in voters disengaging – lack of economic growth, high salaries in public sector, Black Economic Empowerment in the private sector, lack of services at municipal level, unaccountable electoral law, state control expanded in many sectors – marginalizing investors.

Thus, in 1999 the Eligible Voting-Age Population (EVAP) turn-out was 72%, twenty-five years later, in 2024, the EVAP turn-out was 41%.

Faith and church leaders should encourage citizens to participate in elections, to vote, to get involved in national dialogues – as active participants on all levels of society.¹⁸

4. Human dignity and food security, self-realization versus dependency

Bishop Sipuka highlighted: “the path forward requires us to shift from dependency to dignity. Food security is not just about calories; it’s about *ubuntu*, our interconnected humanity. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our *ubuntu* is broken.

Today, I urge our government to prioritize food security on the G20 agenda. More importantly, I challenge all of us to rethink how we can work together to restore dignity to our people. This is not just about feeding the hungry; it’s about reclaiming our sense of *ubuntu* and transforming our communities from being mere recipients of aid to becoming active producers.¹⁹

Therefore the following:

4.1. We see the erosion of human dignity through dependency on grants. Grants are

¹⁶ Moeletsi Mbeki, Democracy in South Africa: Government of National Unity Challenges considering geopolitical changes, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁷ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁸ Moeletsi Mbeki, Democracy in South Africa: Government of National Unity Challenges considering geopolitical changes, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁹ Bishop Dr Sitembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025

necessary, but they should be a temporary solution. No nation can rely solely on grants; it is neither sustainable nor dignified. People will regain their dignity when they can actively participate in the economy rather than relying on handouts.

- 4.2. In the Eastern Cape, as an example, the transformation of once-productive landscapes into fallow land. Fields that once flourished with maize now lie barren, and grazing lands that sustained cattle are now littered with waste. Meanwhile, queues at government offices grow longer each day, filled with young people seeking grants instead of opportunities to contribute to their communities.
- 4.3. Addressing the mentality of dependency – a troubling shift towards dependency, over the chance for self-realisation, growth and self-sufficiency. It is this mentality that poses a significant challenge to our community's future even amongst our young people. Refusing opportunities because they feared losing the R350 government grant for the unemployed.
- 4.4. This issue extends far beyond food security; it strikes at the core of our identity as African communities, which have historically been producers rather than mere consumers. We are the descendants of those who cultivated their own sustenance and generously shared with others.

5. Empowerment through partnerships & active faith communities

The solution to food insecurity and poverty requires a four-pillar approach: government leadership, business partnership, faith-based communities' involvement, and citizen empowerment.

5.1. Government leadership: Our appeal to the government must include both immediate and systemic actions. The government must lead through effective policy, adequate resources and efficient coordination. The Global Alliance Against Hunger provides a framework, but implementation requires political will and adequate funding.

5.2. Business sector partnerships: to move beyond corporate social responsibility to genuine partnership. We must not see business leaders around Christmas time and during natural disasters dishing out handouts and posing for cameras, but we must see businesses supporting smallholder farmers, investing in rural infrastructure, creating jobs in agricultural value chains, and collaborating with faith communities on food security initiatives

5.3. Faith-based communities' involvement: When the disciples wanted to wash their hands of the responsibility, telling Jesus to send the hungry crowd away, Jesus responded: "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Like those disciples, we cannot send our people away hungry – we must take direct responsibility for feeding them, with their cooperation, with five loaves and two fishes.

Historically, missions and parishes served as vital oases within their communities where people gathered not only to pray, but also to be educated and learn the skills necessary for self-sustenance. We must demonstrate productive partnerships between faith and life, and mobilise our communities for agricultural production, provide training and support for food security initiatives, advocate for policies that promote dignity and empowerment, and address the spiritual aspects of dependency and empowerment. Every church and traditional authority should have a food security project. Faith-based organisations should collaborate with the government on nutrition education. Religious institutions can provide land for community gardens, land which we have in abundance and use it for farmer training and support programs.

5.4. Citizen empowerment poses a significant challenge: We need to shift people's perspective from viewing themselves as objects of delivery to recognising themselves as active agents of economic growth. Just as Jesus needed the young boy's willing participation in Jn 6:9 – his offering of five loaves and two fishes – to perform the miracle of feeding the multitude, so too does sustainable development require the active participation of our people. This means reviving subsistence farming through training and support, establishing home and community gardens, and providing agricultural inputs.

6. IF20 Interfaith Forum in South Africa

Ubuntu in Action - Focus on Vulnerable Communities, leaving no-one behind (Cape Town, August 10-14, 2025)

As we take on the G20 presidency, we have inherited Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. This is a unique opportunity for us to lead by example. The Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development is committed to supporting this alliance. As religious leaders, we must ensure our government translates this international commitment into concrete policies and programmes that address the food insecurity crisis facing 15 million people in South African and beyond our borders.²⁰

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) annual platform involves a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives that engage on global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). IF20's work with business and civil society actors and other key stakeholders contributes to the agenda for each Annual IF20 Forum, inspired each year by successive host governments.

The context of South Africa's priority themes of Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability guides the IF20's 2025 work. The present crises facing global agendas (failure to meet SDGs, humanitarian disasters, conflicts, environmental decay) and critical financial challenges (debt, weak resource mobilization, poor resource use) provide context. For faith

²⁰ Bishop Dr Sithembel Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025,

communities, the absolute priority is to give practical meaning to “Leaving No One Behind.”

Priority areas of focus are as follows:²¹

6.1. Food security and poverty. Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 builds on global faith-inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD (International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision and countless others.

6.2. Economic and Financial Action. Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, particularly in Africa, and hinder poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services such as education, health care, water supply, disaster response and job creation. Religious communities link the economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year.

6.3. Addressing interreligious tensions through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters. The foundational Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) programme and Arigatou International’s Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programmes offer potential to strengthen regional and global approaches and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and action to support women, children and families – for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities and fair, equitable treatment.

6.4. Migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, and modern slavery present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20’s continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20’s longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.

6.5. Disaster prevention, response, recovery. Active religious involvement, as first responders, at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis, plays a vital role. Disaster relief is closely tied to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate movements/migration, underlining the needed focus on prevention, building resilience, and meaningful capacities to respond

²¹ Katherine Marshall, “G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025,

7. A call to action

Ubuntu also offers a solution. When government, business, faith communities and citizens work together with mutual respect and shared responsibility, when we treat people as agents rather than objects, and when we build systems that empower rather than create dependency, then we restore not just food security, but human dignity.²²

To our government: Use the G20 platform to champion not just emergency relief, but sustainable food systems that empower people. Learn from Brazil's success, but adapt solutions to our African context. Part of this must include providing enough budget for agriculture in the national budget.

Address the critical issue of partnership that undermines the effectiveness of social development programmes, including food security initiatives. Too often the government adopts an approach of wanting to "do it alone," systematically excluding churches and faith communities from programme implementation, opting for isolation over collaboration

This approach fails to recognise that churches have the organisational structure and unwavering commitment for social service and development that the government desperately needs. We are present in every corner of our country – in cities and in the most remote rural areas where government services barely reach. More importantly, we have deep personal connections with communities that government officials cannot replicate. Instead of viewing faith communities as competitors or obstacles, the government should provide funding and support to leverage our existing infrastructure and community trust.

To Business Leaders: It's time to go beyond just making donations; let's focus on making real investments. Partner with our communities to help build local capacity and create sustainable livelihoods.

To Faith Communities: We have a vital role to play in shifting from dependency to empowerment. Our moral authority comes with a practical responsibility to lead this change.

To Our People: It's time to reclaim your dignity as producers, not just consumers. The land that once sustained our ancestors can nourish us again.

As we participate in the G20 process and work on our national development agenda, let's remember that our success will not be measured by the size of our grants or how efficiently we deliver services. Instead, it will be about whether our children can hold their heads high, knowing they live in communities that produce, create and sustain themselves.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. I believe our people are ready for this change.

²² See contribution by Bishop Dr Sitembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishopcourt colloquium, 12 June 2025

The real question is: Are we, as Church and faith leaders, prepared to lead them there?

Please direct questions to the Secretariat, Dr Renier Koegelenberg (EFSA Institute) (renier@cddc.co.za)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sipuka" with a cross symbol to the left.

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

Catholic Bishop of Mthatha
President of Southern African Council of Churches
Chair of NCLC
13 June 2025

8. Addendum of shared contributions

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Anglican Archbishop of Cape town

“Welcome note and background of NCLC consultations”

Mr Moeletsi Mbeki

Chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs

“Democracy in South Africa: economic and political challenges”

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

Catholic Bishop of Mthatha

President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)

“Addressing Food Security in South Africa: A Call for Empowerment and Partnership”

Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

Moderator of the World Council of Churches

“Public Theology for the One World - a global ecumenical perspective”

Prof Katherine Marshall

Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Washington DC; Executive Director, World Faiths Development Dialogue Vice- President of the G20 Interfaith Association

“G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025”

Bishop Ivan Abrahams

Former General Secretary of the World Methodist Council

“Bread for all - a theological reflection”

Rev Udo Hahn

Director of the Protestant Academy of Tutzing, Bavaria, Germany

“A German Church Academy Perspective”

Dr Gustav Claassen

Dutch Reformed Church, Ecumenical Consultant

“Faithful Witness in Troubled Times: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa through Faith-Based Engagement with the State”

Dr Marlene Mahokoto

Senior Programme Manager, CDDC Trust

“Gamagara Cares Initiative - A partnership between the Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen Mine, Faith Communities in the Northern Cape and the CDDC Trust”

Mr Charl Fredericks

Senior Programme Manager, CDDC Trust

“Gamagara Cares Initiative - A partnership between the Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen Mine, Faith Communities in the Northern Cape and the CDDC Trust”

9. Consulted participants

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Endres, Mr Christiaan, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)
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Makgoba, Dr Thabo, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town
Marshall, Prof Katharine, Georgetown University, G20 Interfaith Vice-President, Washington
Mbeki, Mr Moeletsi, Chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA).
Meisel, Ms Carlotta , Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)
Pinyana, Rev Mcebisi, Pastor, Bishops court
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Van Huyssteen, Prof Leopoldt, CDDC Trustee; Director: Academy for Environmental Leadership (AEL)
Van Niekerk, Dr Andre, CDDC Trustee
Walters, Rev Grant, Pastor, Bishops court
Whiteman, Rev Rodney, Western Cape Council of Churches
Zondi, Dr Siphon, Langa Baptist Church



PART 1

BISHOPSCOURT CONTRIBUTIONS

12-13 June 2025

DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES FACING THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY IN THE LIGHT OF GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

Mr Moeletsi Mbeki'

Introduction

Failure to transform the economy

One of the most important outcomes of democracy in South Africa was that it transferred political power from property owners:-

*farmers, mine owners, factory owners, banks owners, shop owners, etc.

to non-property owners:-

*African middle-class professionals.

This is what lies at the root of the country's economic stagnation.

Non-property owners who control the state use their political power to transfer the economic surplus from potential investment in the production sector to consumption by the ruling political elite using the tax system and awarding themselves inflated public sector salaries.

The state of South Africa's democracy

1. Why Democracy – What is it?

¹ Mr Moeletsi Mbeki is the Chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)

Democracy is a last resort form of appeasing or accommodating the demands of aggrieved social groups through the creation of a more inclusive system of governance.

Democracy comes about when the use of force has failed to suppress or overcome threats from below to an existing socio-economic order.

Democracy is a mode of preserving, as much as possible, the existing socio-economic order through compromise and accommodation, where the use of force by protagonists has failed to prevail.

2. Democracy in South Africa

I once asked Pik Botha why the National Party (NP) decided to negotiate when it did, from a position of strength.

Botha said the National Party estimated it could hold back the threat from the blacks by force for another 10 years.

Botha said a more immediate threat to the regime was the whites. He said the whites were not prepared to sacrifice their standards of living in order to preserve apartheid.

The main threat to the white standard of living came from international sanctions, especially American sanctions.

The British government was also aware of the threat posed by the collapsing South African economy as a result of the American sanctions.

By their own calculations, the British concluded that a collapsing South African economy would dislocate 800 000 people of British descent from South Africa, and another 200 000 citizens in the United Kingdom would lose their jobs derived from trade with South Africa.

Given the threat to South Africa's socio-economic order, the National Party therefore had to find a formula that preserved as much of the existing socio-economic system as possible by accommodating its adversaries who by the mid-1980s included:

- i) Big business
- ii) Whites
- iii) Blacks
- iv) American government
- v) United Kingdom government
- vi) African governments
- vii) United Nations
- viii) Commonwealth

Why voters have disengaged

- Black Economic Empowerment in the private sector
- Policies focused on benefiting African middle-class with high salaries in public sector
- Lack of economic growth and employment
- Lack of services at municipal level
- Unaccountable electoral law
- Low levels for investment
- Marginalization of owners of capital from political power and control of the state

What role can the church leaders play to put South Africa on a better new path

Encourage citizens to vote

* In 1999 the Eligible Voting-Age Population (EVAP) turn-out was 72%

* In 2024 the EVAP turn-out was 41%

Encourage all structures of churches to take part in the national dialogue.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Welcome by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba¹

June 12th 2025

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I welcome you to Bishopscourt, the home and office of the bishops and archbishops of Cape Town for more than 175 years, a site of resistance against apartheid and the house where Nelson Mandela spent his first night out of prison in 1990.

I begin my welcome with the words which open John's Gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Portraying as it does the Incarnation as a form of light, this passage (Jn 1:1-5) captures my passion for using it as a means through which to express our longing to create inclusive and caring economies across the world. Expressing the Incarnation in this way doesn't deny that darkness exists – and of course in today's world we see darkness all around us – but it reinforces the hope that characterises our faith by reaffirming that when Jesus enters our world, light shines and dispels the darkness. Thus the Incarnation calls us to witness to God in almost everything; to bring God's light to where there is darkness, and to witness to the light wherever we are.

Our colloquium today and tomorrow follows in the tradition of public theology seminars over the last decade or more, in which we have examined burning national issues and challenges facing South Africa and the world, focusing on the core values of ethical leadership in all sectors with the aim of creating just, peaceful and inclusive societies in which no one is left behind. These seminars reflect our longing that everyone will have abundant life, which – I don't need to remind this audience – should be enjoyed not only by the rich, or those who are politically connected and have access to power; we want it to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of race, culture or social status.

¹ Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town

The form of dialogue that we continue today began in 2009 under the auspices of the National Church Leaders Consultation (NCLC) as a joint venture between the EFSA Institute and leaders of the SACC, when Bishop Ivan was President of the SACC. It has continued to be led by SACC presidents, and today by Bishop Sithembele as the current President.

Our dialogues have always started with a reflection on our failures and weaknesses as a young democracy. They have then sought to address the challenges we face in our churches, and in our work in the broader society.

As we have reflected on the dangers faced by our constitutional democracy, we have repeatedly highlighted the following issues:

Firstly, restoring hope through creating an inclusive national vision for a new society in South Africa – a home for all, as envisaged by Chief Albert Luthuli, a nation in which the human dignity of everybody counts;

Secondly, addressing violent crime, in a country in which 89 people are murdered every day, with more people dying than in many countries at war; a country in which most of those implicated in corruption by the Zondo commission's report on State capture have not yet been successfully prosecuted; and a country which trust in democracy is thus weakened;

Thirdly, we have highlighted the cardinal importance of dealing with the legacy of a race-based apartheid system by taking transformation seriously, not by enriching just a small elite, but by building an economy which creates jobs and income for all of our citizens. Our population growth is consistently higher than the economic growth rate; our real investment is 15.2 percent against a world guideline of 26.1 percent, and South Africans are getting poorer every year. Our failure to transform the South African economy destroys social cohesion, alienates minorities and majorities alike, and drives our young talent out of South Africa to other countries that appreciate their skills.

To conclude, I hope this consultation will help us as church and faith leaders, in cooperation with academic and business leaders, to prioritize our contribution to the broader national dialogue in South Africa, to focus on the priorities of South Africa in hosting the G20 this year, and to contribute to the work of the global ecumenical movement as the WCC Executive meets this coming week in Johannesburg.

I am confident that each one of us can bring a unique and important contribution to this process of reflection, thus helping us to come up with concrete recommendations and priorities.

ADDRESSING FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CALL FOR EMPOWERMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka'

Greetings to all of you. As we come together today under South Africa's G20 presidency, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment filled with both great potential and pressing moral obligations. I stand here not just as a fellow church leader, but as someone who has first-hand experience in the Eastern Cape of the portion of the reported 15 million South Africans facing food insecurity. It's heartbreaking to learn that over 1,000 children lose their lives each year due to malnutrition in our beloved country. We can no longer accept the way things are.

Today, I urge our government to prioritise food security on the G20 agenda. More importantly, I challenge all of us to rethink how we can work together to restore dignity to our people. This is not just about feeding the hungry; it's about reclaiming our sense of *ubuntu* and transforming our communities from being mere recipients of aid to becoming active producers.

Let's take a moment to reflect on the harsh realities about food scarcity reported in South Africa. It is reported that currently 63.5% of South African households experience food insecurity. Nearly one in three children under 5 years suffer from stunting, and 2.7 million children under 6 years live in households below the food poverty line. Most tragically, cases of child malnutrition have surged by 33% between 2020 and 2023. The statistics are alarming and should deeply concern us.

In Gauteng, our economic hub, 35% of the population is reported as skipping meals simply because they cannot afford food. If this is the situation in our wealthiest province, we can only imagine the hardships faced by those in rural areas, such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. These numbers are not just statistics; they represent the faces of our children, mothers and community members who go to bed hungry in a country that produces enough food to nourish everyone.

¹ Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka is the Catholic Bishop of Mthatha, as well as the President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)

As we take on the G20 presidency, we have inherited Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. This is a unique opportunity for us to lead by example. The Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development is committed to supporting this alliance. As religious leaders, we must ensure our government translates this international commitment into concrete policies and programmes that address the food insecurity crisis facing 15 million South Africans as well as those beyond our borders.

Our appeal to the government must include both immediate and systemic actions. The child support grant, which is R530, needs to be reviewed to ensure it meets the minimum required for a basic standard of living. The expansion of the National School Nutrition Programme to include weekends and holidays should be seriously considered, because hunger doesn't take a break when schools close. Beyond these immediate needs, we require systemic changes, which will include regulating essential food prices to keep them affordable as well as prioritising land redistribution for productive agricultural use. Consideration should also be given to supporting seasonal and informal workers during periods of unemployment, as well as implementing the 2023 food-waste strategy to recover the reported 10 million tons of food wasted annually.

While we rightfully call for government action, we must also confront a more complex and uncomfortable challenge – the erosion of human dignity through dependency. Grants are necessary, but they should be a temporary solution. No nation can rely solely on grants; this is neither sustainable nor dignified. People will regain their dignity when they can actively participate in the economy rather than relying on handouts.

I speak from experience in our Eastern Cape province, where I see the transformation of once-productive landscapes into fallow land. Fields that once flourished with maize now lie barren, and grazing lands that sustained cattle are now littered with waste. Meanwhile, queues at government offices grow longer each day, filled with young people seeking grants instead of opportunities to contribute to their communities.

What worries me even more than the situation itself is the mentality of getting things for free that sometimes manifests in our people gathering around a capsized truck, hurriedly and competitively taking whatever goods it was carrying. Similarly, when a cow is struck by a vehicle and left immobilised, it does not perish from the impact; rather it succumbs to death and eventually disappears because of the actions of those who cut it into pieces, running away with chunks of meat, leaving only traces of blood and dung on the tar mark as evidence that the cow once existed.

This issue extends far beyond food security; it strikes at the core of our identity as African communities, which have historically been producers rather than mere consumers. We are the descendants of those who cultivated their own means of sustenance and generously shared with others. We must not allow ourselves to become permanently reliant on handouts and adopt a scavenger mentality.

The solution requires a four-pillar approach: government leadership, business partnership, faith-based communities' involvement, and citizen empowerment.

The government must lead through effective policy, adequate resources and efficient coordination. The Global Alliance Against Hunger provides a framework, but implementation requires political will and adequate funding.

We call on the private sector to move beyond corporate social responsibility to genuine partnership. We must not see businesses around Christmas time and during natural disasters dishing out handouts and posing for cameras, but we must see businesses supporting smallholder farmers, investing in rural infrastructure, creating jobs in agricultural value chains, and collaborating with faith communities on food security initiatives.

There are significant challenges and opportunities in citizen empowerment. We need to shift people's perspective from viewing themselves as objects of delivery to recognising themselves as active agents of economic growth. Just as Jesus needed the young boy's willing participation in Jn 6:9 – his offering of five loaves and two fishes – to perform the miracle of feeding the multitude, so too does sustainable development require the active participation of our people. This means reviving subsistence farming through training and support, establishing home and community gardens, and providing agricultural inputs.

We need skills development programmes that align with the needs of the food system, entrepreneurship initiatives for young people, and financial literacy training. Most importantly, we need to mobilise our communities, with faith groups leading the way through productive projects. Traditional leaders should champion agricultural revival, and youth programmes must focus on agriculture and food production, ensuring that the community takes ownership of food security initiatives.

We cannot overlook the impact of crime on food security. Theft of livestock and crops undermines both commercial and subsistence farming. Farmers are hesitant to invest in production when their harvests are stolen. Rural communities struggle to achieve food security when their animals, an essential part of their wealth, disappear overnight. We need effective rural safety strategies to protect agricultural assets, community policing initiatives in farming areas, well-resourced units to tackle stock theft, and community courts to address food-related crimes swiftly.

When the disciples wanted to wash their hands of the responsibility, telling Jesus to send the hungry crowd away, Jesus responded: "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Like those disciples, we cannot send our people away hungry – we must take direct responsibility for feeding them with their cooperation – and five loaves and two fishes.

Historically, missions and parishes served as vital oases within their communities where people gathered not only to pray, but also to be educated and learn the skills necessary for self-sustenance. We must demonstrate productive partnerships between faith and life, and mobilise our communities for agricultural production, provide training and support for food security initiatives, advocate for policies that promote dignity and empowerment,

and address the spiritual aspects of dependency and empowerment.

Every church and traditional authority should have a food security project. Faith-based organisations should collaborate with the government on nutrition education. Religious institutions can provide land for community gardens, land which we have in abundance and can be use for farmer training and support programmes.

True partnerships in food security must restore dignity. Between faith communities and government, we need to jointly implement nutrition programmes, collaborate on community development projects, share training and capacity-building efforts, and coordinate responses to food emergencies. Between communities and businesses, we need local procurement initiatives for school feeding programmes, contracts for smallholder farmers with large retailers, skills development partnerships, and support for technology transfers. Between citizens and institutions, we need community ownership of development projects, participatory planning and implementation, local leadership development, and accountability mechanisms.

Our vision must be clear: every South African should have access to nutritious food, not as charity, but as a result of a functioning economy where everyone can participate productively. In the short term, we must expand social grants while building productive capacity, establish food security projects in every community, train extension officers and community facilitators, and address immediate malnutrition crises. In the medium term, we must reduce dependency on grants through increased production, develop local food systems and markets, build processing and storage capacity, and create sustainable employment in agriculture. In the long term, grants must be an exception, where the government intervenes minimally to do what people locally are unable to do, and consistently empowers them to achieve food self-sufficiency at the community level, following the principle of subsidiarity.

The path forward requires us to shift from an emphasis on dependency to dignity. Food security is not just about calories; it's about *ubuntu*, our interconnected humanity. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our *ubuntu* is broken.

But *ubuntu* also offers a solution. When government, business, faith communities and citizens work together with mutual respect and shared responsibility, when we treat people as agents rather than objects, and when we build systems that empower rather than create dependency, then we restore not just food security, but human dignity as well.

A Call to Action

To our government: Use the G20 platform to champion not just emergency relief, but sustainable food systems that empower people. Learn from Brazil's success but adapt solutions to our African context. Part of this must include providing enough budgetary

resources for agriculture in the national budget. One expert believes that if African countries could allocate 10% of their national budget to agriculture, this would go a long way toward ensuring food security.

Brazil's achievements are not theoretical; they are proven and measurable. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Brazil achieved its goal of not only halving the percentage of people who suffer from hunger, but also halving the percentage of those who suffer from chronic hunger. Between 1990 and 1992, 14.8% of the population in Brazil suffered from hunger; however, this number had fallen significantly by 2014. Between 2003 and 2012 malnutrition rates decreased by 82%, and overall poverty rates dropped from 24% to 8.5%.

This is what political will and comprehensive action can achieve. However, we must address a critical issue that undermines the effectiveness of social development programmes, including food security initiatives. Too often, the government adopts an approach of wanting to "do it alone," systematically excluding churches and faith communities from programme implementation, opting for isolation over collaboration.

This approach fails to recognise that churches have the organisational structure and unwavering commitment to address the social services and development that the government desperately needs. We are present in every corner of our country – in cities and in the most remote rural areas where government services barely reach. More importantly, we have deep personal connections with communities that government officials cannot replicate. Instead of viewing faith communities as competitors or obstacles, the government should provide funding and support to leverage our existing infrastructure and community trust.

To Business Leaders: It's time to go beyond just making donations; let's focus on making real investments. Partner with our communities to help build local capacity and create sustainable livelihoods.

To Faith Communities: We have a vital role to play in shifting from dependency to empowerment. Our moral authority comes with a practical responsibility to lead this change.

To Our People: It's time to reclaim your dignity as producers, not just consumers. The land that once sustained our ancestors can nourish us again.

As we participate in the G20 process and work on our national development agenda, let's remember that our success will not be measured by the size of our grants or how efficiently we deliver services. Instead, it will be about whether our children can hold their heads high, knowing they live in communities that produce, create, and sustain themselves.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. I believe our people are ready for this change. The real question is: Are we as Church leaders prepared to lead them there?

May God bless our efforts and help restore the dignity of our people.

People should not be seen as mere recipients of aid, but as active contributors to the growth of our economy.

Acknowledgement: I want to conclude by thanking the various media outlets and journalists who continue to address food security issues with the seriousness they deserve. Your reporting and analysis have been invaluable in bringing these critical issues to light and informing our advocacy efforts. A well-informed public discourse is essential for driving the changes our communities desperately need.

Thank you.

PUBLIC THEOLOGY FOR THE ONE WORLD – A GLOBAL ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm'

The world is in turmoil. Autocrats and populists have gained ground in world politics. They often misuse religion for their purposes. How can the churches, how can the ecumenical movement react to this situation?

The first point I want to emphasize is: As churches we must defend democracy!

1. Democracy is not only an election procedure but a vision

Democracy is not just an electoral process. Democracy is the expression of an image of the human being. South African theologian John de Gruchy, in his groundbreaking book on Christianity and Democracy, makes the distinction along similar lines between a “democratic system” and a “democratic vision”.² Of course, both are intrinsically intertwined. The fact that the German Constitution begins with the affirmation that “Human Dignity is inviolable” signifies that the basic affirmations of constitutional law are at the same time the basis of the democratic vision. At the centre of democracy’s anthropological assumptions is the conviction that every human being has the same inviolable human dignity. This means that human beings – as the philosopher Immanuel Kant put it – must never be merely a means to an end, but are always an end in themselves.

De Gruchy has shown convincingly how rich the biblical material is that points us toward those convictions fundamental for both the democratic system and the democratic vision.³ What can be stated today from very different religious or non-religious perspectives is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁴ Every human being is created equally in the image of God. This conviction expressed in the Bible (Genesis 1:27) is inextricably linked to the commitment to democracy. For it overcomes any gradation of the value and worthiness of people. How people are treated is no longer based primarily on power, but

¹ Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria is the moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee.

² J. de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy. A Theology for a Just World Order*, Cape Town/Johannesburg 1995, 7.

³ De Gruchy, 40-53.

⁴ For a more thorough account of the following see H. Bedford-Strohm, *Human dignity: A global ethical perspective*, in: *Scriptura* 104 (2010), 211-220.

on a right that protects all people equally.

There is a direct line to a central biblical tradition which Latin American Liberation Theology has called the “preferential option for the poor”. We can only understand the prominent place of this option for the poor in the Bible when we see that it is the exact consequence of this affirmation of human beings as created in God’s image. The special sensitivity towards the poor and marginalized is exactly based on the scandal, which the lack of a treatment of human beings with dignity means for their status as created in the image of God. Preference for the poor is necessary and appropriate as long as there are people whose “kingly dignity” is gravely denied. Preference for the poor is no longer necessary when all human beings can live a life without human-made material, physical and spiritual threats.

The cult critique of the prophets is only one of the many biblical traditions in which this is reflected: “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.... Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Am 5:20-24).

In the light of this passionate affirmation, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, killed by the Nazis for his resistance against Hitler, once said that Christian existence is “praying, doing justice and waiting for God’s time.”

The second point to be emphasized is: Democracy must include social justice. Overcoming hunger is a priority. It is irreconcilable with the increasing drive to finance military force.

2. The gap between huge amounts of spending on arms and the underfinanced fight against hunger is a moral scandal

If it is true that military force can never be the norm, but always an “impossible possibility,” then a critical look at the financial expenditure for boosting the means of military force is warranted. Military spending rose sharply worldwide in 2024. According to the peace research institute SIPRI, countries invested more than \$2.7 trillion, 9.4 percent more than in the previous year. This was the largest increase ever recorded by SIPRI. The United States leads the way with \$997 billion. Russia's spending grew from \$109 billion to \$149 billion. All 32 NATO countries together spent a total of \$1.5 trillion on their military capabilities.

Even if this figure were set several times higher, Russia's spending would still be far below the budgets of the countries united in NATO.

This in turn suggests that the West's response to the attack on Ukraine should not focus on increasing military spending, but rather on greater intelligence in terms of peace and security policy.

The questionable nature of the high sums spent on military resources is even more evident if we put it in relation to the financing human development. The drastic underfunding of

civilian capabilities to save human lives remains a moral scandal. Every day, around 25,000 people worldwide still die because they do not have enough food.

On the occasion of the UN World Food Summit in 2021, agricultural scientist and Vice-President of Welthungerhilfe Prof. Dr. Joachim von Braun, who also chaired the scientific advisory board for the UN summit, estimated the global expenditure that would make it possible to largely overcome hunger by 2030. He stated that this would require additional investments of around 39 to 50 billion dollars annually over the next ten years. He added: “No finance minister can shirk their responsibility and claim that it is unaffordable to fight hunger. No, it is not.”

If only to prevent future violent conflicts, the churches must repeatedly highlight the absurdity of the distribution of resources between spending on armaments and spending on human development.

Especially in view of the churches' witness to peace, Jesus' promise applies: “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.” To listen to this promise and live by it means understanding that the “peace that surpasses all understanding” also has clear worldly consequences. The consequences may also include protecting people from murder and the worst forms of abuse, if necessary by force of arms. But the absurd disparity between extremely high military spending and far too low spending on development can never, ever be justified. In both cases, it is a matter of protecting human life. In the latter case, it is a matter of preventing daily mass deaths.

Justice – this is the third point – is inseparably linked with fighting climate change.

3. Climate justice is inseparably connected with human dignity as the core value of democracy

Recent events have been a sad confirmation of the appropriateness of many voices of the past which have warned us against unseen upcoming natural disasters. Huge wildfires in Canada, California and Greece; massive flooding in Eastern Europe, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal; and devastating storms in Asia and in the Caribbean speak a clear language and cost not only many lives but also enormous amounts of money. As the world's largest reinsurer Munich Re reports, worldwide natural disasters caused losses amounting to 320 billion US dollars in 2024 – money that would be so much better spent on sustainable human development rather than on rebuilding after destruction.

The high cost of global warming is now increasingly reaching the global north. However, those who are most terribly affected are people in the global south. Those who have contributed least to climate change are its first victims. Everyone with a clear mind and a sensitive heart understands how grave this injustice is.

I will never forget when, during one of my visits as Lutheran Bishop of Bavaria to our Tanzanian partner church, my friends there showed me the parched fields and development projects that were simply destroyed by the extreme weather conditions caused by climate

change. I remember the shame I felt when I realized that our CO₂ emissions in Germany are between 9 and 10 tons per capita per year, compared to 0.2 tons in Tanzania.

I will also never forget an experience in Papua New Guinea. An old man at a seaside village that we visited showed us a wooden pole standing 50 meters out in the water and said, “Over there by the wooden pole, there used to be land in my childhood.” And he told us that one of the islands off the coast is already sinking into the sea. The inhabitants had to be resettled. Knowing how much, for the Papuans, the land is part of their identity, I can imagine the pain this causes. In Papua New Guinea, CO₂ emissions per capita per year are 0.8 tons. Since then, I have heard in many WCC meetings the stories of our brothers and sisters in the Pacific that tell us about the very real threat to their existence that continuously rising ocean levels mean for them.

What I experience in the global community of churches compels me to become engaged in the public and political debates in my own country. When I return to Germany and follow the discussions about climate policy there, how can I disregard all my experiences elsewhere? How could I not intervene in the political debates at home, if I want to look the people in Tanzania or Papua New Guinea in the eye, whom I have just addressed in my sermons there as “sisters and brothers”?!

What is relevant for global justice is also relevant for intergenerational justice. My oldest grandson is now six years old. He will be my age in the year 2081. I want him to have a life at least as good as mine. And I believe that every other grandfather, every grandmother, on this earth has the same wish. Climate science clearly tells us that we need a fundamental change, true *metanoia*, to make this possible. Who would be more predestined to be a driving force in the process necessary for that than the churches and religious communities?! We are rooted locally everywhere in the world, from the great metropolises in the urban areas to the smallest villages in the rainforest, and at the same time we are united in a global horizon based on our common faith in God the creator of heaven and earth. Who could be such a driving force for *metanoia* in global civil society if not we as churches and religious communities?!

And yes, we also have to become outspoken in the necessary political debates and have to address the systemic reasons for present and future suffering. It is not enough to bind the wounds of the victims. It is necessary to overcome the root causes of their victimization. We also have to back up our words with actions and give good examples by limiting CO₂ emissions to what is absolutely necessary by, for example reducing our use of plastic for water bottles, by turning to renewable sources of energy in our buildings, and by sharing resources so that everyone can afford a life without the destruction of non-human nature.

If we speak of *metanoia* as a fundamental change of direction in our lives, then we must also talk about sin. This will lead us – this is the fourth point – to reflect on the challenge of misleading theologies

4. The role of misleading theologies – addressing nationalism and colonialism

I believe that understanding the character of sin is the first step towards the change that we need so desperately and that can be expressed with the old Greek term of *metanoia*. And while for some these words are expressions of an outdated form of spirituality that needs to be overcome to discover life in its fullness, I believe the opposite is the case. Sure enough, these words have indeed often been misused to put people down rather than to encourage them. Feminist theological scholarship has shown the destructive impact that old theological interpretations such as self-love as a sin have had on women. It has shown how discovering self-love can be a force of healing rather than being put down as sin.

We can, however, discover the healing potential of talking about sin and its immense public and political relevance if we understand this concept in relationship categories. A key idea for that can be Martin Luther's understanding of sin as "*homo incurvatus in seipsum*"; as a human being "being crooked in himself or herself." The word "sin," thus, gives expression to familiar forms of human self-isolation from God and one's fellow human beings. Dominating, ignoring or even dehumanizing others is a clear form of sin. A culture of sober self-perception, which makes it possible to speak of human sin, is the first step towards overcoming the self-isolation associated with it. This is why the confession part of our worship services is so important. Only where sin is called out by name can the liberating power of forgiveness be experienced.

Reflecting upon this in the universal horizon of the one world shows the enlightening quality of such a relational understanding of sin. We can further develop Luther's concept of sin by speaking of "*communio incurvata in seipsam*", a "community crooked in itself." Reflecting on what I just elaborated on the climate catastrophe, one can say: What we are dealing with is a "generation crooked in itself." This generation's denial of the need to care for future generations is a sin.

But this category of analysis also helps us to understand other pressing challenges of our times. Whoever places his own country or his own ethnic group above others and puts them down, produces hatred, sometimes violence and ultimately perhaps even countless deaths. That is why *nationalism* is a manifestation of sin. Nationalism poisons the climate between people. It is a contradiction of all that the Christian tradition stands for. The problem is not loving our own country. If patriotism is simply an expression of gratitude for how blessed we are where God put us, it is an asset. If, however, loving your country turns into putting it above others and ignoring or denying the beauty of others, then it is an expression of the sin of nationalism.

Unfortunately, the churches have way too often been part of the problem instead of part of the solution. My own country is a sad example. I have grown up with a remembrance culture that tried to make sure that this never happens again. Donald Shriver, the former president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, published a brilliant book in 2008 on how countries deal with the dark sides of their history. The title is telling: "Honest patriots.

Loving your country enough to remember its misdeeds.”⁵

The concept of sin as being crooked in oneself is also very relevant for a theme that has gained increasing relevance for different programmes in our work as WCC. Colonialism was one of the most terrible expressions of sin, of “*communio incurvata in seipsam*”, of “community crooked in itself.”

At a conference in Berlin a few weeks ago we commemorated the 140th anniversary of the “Berlin Conference” in 1884/85. In the 1884/1885 conference Africa was divided up between the major European colonial powers. It is evident how the arbitrary drawing of lines on the map to mark future borders which are visible to this day in the straight borderlines on our maps, has been a source of conflicts to this day. The borders were drawn purely according to the power interests of the colonial powers and their economic greed. No Africans were at the table. The colonialist powers were crooked in themselves. The Eurocentrism of the colonialists kept the European powers from even seeing those whose land they took, let alone treating them as fellow human beings. This sin led to violent occupation, humiliation and killing of so many.

Metanoia now means understanding the injustice of colonialism, seeing how it still bears responsibility for systemic injustices today, and developing and implementing strategies to overcome such injustices.

Since the conference took place in Berlin and since the moderator happened to be German, let me also add this: The sin of colonialism remains to be one of the blind spots of our German remembrance culture. Fortunately, we have established such remembrance culture in relation to the historical crime of the holocaust. A similar effort to establish a true remembrance culture in relation to the crime of colonialism is undertaken only by a few committed individuals. My hope is that the presence of the WCC at this conference in Berlin can encourage us in my country to become many.

5. Public theology as an expression of witness to the Gospel

In the light of the examples of climate policy, nationalism and colonialism, I have pleaded for a prophetic public voice of the churches. If human suffering is caused by political decisions, we must advocate for political decisions that overcome such suffering.

However, three clarifications are necessary.

First, we must clarify what we mean by “political.” If someone says: “the church should not get involved in politics” and means party politics or political power-plays, then one can only agree. But if this admonition is meant to keep us from public advocacy for justice, for the poor and vulnerable, for overcoming violence or for overcoming the destruction of non-human nature, then we clearly have to disagree. The church is called to have the courage to speak truth to power and defend the values of the gospel, even if the government

⁵ Donald Shriver, *Honest patriots. Loving your country enough to remember its misdeeds*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

dislikes it. Whether or how this is possible can vary very much due to the context. Especially with repressive governments, prophetic clarity will be coupled with prudence. However, programmatically excluding the realm of politics and public life from the witness of the church would betray our faith that Christ is the Lord in all areas of our lives.

Second, it must be clear, what the source of political intervention by the church is. It is the gospel which must inform what we say in politics – not vice versa! Nationalist governments often misuse religious rhetoric for their nationalist agenda. They use representatives of the church to bless their politics. Then, politics drives the church. As we have seen in our reflection of nationalism as a sin, this betrays the values of the gospel. When we intervene in politics, our question should always be: is this a consequence of our belief in Christ and his love which moves the world to reconciliation and unity? Or is our motivation for public intervention to please a government or another worldly power. Our motto can never be “our country first” but must always be “Gospel first, Christ first!”

Third, we must always make the distinction between the fundamental values of the gospel like love of neighbour, justice for the poor, or protection of God-given life, on the one hand, and concrete political proposals, on the other. While the former deserve our strong commitment, the latter must always be open to discourse. If the discussions show that other proposals are better able to implement the values we advocate for, then we must learn from that. In short: we need passionate advocacy for the values of the gospel and complete openness for the discourse about its concrete political consequences.

6. Waiting for God’s time

We are called to pray, to do justice, and to wait for God’s time. These are the three elements that Dietrich Bonhoeffer once identified as the decisive characteristics of a Christian existence. If our prayer is really a prayer of the heart, it will show in doing and advocating justice. In a time in which crises and so much suffering connected to these crises threaten to overwhelm us, maybe the third element is the most important one, because it enables us to address the other two. Waiting for God’s time means trusting that this world is not moving towards a dark hole, but towards a new heaven and a new earth, in which justice, reconciliation and unity will reign. We all know already from our childhood, for example at Christmas before we get our presents, how hard waiting can be. Now, in our adult life, waiting is sometimes almost intolerable – when we deal with hunger, terror, violence, injustice and so much suffering. Why is this still happening? When will this end? What is God doing? When is God’s time coming?

When we are now together here, let us encourage each other in our trust in God. Let us remind each other that we do not have to despair because we know that our God is there, that our God is acting, that our God will make visible the justice, the reconciliation, the unity that has come through Christ’s death and resurrection, and that we as the church are called to witness it now already. We will continue our pilgrimage praying and doing justice, keeping our eyes open for the signs of the kingdom to come and trustfully waiting for God’s time.

UBUNTU IN ACTION: FOCUS ON VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Prof Katherine Marshall¹

The **G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20)** will hold its major 2025 Forum event from August 10-14 in Cape Town, South Africa. The gathering will bring together diverse stakeholders, from religious and spiritual traditions, other civil society organizations, government representatives, multilateral entities, and academia.

The Cape Town event is inspired by South Africa's G20 theme, "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability", and the overarching African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which are integral to South Africa's approach to its G20 Presidency. Like South Africa, the G20 Interfaith Forum recognizes that neither individuals nor nations can thrive in isolation and that global priorities should ensure that no one is left behind. Reversing the stalled progress toward the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential, and this demands a paradigm shifts in ways to address overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises. The IF20's key 2025 priorities align with the priority areas of the G20 Summit, which will be held on 22-23 November 2025 in city , Gauteng, South Africa.

OBJECTIVES

The IF20's mandate is to contribute to a more just world and a sustainable future by drawing on and enriching the multifaceted ideas, experiences, activities and contributions of diverse actors inspired by faith across the world. The Cape Town Forum will foster practical approaches to challenges ranging from social polarization and economic and social inequality to the general challenges of finding sustainable solutions to proliferating operational problems facing communities.

The gathering offers the opportunity to harness the transformative potential of religious beliefs and the work of faith-inspired actors to advance global sustainable development agendas (and specifically the United Nations SDGs). It provides a platform where diverse religious and related communities can identify shared priorities and mobilize solutions with a reach from local to global levels. The hope is for IF20 to serve as a catalyst for policy change

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amongst G20 countries, especially where there is openness to strategic cooperation among state and religious actors. By harnessing the collective wisdom, resources and networks of diverse stakeholders, especially religious actors and traditional communities, the Forum aims to inspire concrete actions towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. We aim to foster a more just, equitable and sustainable world by focusing on advocacy efforts and actions that build on the rich experience of countless communities at local, national and international levels. The IF20 thus draws on the work of what it sees as a true global “network of networks” grounded in shared humanity and working for the common good.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF THE ANNUAL G20 INTERFAITH PROCESS

Objective 1: Foster inclusive dialogues that can enhance solidarity by addressing flagging trust and countering polarization, hate speech and violence, supporting collaborative partnerships and collective action focused on governments and faith actors from around Africa and the world.

Objective 2: Help build networks and share good practices that contribute to genuine progress in addressing key social problems, supporting those who are most vulnerable, through multi-stakeholder collaborations with faith actors.

Objective 3: Forge links to the work of G20 Engagement Groups (civil society, think tanks, women, youth, business and others) and relevant Working Groups of the **G20 Sherpa Track** (notably Anti-Corruption, Health, and Climate and Environmental Sustainability), linking various G20 constituencies in preparation for the **G20 Social Summit** (November 18-20, 2025).

Objective 4: Communicate richer understandings of the concrete contributions of faith actors to solidarity, equality and sustainability through humanitarian work, community building and supporting sustainable progress that benefits the vulnerable.

Objective 5: Develop recommendations on actions that support the world’s most vulnerable groups, including children, women, minority groups and others, amidst challenges such as poverty, violence, forced migration and the changing climate.

G20 INTERFAITH’S PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS

The context of South Africa’s priority themes of Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability guides the IF20’s 2025 work. The present crises facing global agendas (SDGs, humanitarian, conflict, environment) and critical financial challenges (debt, resource mobilization, poor resource use) provide context. For faith communities, the absolute priority is to give practical meaning to “Leaving No One Behind.” Concretely, legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic point to operational challenges that demand urgent attention. Priority areas of focus are outlined below.

- 1. Food security and poverty.** Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 supports this multisector programme, aiming to show convincingly that religious institutions are major players, and how our (G20 Interfaith) commitments can enhance transnational and national efforts. IF20 builds on global faith-inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD (International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, LDS Charities and countless others.
- 2. Economic and Financial Action.** Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, concentrated in Africa, and they dampen poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services such as education, health care, water supply, disaster response and job creation. Religious communities link the economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year. Action to mobilize public finance nationally and multilaterally can ensure debt sustainability and mobilize finance for sustainable and equitable development.
- 3. Addressing interreligious tensions through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters.** The foundational Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) programme and Arigatou International’s Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programmes offer potential to strengthen regional and global approaches, and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors. Priority efforts directed to reinforce social cohesion are integral to education policies and to broader issues of trust and information, Religious approaches to ethics and practice offer contributions to the fast-developing field of Artificial Intelligence. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and actions to support women, children and families — for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities — and ensuring fair, equitable treatment.
- 4. Migration and refugee movements, human trafficking and modern slavery** present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20’s continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and call for religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20’s longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.
- 5. Disaster prevention, response, recovery.** Active religious involvement by first responders at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis plays a vital role. With rethinking at different levels on optimal approaches, the contributions of religious actors deserve greater focus. Disaster relief is closely

ties to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate-related movements/migration, underlining the need to focus on prevention, building resilience and meaningful capacities to respond.

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZER

The **G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20)** annual platform involves a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives that engage on global agendas, including the SDGs. The G20 process has evolved since it was established in 2014, recognizing an expanding range of stakeholders and platforms that allow different sectors and communities to present ideas and recommendations to global leaders. The IF20 contributes insights and recommendations that respond to and help shape the G20 and thus global policy agendas, building on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs and reflecting their rich diversity of institutions, ideas and values. Through its networks, the IF20 contributes not only to the formulation but also to the implementation of G20 policies, and to forging consensus on priorities shared by interfaith and intercultural organizations, religious leaders, scholars, and development and humanitarian entities. IF20's work with business and civil society actors and other key stakeholders contributes to the agenda for each Annual IF20 Forum, inspired each year by successive host governments.

BREAD FOR ALL; A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Bishop Ivan Abrahams¹

Introduction

Last month the President, Vice-President and Minister of Agriculture all attended the most influential agricultural showpiece in the southern hemisphere at Bothaville, Free State under the theme “Global Agriculture, locally rooted”.

The last of the maize, sunflower and soya crops are currently being harvested in the summer rainfall regions, while the first wheat is being sowed not far from here in the Swartland and the Caledon areas. The Global Food Security Index (GFI) of 2022 places South Africa as the leading African country in food security. The 2023/24 season produced 13.1 million tons of maize, while still having the capacity to export over 3 million tons.

Despite being a food producing nation, with a constitutional guarantee stating “everyone has the right to access to sufficient food and water” (Section 27(1) (b)), the 2022 census states that 25.8% of the population (approximately 15,3 million individuals) suffer from food insecurity, with children under the age of 5 being the most vulnerable.

I have no doubt that we are gathered here to drink from the calabash of collective wisdom in this room. We gather in the audacious belief that we can bend the moral arc of history to achieve, amongst other things, the second Sustainable Development Goal of “building a world without hunger, food security and malnutrition.”

I am sure that other presenters will explore current risks to food security such as urbanization, conflict, poverty and inequality, and climate change. They will also share future challenges such as the use of renewal energy, and how to tap into the green and blue economies to mitigate against food insecurity. Since the majority of us gathered here are church leaders, I wish to focus on how we can popularize, mobilize and theologize around a basic South African staple food BREAD – hence my theme, **bread for all; a theological reflection**.

¹ Bishop Ivan Abrahams is the Former General Secretary of the World Methodist Council

The Lord's Prayer is prayed each day by millions of people in many different languages, more I presume as a formal recitation. The followers of Jesus are mandated to make three petitions. I am particularly interested in the petition for DAILY BREAD which comes before the petitions for FORGIVENESS and PROTECTION FROM TEMPTATION.

BREAD has great symbolic power!

It is the marker of poverty – the bread line.

It speaks of friendship, hospitality, covenants and community – breaking bread together.

It is the symbol of hope and opportunity – cast your bread upon the waters.

It captures security and responsibility – the breadwinner.

It signifies basic needs – bread and butter issues.

It is the symbol of God's gift of life – Jesus the Bread of life.

Bread also takes many forms; buns, croissants, tortillas, bagels, pot bread, dombolo, ujeqe, roosterbrood, roti, naan, chapatti, baguette ... and so we can continue.

With urbanization, bread is becoming the staple food of many people.

The Bible abounds with at least 492 references to bread. It takes our human need for food extremely seriously. When the early followers of Jesus prayed "Give us this day our daily bread", they expressed their utter dependence on God as the Provider for their daily sustenance. Gerd Theissen, the New Testament scholar, reminds us that a careful translation of the word "daily" gives us a clue to the poverty and dependence of the first followers. The phrase is more correctly translated as "give us our bread for tomorrow, today!" Do we rely on God's precepts or has our reliance on the market for our daily provisions blunted that faith?

It is both important and significant to note that the collective pronouns, US and OUR are used in the petition for daily BREAD. There is no room for INDIVIDUALISM and SELFISHNESS here. We ask God for bread not as INDIVIDUALS but as a COMMUNITY. Bishop Dom Helder Camara once said, "Bread for me is a material matter, but bread for my neighbour is a SPIRITUAL matter."

Luther was correct when commenting on the Lord's Prayer: "When we pray for bread, we are praying for everything necessary for the preservation of life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, good government and peace – that God may preserve us from all sorts of calamities, sickness, pestilence, hard times, war, revolution and the like".

A theology of Bread means working for a world without hunger. Hunger in a world that produces more food than can be consumed is a scandal and blight on the witness of the Church.

How can we pray “Lord, give us this day our daily bread” when seeds, wheat, flour, land and its produce are controlled by monopolies and trans-national cartels that manipulate the rules and regulations of trade to their advantage?

How can we, who are supposed to be stewards of the earth, permit the systematic pillage, rape and looting of our natural resources such as fossil fuels in the name of “economic growth” and “profit”? Can we really afford “growth” and “profit”, when future generations have to pick up the tab for the ecological degradation brought about by this and previous generations who have been bent on growth and profit at all costs?

How can we pray with integrity when deregulation and privatization often result in the abolition of price controls, increases in food prices, job losses, excessive profiteering and a decrease in bread’s nutrition value – like lower quality, mass and flour content?

How can we pray with conviction when unfortunately, even churches are complicit in speculative financial systems which prioritize generating profit over the progress and wellbeing of humanity?

A theology of Bread must question the structures that keep people hungry and poor. A few years ago the Competitions Commission fined a major company six percent (6%) of its bread business profits that came to a whopping R98.9 m. We need to confess that Churches were rather silent on this issue and left it to the Commission to pronounce that “Blatant profiteering is an insult to the nation, particularly the poor”.

A theology of Bread must recognise that we face a disaster of incalculable proportions. The signs are visible everywhere: in greenhouse gases, accumulation of nuclear waste, deforestation, desertification, the disappearance of species, the reduction of biological diversity and more. Thousands of people die of hunger each day. Let me remind you as I did in my introduction that in South Africa 15 million people are consigned to the sinful humiliation of suffering from food insecurity!!!

A theology of Bread will expose the contradictions of unbalanced abundance of fast food and systemic hunger where food and land have become a commodity and the poor are assaulted by the politics of biotechnology and maximization of profits.

About 850 million people around the globe do not have enough to eat, while 2 billion people are overweight. Mahatma Gandhi, who began his spiritual and political odyssey in South Africa, warned that while there is enough in the world for everyone’s need, there is not enough for everyone’s greed.

Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele captured something of the horror of poverty in the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa. In an interview with a woman in Kalksteentfontein, one of the areas on the Cape Flats, they record a mother’s story. I read excerpts from it:

Sometimes my children lie awake at night crying. I know they are crying because they are hungry. I feel like feeding them Rattex. When your children cry hunger-crying, your heart wants to break. It will be better if they were dead. When I think things like that I feel worse. It is terrible when a mother wants to kill her own children. But what can I do, I'm not a mother worth having ... what can one do? You must start looking. You can also pray to God that he will keep you from killing your children.

What has changed forty-one years later? The poverty hearings chaired by the former archbishop of Cape Town tell of the despair and agony of living in poverty in a nation ranked most unequal in the world.

The poor are poor not because of their own doing, but mostly because of circumstances out of their control. And they despair because the owners and controllers of wealth and production – including those who buy into their system – blame the poor for their circumstances. How frequently don't we hear "If only they would learn to pick themselves up by their bootstraps ... go back to tilling the land again ... stop drinking ... stop having children ' This is one of the cruelest sayings as many poor people don't have boots at all.

Praying the Lord's Prayer is an instruction for advocacy and activism to set the Church's mindset to radical – not palliative measures – of redress for land reform, just wages, just trade and just reward, so that all God's people may enjoy the fruits of God's provision. Remember: "The earth's is the Lord's and all that is therein." (Psalm 8).

Conclusion

When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread" we are commanded to confront the large companies that control the seeds and means of food production. We are exhorted to challenge those cartels and monopolies that put their faith in a casino economy – an economy which runs on the principles of a lottery, chance and greed – and those international financial institutions whose interests are geared toward profit rather than the reconstruction and development of people's national and communal existence.

The Lord's Prayer presents us with moral challenges which go to the heart of our faith. If I may paraphrase a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams: "good ecology is not an optional extra but a matter of justice." Good ecology is central to what it means to be a Christian, hence we cannot leave this to businesspeople, politicians or even to scientist and engineers.

We must refuse the temptation to offer our flock a diet of fast food and an empty-calorie spirituality of many of the prosperity cults.

DT Niles is reported to have defined MISSION as "one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread". I like that definition. Bread is what we need to sustain life. The Church is called to ensure the just distribution of the earth's resources.

We are challenged to share in the momentous task of being “co-creators” – agents of transformation. We need to remind ourselves that God acts in human history through human activity. We are God’s agents of healing and transformation.

Whenever we pray for our daily bread, may God fill us with prophetic zeal, put fire into our bellies and the marrow of our bones to work for a more just use of the earth’s resources.

Friends, a different world is possible. Let us act fast, let us act now.

We live in a world that is pregnant with possibilities.

Thank you for your attention.

A GERMAN CHURCH ACADEMY PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Udo Hahn¹

It is an honour to be able to present the perspective of a German church academy in this consultation this afternoon.

Let me begin with a personal remark. I am a pastor and journalist. I first visited South Africa in early 1992. At that time I was working as an editor for a weekly newspaper in Germany. My assignment was to describe the developments in South Africa before the referendum in March 1992 and then to comment on the result. I had previously participated in conferences and programmes of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. My editor-in-chief thought these experiences were important in order to be able to assess the situation in South Africa.

In 2011, I was appointed Director of the Evangelical Academy Tutzing in Bavaria. The Academy had already been working with the EFSA Institute at the time. One of my first initiatives as Academy Director was to develop an agreement with Renier to conclude an official partnership agreement. We then signed this on 31 October 2011 in Nuremberg – with Bishop Bedford-Strohm, who was inaugurated into his office as regional bishop on that day. This partnership, dear Renier, means a great deal to me personally and it is an important broadening of horizons for our academy work.

The idea of Protestant academy work in Germany has its roots in the dictatorship of National Socialism. Its pioneers – including Dietrich Bonhoeffer – had the bold idea that after the Second World War, Germany needed places where the various forces from politics, business and civil society could come together to engage in free discourse, with the aim of developing solutions or partial solutions to the current challenges of our time. This freedom did not exist under the dictatorship of National Socialism. Today we know that a democracy is successful when it has a strong civil society.

With the founding of academies, German Protestantism achieved perhaps the most important innovation after the Second World War. The work of the academies connects the church with society and, conversely, creates the opportunity for social actors to come into contact with the church. 40 percent of the participants in our events do not belong to a church. In politics and civil society, the think tanks are regarded as places of trust for fair dialogue.

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The oldest Protestant academy was founded just a few weeks after the end of the Second World War near Stuttgart. Two years later, work began in Tutzing – 30 kilometres south of Munich. Today there are 16 Protestant academies in Germany. I have been Chairman of the Board of this network of Protestant academies in Germany since 2021. Each academy has its own profile. Over the decades, Tutzing has earned a special reputation for the fact that all German chancellors and all German presidents have given important lectures here. And many important impulses have emerged from its work. Perhaps the most important: Egon Bahr developed the motto of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik at a conference in Tutzing in 1963: "Change through rapprochement." The idea of reconciliation with the Eastern European states was controversial in Germany for a long time. In retrospect, it can be said that conferences such as the one in Tutzing, where discussions were both open and controversial, promoted a development that fostered peace, freedom and democracy. For many, the upheaval in Eastern Europe was the result of a development that could be well described by the motto "change through rapprochement". Its success was also due to the fact that there were politicians who were prepared to break new ground.

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, there were many conferences in Tutzing that dealt with the unification of Germany – bringing together people from politics and civil society.

On 31 January 1990, the then German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher developed the so-called "Tutzing Formula" at a conference at the Academy. He proclaimed that NATO should rule out "an expansion of its territory to the east, i.e. closer to the Soviet borders". Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly invoked the fact that the West had broken this alleged promise. At those times, however, the Warsaw Pact states were not yet independent.

When the state of Yugoslavia disintegrated, the various opposition movements met on neutral ground in Tutzing. And since 2015, we have regularly organized conferences for civil society actors from Ukraine and the countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

Pro Asyl was founded in Tutzing in 1986, the initiative of the then Deputy Director of the Academy. Pro Asyl is an independent voice raised for human rights and refugee protection in Germany and Europe. And we repeatedly organize conferences with stakeholders who often have very different opinions, for example, between business and trade unions, in order to develop model projects.

In our work, we bring together people from politics, business, culture, science media and the church. Academies see themselves as a place of education and an encounter with the Christian faith. With our work, we want to make opinion-forming possible. Through discourse, we promote the search for solutions in civil society. Our work is interdisciplinary, intercultural and international. Our work is characterized by the idea of developing compromises and finding consensus. And we are committed to combating nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia.

All Protestant academies in Germany are based on the conviction that Protestantism bears a special responsibility for shaping a democratic Germany after its failure under National Socialism. Protestant academy work takes place in a variety of formats – there are panel discussions, open conferences, closed specialist and background discussions, study trips lasting several days, exhibitions, digital workshops and much more.

From a Protestant perspective and with a recognizable focus on the goals of the church's global responsibility, these academies contribute to debates on global justice, peace ethics, cohesion in democracy, the culture of remembrance, asylum policy, artificial intelligence, ecological transformation, social inequality, climate and energy policy, and much more. The cultural work of the Protestant academies seeks a dialogue with contemporary art, literature, film, theatre and its protagonists against the backdrop of a long and varied relationship between the church and culture. As places of reflective spirituality, the academies encourage people to get involved, take responsibility and promote reconciliation.

The Protestant Academies are in contact with political decision-makers, civil society groups and individuals who often belong to the religiously distanced or secular milieus, but who nevertheless have expectations of the role of the churches in civil society and in the promotion of democracy. Through their own conferences and project work, and by participating in the discourses of others, the academies reach people who are not reached by the work of the churches in their local communities.

Actors from politics, business and civil society value the Protestant academies as a forum for very different perspectives from discussion partners who rarely sit down at the same table.

The Protestant academies are perceived by secular partners as actors who have the knowledge and ability to understand religion and religions and to mediate in secular contexts. They have contacts with other religious communities and a wealth of experience with various forms of trans-religious dialogue.

Discourse is the most important element of Protestant academy work. The outcome of discourse and debate is open. The Protestant academies try to set the tone, particularly in transformation processes, by focusing on certain topics, introducing their own positions and advocating freedom, peace, reconciliation, justice and the integrity of creation on the basis of their Christian faith. Current debates in the media and society are primarily determined by emotions, which must be recognized and addressed as such. In the academies, this is achieved through a unique climate of discourse that is characterized by hospitality, attentiveness and mutual respect. Of great importance is the inviting atmosphere of the conference venues, the feeling of being welcome and the space that is available here for encounters and discussions that go beyond factual debates.

The Protestant Academies attach great importance to not stopping at the analysis of social realities and grievances. Rather, in a second step, they always want to awaken a sense of the possible – what could be that is not yet? – and at the same time uphold the confidence that social developments can be changed for the better.

In principle, the academies also focus on the global dimension of transformations, usually in dialogue with other denominations and religions. Key social problems and crises are always transnational, European and global challenges at the same time. Using approaches of “global learning” and incorporating (post-)colonial perspectives, the academies impart skills for finding one’s way in a globalized world and changing perspectives.

The Protestant Academies are focusing on two central topics in the context of the current upheavals: the socio-ecological transformation and digitalization. Man-made climate change makes it clear to us: many things must change. The Protestant academies are therefore looking in depth at key issues relating to shaping an ecological, sustainable and socially just future, such as reducing the unequal global distribution of resources and the associated social inequalities. This also involves the systemic transformation of our economy and way of life towards a culture of sustainability and ways to start here and now. These paths can only be found if analysis, reflection and transformative experimental practice are combined.

As an added value of their own kind, they add something to all of this that Federal President Joachim Gauck formulated on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Protestant Academy Tutzing at its annual reception in 2017: “There must be something special about it – something that distinguishes it from other, secular educational institutions. In any case, I would like such an academy to add something to all the discourses that shape our society – namely what Christian faith can add to life... We know about the greater hope and the greater devotion that people of faith have brought into the world... Because by trusting in God, people have been able to expand their potential... My wish for the academy’s work: counter the culture of anxiety and frustration with a faith-filled yes to the future.”

Thank you for your attention!

FAITHFUL WITNESS IN TROUBLED TIMES: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STATE

Dr Gustav Claassen¹

Introduction

South Africa stands at a moral, economic and social crossroads. With staggering unemployment, widening inequality, corruption fatigue, a weakened judiciary and state institutions faltering under the weight of misgovernance, the faith community is compelled to bear witness – not only through critique but through constructive participation in nation-building.

This submission reflects on three urgent questions to be posed to the South African government. These are not merely political questions – they are theological. They arise from the conviction that God calls all people – especially those in power – to act justly, with love and mercy, and to walk humbly (Micah 6:8). The Church, and indeed the wider religious community, must be a prophetic, pastoral and partnering presence in the public square.

In the spirit of Desmond Tutu’s courage, Beyers Naudé’s costly discipleship, Thabo Makgoba’s moral leadership and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theological resistance, the time has come to speak clearly, act boldly and hope faithfully. From a Reformed theological perspective, this means standing on the foundational belief in God’s sovereignty over all of life, the centrality of justice in covenantal life, and the Church’s vocation as a community of discernment, proclamation and courageous obedience to Christ in the public realm.

¹ Dr Gustav Claassen is a former General Secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church, now an ecumenical consultant.

The Reformed tradition insists that faith is never private, but always public – always called to engage with the world. The Church is not the servant of the state, but neither is it the state’s adversary. It is the conscience of the nation, holding state, market and society accountable to the demands of the Kingdom of God. This prophetic witness is not partisan – it is covenantal. It flows from our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord over every square inch of creation, including the halls of political and economic power.

We do not merely pose these questions to the government – we come with the intention to collaborate, contribute and co-labour in building a just and compassionate society. The Church seeks not only answers, but shared responsibilities and joint action.

Question 1:

How does the government intend to restore ethical governance and public accountability – particularly in the light of ongoing corruption, the weakening of the judiciary, state capture revelations, and failures to prosecute wrongdoing – so that justice is not withheld from the most vulnerable citizens?

Why This Question Matters

The Zondo Commission revealed systemic corruption that undermines public trust and cripples the state’s ability to serve the people – especially the poor. Despite extensive documentation and public outcry, the judiciary has largely failed to bring key perpetrators of state capture to book. The ongoing breakdown of the judicial system, marked by delays, political interference and an alarming lack of prosecutions, weakens the rule of law. The state’s inability to act against high-level corruption signals institutional decay and judicial vulnerability, which undermines democracy.

Theological and Historical Witness

In Reformed theology, justice is not an optional add-on – it is a reflection of God’s holy character and an essential dimension of public life. The legitimacy of any government is contingent upon its service to justice, truth, and the common good. John Calvin taught that magistrates are to be held accountable by both the law and the people, for they govern as stewards before God. When rulers violate the covenant of justice, the Church is not merely permitted but obligated to protest in word and deed.

Beyers Naudé embodied this tradition when he defied apartheid heresy in the name of true obedience to Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer did likewise in Nazi Germany. Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s theology of restorative justice, rooted in the Gospel and the Imago Dei, remains a powerful call to governmental accountability.

The Reformed tradition further affirms that the Church's prophetic voice must be joined by diaconal action. Protest must lead to praxis. The Church must contribute toward rebuilding trust and reimagining ethical governance in South Africa.

Ecumenical Role

Faith communities can:

- Form ecumenical ethical review boards for public procurement and development projects;
- Support whistleblowers and victims of state capture through pastoral care and legal aid;
- Convene annual integrity forums in partnership with civil society and Chapter 9 institutions;
- Partner with public institutions in leadership development and ethical formation.

Question 2:

What structural economic reforms will the government implement to enable inclusive economic growth, job creation and investment – especially given the continued economic stagnation, high unemployment, declining investment and laws that constrain growth in the light of the growing population?

Why This Question Matters

Over 8.2 million South Africans are unemployed. The economic model privileges short-term redistribution over long-term productivity. Infrastructure is collapsing. Investment is declining and regulatory frameworks – including labour and procurement laws – are deterring local and foreign investment. The result is economic stagnation, while the population continues to grow, threatening the sustainability of state services. South Africa's economic growth forecast stands at a concerning 1.0% for the year, while global growth is projected at 3% – highlighting the urgency for structural reform and inclusive economic strategy.

Theological and Historical Witness

The Reformed tradition teaches that work is not only a social necessity but a spiritual calling (*vocatio*) from God, meant to cultivate creation, serve one's neighbour and glorify the Creator. Economic injustice, unemployment and exclusion from productive labour are therefore not only policy failures – they are violations of the created order and distortions of God's intent for human dignity.

Calvin's insistence on the dignity of labour, and the Protestant ethic of stewardship, remind us that economies are not abstract systems; they are moral arenas in which faith is either

lived out or denied. Bonhoeffer emphasized that the Church must stand where God stands – in solidarity with the poor, the unemployed and the economically excluded.

The Reformed vision of the Kingdom includes a just economy that provides meaningful work, equitable access to opportunity and protection of the vulnerable. In this light, we call for an economy of justice, not patronage – an economy of solidarity, not exploitation.

Ecumenical Role

Faith communities can:

- Promote values-based entrepreneurship, social enterprises and worker cooperatives;
- Launch interfaith development platforms to pool resources for sustainable livelihoods;
- Offer vocational training and business mentoring through church-based initiatives;
- Advocate for economic literacy campaigns and public budgets that favour the vulnerable.

Question 3:

In what tangible ways will the government partner with civil society – including faith communities – to build a compassionate, equitable society that protects the dignity and rights of all, regardless of race, gender, class or nationality, amid the country's worsening geopolitical standing and increased internal security vulnerabilities?

Why This Question Matters

The political crisis is also a moral and spiritual crisis. Xenophobia, racism, division, despair and anger fester in the vacuum of leadership. South Africa's geopolitical standing has weakened and security vulnerabilities – such as porous borders, organised crime and deteriorating community safety – threaten national cohesion. Notably, South Africa now records one of the highest murder rates in the world, with over 45 murders per 100,000 people annually, equating to approximately 89 lives lost each day. This staggering level of violence undermines the dignity of life, corrodes trust in public safety institutions and sows fear across all communities. Compounding this crisis is South Africa's devastating epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV), with an estimated seven women killed by their partners each day and tens of thousands of cases of sexual assault reported annually. These twin scourges of violent crime and GBV demand urgent moral and institutional response. A compassionate and united South Africa cannot be legislated into being; it must be formed in the soul of the nation through narrative, memory and covenant.

Theological and Historical Witness

The doctrine of the Imago Dei declares that every human being is made in God's image and is therefore entitled to respect, inclusion and care. In Reformed ethics, this entails

a communal vocation of solidarity, where justice is personal and political, spiritual and systemic.

The covenantal vision of the Reformed tradition insists that society must be ordered toward mutual responsibility. *Ubuntu* theology, popularised by Tutu, and deeply compatible with Reformed covenantalism, teaches that "a person is a person through others."

Bonhoeffer's image of the Church as "the community for others" compels us to be agents of reconciliation and bearers of hope in a fragmented society. The Church is called to embody the Kingdom by living justly, walking humbly and loving across boundaries.

Ecumenical Role

Faith communities can:

- Establish gender-based violence (GBV) response ministries within local congregations, offering pastoral care, referrals to shelters and accompaniment for survivors during legal processes;
- Facilitate theological education and preaching resources that affirm the dignity of women and challenge patriarchal attitudes that enable abuse;
- Launch community-based men's initiatives to engage men and boys in dismantling cultures of violence and promoting non-violent models of masculinity;
- Organise Truth and Memory Circles to foster reconciliation in divided communities;
- Serve as bridges between immigrants and locals, combatting xenophobia and promoting human dignity;
- Partner in local service delivery projects in health, housing and education;
- Engage in joint planning with local municipalities for social development projects;
- Monitor and support initiatives that enhance border integrity and community safety.

Global Relevance and G20 Context

South Africa's internal renewal cannot be separated from its global responsibilities. In a shifting geopolitical context where development aid is declining, security risks are rising and the multilateral order is fragmenting, faith communities can:

- Champion the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a moral and theological perspective;
- Monitor the impact of international economic policies on civil society resilience;
- Advocate for pandemic preparedness, health equity and climate justice as a spiritual imperative;
- Collaborate with international ecumenical partners to ensure South Africa's development aligns with justice and global solidarity.

Conclusion

The time for polite silence is over. We must, like Bonhoeffer, like Tutu, like Naudé, and like Makgoba, be willing to confront uncomfortable truths – not in bitterness, but in love. We must echo the prayer of Psalm 85:10:

“Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.”

We call on the South African government to hear these questions not as accusations, but as invitations to accountability, to partnership and to hope.

We, the faith communities, stand ready not only to ask but to act. We are prepared to journey alongside all sectors of society in rebuilding our nation’s moral and institutional infrastructure. Rooted in the deep soil of the Reformed tradition, we proclaim that Christ is Lord – and therefore justice must prevail, hope must rise and the voices of the poor must be heard. May our democracy deepen, may human dignity be restored, and may “justice roll down like waters” (Amos 5:24).

GAMAGARA CARES INITIATIVE: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE KUMBA IRON ORE’S SISHEN MINE, FAITH COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTHERN CAPE AND THE CDDC TRUST

Dr Marlene Mahokoto and Mr Charl Fredericks¹

Background and Rationale

Gamagara Cares is an initiative of Faith Leaders in the Gamagara Local Municipality in the Northern Cape, in partnership with Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen Mine and the Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust (CDDC Trust). This partnership was established to help address the socio-economic challenges facing the Northern Cape. These challenges that are experienced across South Africa, require collaborative and sustained efforts from a diverse range of stakeholders.

The National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD), which serves as the implementation arm of the CDDC Trust, firmly believes that faith-based communities must be integral partners in any strategy for sustainable socio-economic transformation. These communities have an unmatched footprint across South Africa, including deep access into rural and underserved areas. Faith communities are also trusted institutions in local communities. Crucially, faith-based organisations often remain active in their communities even when external funding ends—providing consistent spiritual, emotional, and physical support to congregants and the broader public. When these communities take ownership of development initiatives, they can better prioritise interventions that reflect their specific needs.

¹ Dr Marlene Mahokoto and Mr Charl Fredericks are senior Programme Managers in the CDDC Trust.

Context: Challenges facing Mining Communities

Mining activities and their influence on local towns and communities face several challenges – some related to specific mining operations (where smart mining technology seeks to minimize environmental impact and consequences for water quality for instance). Others have to do with the dynamics of the influx of employment seekers (especially youth) in a general context of unemployment in the country and the challenges of rendering health, social services, and training opportunities locally. Given its economic prominence, the mine is often expected to be the primary driver of development—a burden too large for any one entity to carry alone.

The Northern Cape Province also face challenges in relation to food security. According to a report from Statistics South Africa², released in February 2025, approximately 20% of households (almost one out of five) in the country experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. The report reflects that 34.5% of the households that experienced moderate to severe food insecurity resided in the Northern Cape Province, as the highest proportion across any province in the country.

The Gamagara Cares Initiative: Purpose and Impact

The Gamagara Cares Initiative empowers faith communities through training, support, and the implementation of various projects. As a feature of the initiative, communities are empowered to be partners in their own development (not mere beneficiaries), as community members identify their local challenges, they formulate the approaches or solutions to such challenges, and they implement the projects that are aimed at addressing their challenges. Local ownership is fostered in various stage.

Some of the areas that these projects address are education and training, the formation of positive values, substance abuse prevention and awareness, arts and culture, the cleaning of local environments, water access and sustainability. One of the projects with a focus on food security cultivated a vegetable garden in the backyard of the local bishop's home, that provided vegetables for local consumption by members and for sale to suppliers. It was noted that this vegetable garden was not as susceptible to theft and vandalism, when compared to vegetable gardens in other locations. Another project with a focus on health and wellness included the option for elderly persons to collect their medication at a local church in close proximity to their homes, implemented in partnership with the local clinic.

In addition, the initiative seeks to build social capital by nurturing networks of collaboration within communities and between key partners. This approach ensures that projects align with local needs and have the buy-in of all stakeholders, including the Sishen Mine and surrounding communities.

² Statistics South Africa. 2025. *Food security in South Africa in 2019, 2022 and 2023: Evidence from the General Household Survey. Statistics South Africa Report - 03-10-28, 27 February 2025.* Available: https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=03-10-28 and <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-10-28/03-10-28.pdf>.

The Role of Dialogue and Partnership

The vision of Sishen Mine—to be a trusted, long-term development partner—is both ethical and essential. Mutual trust and social stability can only be built through regular dialogues and consultations, joint priority-setting as well as agreements on a joint roadmap for implementation (including monitoring progress and impact) of programmes. Ultimately trust and cooperation are built by working together as stakeholders in the implementation of a shared vision.

NRASD's Contribution and Vision

The NRASD, supported by academic institutions and expert associates, brings over 30 years of experience in facilitating development partnerships—both locally and internationally. We are a founding member of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) – of which several G7 countries are members. We also have experience of working in mining communities, with mining partners, and learned from both successes and challenges.

Although our expertise includes working closely with faith communities and NGOs, we have a long history of fostering formal partnerships with international agencies (The Global Fund), business partners, government agencies (from the presidency right down to provincial and local governments) – bringing alternative expertise and resources to joint programmes – that can complement and strengthen the inputs and contributions made by the mine, strengthening long-term sustainability.

Looking Ahead: A Scalable Model for Development

Our aspiration is to use the Gamagara Cares Initiative as a blueprint—a model of integrated, community-centered development that can be adapted and replicated across other mining towns and underserved areas in South Africa.

By strengthening existing partnerships and values, we believe this initiative can demonstrate how faith, industry, civil society, and government can work together to build thriving, resilient communities.



PART 2

IF 20 G20 INTERFAITH FORUM CONTRIBUTIONS

10-14 August 2025

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS IN ADDRESSING HUNGER AND POVERTY - SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES

Dr Renier Koegelenberg'

Thesis/question:

Why are people (especially children) dying of hunger globally, and in South Africa?

How do we deal with this moral scandal, when:

- There is enough funding, resources available to prevent it?
- There is enough excellent research being done to prove and analyse this scandal by excellent Units at Universities and NGOs?
- There are enough examples and case studies of faith-based, NGO and business networks that successfully address food security and holistic support to vulnerable families – that can be scaled up?

Is it not simply a question of priorities; a lack of political will, and often the wrong/bad allocation of national resources?²

Who should take responsibility?

¹ Dr Renier Koegelenberg is the CEO of the CDDC Trust. See IF20 webinar: The role of Inter-religious actors in addressing Hunger and Poverty, 10 July 2025; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Mf7xo8m9E>

² Subtext for South Africa: SA annual income is approximately R2 trillion; 84% is spent on two line items: public sector wages (at least 55000 public servants earns more than R1 million annually – substantially more than countries with comparable economies); and servicing of debt. South Africa's GDP is 0.36% of global GDP – but we have the largest Cabinet of Ministers (32) and Deputy ministers (43) with lucrative benefits. SABC news, 1 July 2024.

Introduction

Global Context

UN Sustainable Development Goals [SDG2; by 2030, Zero Hunger).

UN Report: The State of food security and nutrition in the world 2024;³

Key Messages [selected]

- The world is still far off track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero Hunger, with the global prevalence of undernourishment persisting at nearly the same level for three consecutive years after having risen sharply in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Between 713 and 757 million people may have faced hunger in 2023 – one out of 11 people in the world, and one out of every five in Africa.** Hunger is still on the rise in Africa, but it has remained relatively unchanged in Asia, while notable progress has been made in the Latin American and Caribbean region
- Focusing on economic access to nutritious foods, updated and improved estimates show that **more than one-third of people in the world** – about 2.8 billion – **could not afford a healthy diet in 2022.**
- It is projected that **582 million people will be chronically undernourished at the end of the decade, more than half of them in Africa.**
- Improvements in dealing with stunting, wasting and exclusive breastfeeding lay the groundwork for children to achieve their full potential for growth and development, but rising rates of obesity – exacerbating the double burden of malnutrition – foreshadow major challenges for the health and well-being of all age groups. Double-duty actions are needed which **simultaneously tackle undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity by leveraging the common drivers shared by all forms of malnutrition.**

South African Context [Prof. Julian May & HSRC report]⁴

- **UN Food systems profile 2022:** The South African food system is characterized by **a paradox**. The country is in the upper-middle-income group ... is the most industrialized in Africa ... *has a positive food balance. However, persistence of food and nutrition insecurity despite the availability of sufficient food and public health.*

³ UN Report: The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms, Rome 2024.

⁴ <https://theconversation.com/south-africas-malnutrition-crisis-why-a-cheaper-basket-of-healthy-food-is-the-answer-250308>

- **NRASD Statement: Ending Child Hunger**, highlighting acute shortages of social workers [approximately 50,000] and medical staff [1,330 medical doctors and 10,000 nurses].

But it is grappling with a triple burden of malnutrition (comprising under-nutrition and hunger), micronutrient deficiencies and unhealthy diets.

According to the most recent Food and Nutrition Security Survey, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC),⁵ food insecurity affects 63.5% of households in the country – 17.5% of them severely. Food insecurity is not just a matter of inadequate access to food. It is deeply intertwined with child malnutrition, meaning that food security is not just about having enough food; it's about having nourishing food for children.

The link between household food insecurity and child malnutrition is stark. Among households with at least one child under the age of 5 suffering from stunting, food insecurity rates reach 83.3%.

The **South African Early Childhood Review 2024**⁶ reinforces these findings. This is an annual review of child development produced by the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana, an early childhood development NGO. **It highlights a rise in child malnutrition, particularly severe acute malnutrition. Between 2020 and 2023, these cases increased by 33%, with 15,000 children requiring hospitalisation in 2022/23 alone.**

Alarmingly, **1,000 children die each year due to preventable acute malnutrition.** And 2.7 million children under 6 live in households where poverty levels prevent their basic nutritional needs from being met. Food poverty rates have worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic. Food inflation has exacerbated the crisis.

The survey indicates that 28.8% of children under the age of 5 suffer from stunting, an indicator of chronic undernutrition. It means children are below the height expected for their age.

Based on our extensive research experience, policy advice and activism in food security, we argue that food insecurity transcends mere food supply issues. It is deeply intertwined with systemic inequality, food system dynamics, poverty and failures in policy.

Tackling these crises will need a profound change in the approach to food and nutrition security. It requires a shift from temporary relief measures such as the social relief of distress grant to sustainable, structural solutions that lower the

⁵ https://www.dalrrd.gov.za/images/Newsroom/notices/national-food-and-nutrition-security-survey-report_-south-africa.pdf

⁶ <https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/SA-early-childhood-review-2024-FINAL.pdf>

cost of a healthy food basket. That would mean no child would have to search for sustenance in refuse bins.

The grants include social grants: About 58% of children aged 14 and younger receive social grants, primarily through the child support grant ... but the grants are not enough to alleviate food insecurity.

What needs to be done? The HSRC and South Africa Early Childhood Review 2024 highlight the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral solutions.⁷

- Increase the value of the child support grant, currently R530 (US\$28) a month, to align with the cost of a thrifty healthy basket of R945 (US\$51).
- Ensure infants and young children are enrolled in the child support grant from birth through better collaboration between the Departments of Health, Home Affairs and Social Development. The recent reduction in the visa backlog shows what can be achieved.
- Establish the national multi-sectoral food security coordination body proposed in the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan to streamline policies across different government departments. Brazil followed a similar approach with success.
- Expand early childhood development nutrition programmes, register informal early childhood development centres, and increase subsidies to improve food provision in these centres.
- Address gender inequalities in food security by ensuring better economic opportunities for women engaged in food trade, including street vending, who are more likely to be heads of households.
- Expand community-based health services, using community health workers to monitor child growth and nutrition at the household level.
- Address neglected dimensions of food insecurity.
- For example, poverty negatively affects caregivers' mental health, which in turn affects child nutrition. Caregivers experiencing food insecurity have higher levels of depression and hopelessness. This potentially affects their capacity to provide the care and attention that children require. Expanding income support and community health services to caregivers can mitigate this cycle.
- Disabled children and caregivers are another example. They face additional challenges and must be specifically targeted for tailored support.
- Finally, children of seasonal farmworkers are highly vulnerable when their caregivers are without employment and not receiving unemployment insurance fund payments. Immediate food relief can prevent fluctuations in the quality and quantity of their diets.

Julian May, Director DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape

⁷ <https://theconversation.com/south-africas-malnutrition-crisis-why-a-cheaper-basket-of-healthy-food-is-the-answer-250308>

HOW do religious actors respond to Hunger and poverty?

Fundamental considerations

- Our Creator created all of us ... this is the basis of the conviction that every human being has the same inviolable human dignity. In our Christian tradition we believe that *every* human being is created equally in the image of God. How people are treated is no longer based primarily on power, but on a right that protects all people equally.⁸
- **Bishop Sipuka** “Human dignity and human development – our rationale for cooperation” (PaRD conference, 3 September 2020). “The purpose of PaRD: ... between the government and churches, between development NGOs and churches, and between funders and churches there is a common goal of improving the lives of people. It was in recognition of **this common goal for humanity** that the Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) was founded in Berlin ... we find ourselves in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. It is one of those few moments in human life where a calamity makes us realise that regardless of wealth, class, race and age, we are all feeble beings with no control of life and so we are brought into solidarity”.⁹

Practical considerations: The unique strength of faith communities

In general: churches and faith communities, founded on their faith and values, respond to needs in society food programmes, orphan programmes, schools, founded universities and training colleges, hospitals – short term and long term.

- **Location:** they are based in local communities – especially in hard-to-reach areas; know the strengths and weaknesses of community, trusted by community,
- **Own contributions:** raise their own resources, utilize volunteers, use their own infrastructure, access to regional and global networks; not “fly by night” institutions – but characterized by resilience and long-term commitment.
- **Technical skills and many years of practical experience** of working with vulnerable communities and families.
- **Wide spectrum of services:** from emergency, from relief to more sustainable community development programmes (food gardening; health programmes).
- **Holistic approach:** needs of person – material (food), health, psychological, pastoral – church and faith communities reach out to others. (Social muscle

⁸ Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World – a global ecumenical perspective

⁹ Bishop Sipuka paper presented at BishopsCourt, Cape Town – Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond, a NCLC and IF20 Colloquium, 12 June 2025

of society, not focused on itself, serve others. Church as Platform (Bonhoeffer and Seabright).

- **Leadership examples** based on work of faith communities – long term impact; how do you measure impact? [Examples of public leaders whose studies were funded by religious leaders (Prof. Thuli Madonsela, former SA Public Protector; Chief Justice Zondo, former Chief Justice; Dr Immanuel Taban, internationally known pulmonologist)]
- **Power of convening – of dialogue**, of influencing, of advocacy, to correct faulty policies.
- **Policies and agreements that fail the poor** [internationally and in South Africa] – that hinders partnerships and cooperation, even if intentions may be good (sometimes).

Bishop Sipuka conclusion, Bishops court, 12 June 2025¹⁰

“Today, I urge our government to prioritise food security on the G20 agenda. More importantly, I challenge all of us to rethink how we can work together to restore dignity to our people. This is not just about feeding the hungry; it’s about reclaiming our sense of ubuntu and transforming our communities from being mere recipients of aid to becoming active producers...

The path forward requires us to shift from dependency to dignity. **Food security is not just about calories; it’s about ubuntu, our interconnected humanity.** When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our ubuntu is broken.

As we take on the G20 presidency, we have inherited Brazil’s Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. As religious leaders, we must ensure our government translates this international commitment into concrete policies and programs that address the food insecurity crisis ...facing 15 million South Africans and in our African region, beyond our borders.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. I believe our people are ready for this change.”

The real question is: Are we as Church [and faith] leaders prepared to lead them there?

¹⁰ Bishop Sipuka paper presented at Bishops court, Cape Town – Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond, a NCLC and IF20 Colloquium, 12 June 2025.

UBUNTU IN ACTION - FOCUS ON VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES, LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND¹

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Introduction

It is a great privilege to welcome you in one of the most beautiful cities of the world to this important international Interfaith Forum in the year of South Africa's G20 leadership.

The importance of the G20 summits as a global forum has been underlined by their response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the broadening of their agenda to include the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The **G20 Interfaith Forum** was launched in 2014 during the summit in Australia. With 84% of the world's population affiliated with a religious faith, this forum can reflect, influence and shape the values and actions of people in our world. It is therefore an indispensable voice in the global debate.

The Forum draws on the global work of many faith communities that address the challenges and priorities of global agendas. Although it is not part of the formal "constellation" of engagement groups around the G20, it partners and works closely with several of the formal groups, such as the C20 (civil society) and T20 (think tank) meetings.²

However, the **distinctive contribution** of the religious sector, of faith communities, is not based on our numbers but rather on **our core values which shape our focus and actions**. In South Africa, in continuity with last year's theme of "leaving no one behind," we focus on **the needs of the most vulnerable in our society**. In our Christian tradition, we rely on the passage in John's Gospel (10:10), where the teacher we follow says, "I have come that you may have abundant life" – that means we aspire to an abundant life **really for all**, not only for those with powerful connections in politics or business.

¹ Opening address, IF 20 G20 Interfaith Forum, 10 August, Cape Town

² Katherine Marshall, Vice President G20 Interfaith Association: Brasilia: Leave No one Behind. The G20 Interfaith Forum – our journey. August 20, 2024

It is our shared responsibility to remind a world which is in a state of war and turmoil that – regardless of geopolitical alliances or the divides between North and South, between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and/or powerless – we have a shared origin and a common destiny: we are all part of God’s creation and created by God to love and serve one another.

We live in a world that we have not created, and for a very short time. We are only stewards of God's creation. The global climate crisis and the AIDS and Covid-19 pandemics underlined our fundamental connectedness, and highlighted the imperative that that we must seek global solutions for health challenges, poverty and food insecurity, and promote economic development for all.

South Africa’s G20 Presidency focus³

The South African government has located its Presidency of the G20 this year in a world, and I quote, that “is facing a series of overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises, including climate change, underdevelopment, inequality, poverty, hunger, unemployment, technological changes and geopolitical instability”. And this is at a time when there are only five years to go before the deadline to reach the UN's the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

Although our faith is always fundamentally about more than any developmental agenda, more than any current political or economic ideology, we support the SDGs because we are convinced that they are in line with God's vision for us and our world.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highlighted that only 12% of the SDG targets are currently on track to being met. About half of the goals call for more substantial progress if they are to be reached, and more than 30% have either stalled or been reversed. Only a fundamental shift in approach and accelerated implementation will be able to achieve them.

In this context South Africa’s Presidency has identified **inequality** as one of the key causes of the lack of progress. Again, I quote: “Inequality poses a significant threat to global economic growth, development, and stability, as the disparities in wealth and development within and between countries are both unjust and unsustainable. Inequality and its deleterious consequences are especially evident in the Global South.”

It further highlights the “lack of predictable and sustainable financing for development”, which is exacerbated by the high levels of sovereign debt, and the conflict between developmental programmes and the servicing of debt.⁵

South Africa has declared that it aims, and again I quote, “to address these urgent challenges by building partnerships across all sectors of society, acting in the interests of our shared

³ <https://g20.org/g20-south-africa/g20-presidency/>.

³ Mr Antonio Guterres, the Special Edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Progress Report on 25 April 2023; <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>.

⁵ <https://g20.org/g20-south-africa/g20-presidency/>

humanity. ***In the spirit of Ubuntu, we recognise that individual nations cannot thrive in isolation.*** Countries that attempt to prosper alone amid widespread poverty and underdevelopment contradict the essence of Ubuntu and our collective humanity. This understanding reflects the transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, which are dedicated to **ensuring that no one is left behind**.⁵

South Africa has embraced the theme **“Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability”** to tackle the multiple global challenges we are facing: “Through **solidarity**,” we say, “we can create an inclusive future centred on people. Solidarity will allow us to develop our societies in a way that reflects our shared humanity. In our interconnected world, the challenges faced by one nation impact all nations.”

Furthermore, “by promoting **equality**, we strive to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities for all individuals and nations, regardless of their economic status, gender, race, geographic location or any other characteristic.”

And finally, **Sustainability** involves meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Furthermore, looking at the process of how we achieve our goals, our government highlights how decision-making has traditionally worked best in Africa. It says: “Guided by the spirit of Ubuntu, decision-making and governance in traditional African societies has, in the main, operated by way of consensus for what is in the best interest of all.”⁷

South African IF20 focus points

In this year's deliberations, we have inherited Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. This is a unique opportunity for us to lead by example. As religious leaders, ***we must ensure that our governments translate this international commitment into concrete policies and programs*** that address the food insecurity crisis facing millions of people world-wide.⁸ At an IF20 webinar on 10 July this year—a seminar which focussed on the role of Inter-religious actors in addressing Hunger and Poverty, Renier Koegelenberg asked:

Why are people (especially children) dying of hunger globally, and in South Africa? How do we deal with this moral scandal, when:

There are enough funding and resources available to prevent it;

There is enough excellent research being done to address this scandal by excellent units at universities and NGOs;

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bishop Dr Sithembale Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025.

There are enough examples and case studies of faith-based, NGO and business networks that successfully address food security and holistic support to vulnerable families – that can be scaled up.⁹

Turning to why, having identified that hunger can be overcome, we have not done it, we need to ask, as Renier did:

Is it not simply a question of priorities, a lack of political will, and often the wrong/bad allocation of national resources?

If our values shape our priorities, we cannot tolerate this scandal. In a world focused on “wealth creation” and “wealth management” (mostly for a selected few), we as faith leaders must focus on our common humanity, and abundant life for all.

At a recent colloquium I co-hosted in Cape Town,¹⁰ Katherine Marshall summarized the priority areas of focus as follows:¹¹

1.1 Food security and poverty. Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 builds on global faith inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD (International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision, and countless others.

In some of the IF20 publications available, there are numerous examples of international, regional and local projects initiated by faith leaders and faith communities.

1.2 Economic and Financial Action. Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, particularly in Africa, and hinder poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services like education, health care, water supply, disaster response, and job creation. Religious communities link economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year.

1.3 Addressing interreligious tensions. This can be done through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters. The foundational Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) programme and Arigatou International’s Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programmes have the potential to strengthen regional

⁹ See IF20 webinar: The role of Inter-religious actors in addressing Hunger and Poverty, 10 July 2025; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Mf7xo8m9E>

¹⁰ NCLC and IF20 colloquium, 12-13 June 2025: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

¹¹ Katherine Marshall, “G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025, Bishopscourt colloquium, 12 June 2025.

and global approaches and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and action to support women, children and families – for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities and fair, equitable treatment.

1.4 Migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, and modern slavery present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20's continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20's longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.

1.5 Disaster prevention, response, recovery. Active religious involvement, as first responders, at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis, play vital roles. Disaster relief is closely tied to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate-induced movements and migration, underlining the needed focus on prevention, building resilience and meaningful capacities to respond.

As South Africans, our appeal is to our own President, Cyril Ramaphosa, and other government leaders also to prioritize these agenda points.

The Ubuntu Challenge: meaningful partnerships

At our recent Cape Town Colloquium, Bishop Sitembele Sipuka, President of the South African Council of Churches, emphasized that "Food security is not just about calories; it's about ubuntu, **our interconnected humanity**. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our ubuntu is broken..."

Again, the precepts of Ubuntu offer a solution. When government, business, faith communities, and citizens work together with mutual respect and shared responsibility, when we treat people as agents rather than objects, and when we build systems that empower rather than create dependency, then we restore not just food security, but human dignity."¹²

Therefore, our appeal should be:

Firstly, to our governments: Use the G20 platform to champion not just emergency relief, but sustainable food systems that empower people. Learn from Brazil's success, but adapt

¹² Bishop Dr Sitembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025.

solutions to our African context. Part of this must include providing enough budgetary allocations for agriculture in national budgets.

Address the critical issue of partnership between government and civil society. A failure to work together undermines the effectiveness of social development programmes, security initiatives. Too often, our government adopts an approach of wanting to “do it alone,” systematically excluding churches and faith communities from programme implementation, opting for isolation over collaboration.

Faith communities have the organizational structure and unwavering commitment to provide social services and advance the development that governments desperately need. We are present in every corner of our country—in cities and in the most remote rural areas where government services barely reach. More importantly, we have deep personal connections with communities that most government officials cannot replicate. Instead of viewing faith communities as competitors or obstacles, governments should provide funding and support to leverage our existing infrastructure and community trust.

Secondly, our appeal should be to Business Leaders: It is time to go beyond just making donations; let us focus on making real investments. Partner with our communities to help build local capacity and create sustainable livelihoods. There are numerous partnerships between business and NGOs, between business and faith-based community development programmes: the work of the CDDC Trust and Kumba Iron Ore mine in our Northern Cape mining region – focusing on food security and support to vulnerable families, are good examples.

Thirdly, let us appeal to our own Faith Communities: We have a vital role to play in shifting from dependency to empowerment. Our moral authority comes with a practical responsibility to lead this change.

Fourthly, an appeal to Our People: It is time to reclaim your dignity as producers, not just consumers. The land that once sustained our ancestors can nourish us again.

As we join the G20 process and work on our national development agenda, let us remember that our success will not be measured by the size of our grants or how efficiently we deliver services. Instead, it will be about whether our children can hold their heads high, knowing they live in communities that produce, create, and sustain themselves.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. Our people are ready for this change.

The real question is: Are we, as Church and faith leaders, prepared to lead them there?

Conclusion

If the world fails to achieve the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – which seems almost certain right now – this will not be due to the lack of numerous and costly high-level governmental summits, or of high-level ministerial meetings, different tracks, task forces, working groups and engagement groups. Nor will it be for the lack experts and technical advisors. It will be a result of the lack of commitment to set the correct priorities and to build meaningful partnerships.

The world does not only need a new technical “developmental paradigm” to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. It rather needs a new “heart”: a correction of priorities based on values, on ethical, servant leadership – not only to “tolerate” your neighbour, but to love your neighbour as you love yourself; caring for our environment, caring for future generations, so that they too can prosper! This is real stewardship, ethical leadership. The reformer Martin Luther defined sin as “being bent on your own personal needs,” whereas real freedom means to serve the needs of others.

As the first country in the “Global South” to host the G20, bringing North and South, East and West agendas together, we are challenged to transcend historic ideological differences and legacies to advance real democracy and human dignity.¹³

Especially in the Global South we should not be hypocritical. We cannot expect change only from the rich Global North; we need to be self-critical about conditions and priorities within our own countries and regions. Our political elites and those close to power live in a luxury bubble of affluence, absorbing national resources, while most of their people, especially children and women, struggle to survive, to feed themselves, to find jobs.

It is our moral duty to speak out against hate, racism, the instrumentalization of different faiths for political reasons and nationalist ideologies that exclude others – and channel our energy and wisdom to life-giving programmes that foster the dignity and abundant life of all.¹⁴

In our current global context, amidst increased geo-global political tensions and wars raging in Ukraine and Russia, the Middle East, Sudan and other parts of Africa, more and being channelled into weapons production and security arrangements, this at the expense of health and social programmes.

Therefore, our plea as faith leaders to global leaders is to “Put People First” – pump resources into “life-enhancing programmes” and strengthen peace-making efforts to stop violent conflicts.¹⁵

¹³ See our NCLC Bishops court Statement, 13 June 2025, Cape Town: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

¹⁴ See my recent message to G20 Interfaith/PaRD meeting in Brasilia Forum, 22 August 2024.

¹⁵ Makgoba UNAIDS virtual address, UNAIDS at AIDS2024, the 25th International AIDS Conference, Munich, 20 July 2024

Beyond our moral role as faith leaders lies the reality that our faith networks are some of the most trusted, efficient partners that reach all people at grassroots level. That is why we appeal to political and business leaders to work and partner with us – after all, we are all instruments in God’s hands.

Our mission, as Katherine Marshall told us, is “to highlight the common themes, and above all to keep a laser focus on the problems of the most vulnerable, particularly children, women, refugees, the hungry, and too many other groups”.¹⁶

Our faith therefore demands of us that worship should drive us from our knees, and send us out from our churches, our mosques and our temples to engage the world and ensure that our Creator’s intention is fulfilled.¹⁷

May our Creator bless this gathering, and all those gathered.

Once again, welcome to Cape Town.

¹⁶ Katherine Marshall, Bishops court, 12 June 2025.

¹⁷ See my address to Communities of Faith Breakfast: building Partnerships for a One-Community Response to HIV, Prioritizing Children in the HIV Response, hosted by UNAIDS, Washington.

FROM WORDS TO WITNESS: OUR COVENANT OF ACTION¹

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka²

Grace and peace to you all, beloved servants of humanity.

As we prepare to leave this sacred gathering, I am reminded of the African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." These four days in Cape Town have shown us that we—Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, traditional African spiritualists, and all faith traditions represented here—have chosen to go far together.

The Ubuntu Revelation

We came to Cape Town under the banner of "Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities." Ubuntu has taught us that our humanity is interconnected—"I am because we are." But this week, we have discovered something profound: Ubuntu is not just philosophy; it is prophecy. It calls us beyond mere acknowledgment of our connectedness to active responsibility for one another's dignity.

When we heard from our Indonesian colleagues about education that cultivates cross-cultural religious literacy, when our Islamic brothers and sisters spoke of justice and peace, when our Christian communities shared about serving the marginalized, when our Jewish traditions reminded us of Jubilee justice, when our Hindu and Buddhist communities spoke of compassion in action – we were not hearing different messages. We were hearing the same divine call in different sacred languages.

The Mirror of Truth

But let me speak with the honesty that our faiths demand. This forum has held up a mirror to our souls, and what we see is both inspiring and convicting. We have confronted uncomfortable truths about ourselves as faith leaders.

Too often, we who claim to serve the God of the poor are viewed with suspicion by those very poor. Why? Because our proximity to power has sometimes made us complicit in systems that perpetuate injustice. It's easy for religious leaders to be co-opted by those

¹ Closing address IF20 G20 Interfaith Forum, 14 August, Cape Town

² Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka is the Catholic Bishop of Mthatha, and President of the South African Council of Churches.

in power for the benefits offered, and in exchange lose our prophetic stance to stand and be the voice of the voiceless. This sometimes results in religious leaders living in mansions while their congregants queue for food parcels; it leads to our institutions accumulating wealth while children in our communities go hungry; it leads to us religious leaders blessing policies that oppress rather than liberate – where we become part of the problem we claim to solve. It leads to some living a very luxurious life at the expense of those poor they claim to love and serve.

Let us ask ourselves: How can we speak against the corruption in governments and corporations, while ignoring the corruption in our own hearts and institutions? If we demand transparency from others, should we not model it ourselves? If we call for justice in society, should we not practise it in our faith communities first?

The Five Pillars of Our Commitment

Over these days, we have examined five critical areas where our faiths must move from rhetoric to reality.

- 1. Food Security and Human Dignity** My wish is that we could commit ourselves not merely to feeding the hungry, but to transforming the systems that create hunger. The World Council of Churches, Caritas organizations, World Vision, Islamic Relief, LDS Charities and countless others are already demonstrating what interfaith cooperation can achieve.

As we conclude this conference and go back to our bases, let us commit to establishing food security projects in every faith community represented here, not as charity that creates dependency, but as empowerment that restores dignity. Let us commit to reviving traditional farming wisdom, establishing community gardens, and building agricultural value chains that honour both creation and Creator.

- 2. Regarding Economic Justice and Debt Cancellation,** my wish is that we could commit to becoming accountability partners in the Jubilee call for debt cancellation. Let us commit to not simply advocating for debt relief, but let us also commit to guaranteeing its integrity and its good use for the benefit of the vulnerable. Through our community networks, let us aspire to establish transparent tracking systems to ensure that cancelled debt reaches the poor, not the corrupt.

The Jewish notion of Jubilee restoration, our Christian communities' moral authority, our Islamic communities' principles of economic justice that prohibit exploitation – together, I hope we can build an "Accountability Covenant" that ensures justice reaches those who need it most.

- 3. From the powerful keynote address on Education,** presented here, we heard how Education is the greatest equaliser – with transformative potential to level the playing field and create opportunities for all, perfectly embodying the themes of solidarity, equality and sustainability that have guided this G20 Interfaith Forum. Quality education and religious education can serve as a means to cultivate cross-cultural religious literacy and eliminate attitudes and behaviours which include hostility towards people of other faiths. As we part, my wish is that we could commit to transforming our educational approaches.

Let us commit to establishing interfaith educational partnerships that teach not just literacy and numeracy, but social, emotional and spiritual intelligence. Through cross-cultural religious literacy, may we be able to help end the devastating wars fought in the name of religion that humiliate, brutalise and kill children and the elderly alike. May our madrasas, our church schools, our temple institutions, our community centres become laboratories of Ubuntu – places where children learn that difference is not division, but a tapestry of diversity created by the pleasure and joy of divine design.

- 4. About Migration and Human Dignity,** I want to note that fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. My hope is that as we part, we could commit to being practical sanctuaries of hope for migrants and refugees. May our mosques, churches, temples and synagogues open not just our doors, but our communities to those fleeing violence and seeking opportunity.
- 5. Regarding Climate Justice and Creation Care,** I invite us to commit to the treatment of creation with care as a sacred duty. The world's future requires a vision of development that can be sustained in the long run. My wish is that our faith communities could become models of sustainable living, champions of renewable energy, and prophetic voices for environmental justice.

The Pastoral Commitment: Having the Smell of the Sheep

Pope Francis of happy memories, called religious leaders to have "the smell of the sheep" they claim to pastor, not to smell differently from the people they claim to care for – to live so close to those we serve that their struggles become our struggles, their hopes become our hopes. This is not just a Christian calling; it is the essence of all authentic spirituality.

My wish is that we could commit to pastoral proximity over political comfort. Let us commit to spending more time in informal settlements than in government offices, more time with the unemployed than with the employed elite, more time listening to the cries of the poor than to the promises of politicians.

When we speak, may we speak not as outsiders looking in, but as insiders looking up – from the perspective of those whose dignity is daily denied, whose hopes are daily deferred, whose humanity is daily diminished.

Beyond Calling to Commitment

Let me be clear about what distinguishes this moment from countless other gatherings. We have not gathered here to issue another statement "calling on governments", "calling on business and corporations," and "calling on business" to act. The poor are tired of our calls. The poor are hungry for our commitment.

My hope is that we, as interfaith leaders, could commit ourselves to action.

My wish is that every faith community represented here could take the initiative – not waiting for perfect conditions, not depending on external funding, but beginning where we are, with what we have, for whom we serve.

Rather than setting rigid timelines that may become empty promises, let each of us return home and begin. Some may act immediately, others may need time for consultation and planning. What matters is not the speed of our response, but the sincerity of our commitment.

Instead of a universal deadline, let us each ask: What is the first step my community can take? When can we begin? How will we measure our faithfulness, not just our success?

The Prophetic Challenge

To my fellow Christians: Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them." The world is watching our fruits, not just listening to our words.

To our Muslim brothers and sisters: The Quran reminds us that faith without righteous action is incomplete. Our actions must reflect our submission to Allah's justice.

To our Jewish friends: The tradition of Tikkun Olam – repairing the world – and the ancient notion of Jubilee restoration call us to righteous action that restores justice.

To our Hindu and Buddhist colleagues: The principle of dharma calls us to righteous action that upholds cosmic order.

To our traditional African spiritualists: Our ancestors judge us not by what we promise, but by what we preserve for future generations.

To all of us: The vulnerable communities we claim to serve are not objects of our charity – they are the measure of our authenticity.

The Ubuntu Covenant

As we leave Cape Town, my hope is that we could leave not as individual faith traditions returning to separate spheres, but as an Ubuntu coalition aspiring to shared action. Let us say we will sign – with our lives, not just our signatures – a covenant that calls us to:

1. **Transparency in our own institutions** before demanding it from others;
2. **Service to the marginalized** as the measure of our spiritual maturity;
3. **Accountability to each other** as guardians of this sacred trust;
4. **Prophetic courage** to speak truth to all powers, including religious power;
5. **Practical action** that transforms systems, not just symptoms.

The Final Word

The children of the global south, the poor of this world, the marginalised of every nation, are not waiting for our next conference. They are waiting for our conversion. From talkers to doers. From advocates to agents. From religious leaders to radical servants.

Ubuntu teaches us that we are because others are. Today, we commit to ensuring that others can be because we have been. Not because we spoke beautifully about their plight, but because we acted boldly for their liberation.

When the history of this moment is written, may it record not what the G20 Interfaith Forum called for, but what it committed to. Not the eloquence of our speeches, but the faithfulness of our service.

The God of all faiths, known by many names but recognised by one love, has called us not to be successful, but to be faithful. Not to be applauded, but to be authentic. Not to be comfortable, but to be converted.

May we leave Cape Town not as we came—as separate traditions with good intentions—but as we must go: as one interfaith family with sacred commitments, carrying the smell of the sheep, bearing the burden of the broken, embodying the hope of the hopeless.

The world is waiting. The poor are watching. God is calling.

Ubuntu. Let us act because we are, and others shall be not because we have called, but because we have acted.

Amen. Insha'Allah. Shalom. Om. Asante sana.

God bless our sacred work together.

“In our colloquiums of public theology seminars over the last decade, we have examined burning national issues and challenges facing South Africa and the world... These seminars reflect our longing that everyone will have abundant life, which should be enjoyed not only by the rich, or those who are politically connected and have access to power; we want it to *be* enjoyed by everyone, regardless of race, culture or social status”

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

“Food security is not just about calories; it’s about *ubuntu*, our interconnected humanity. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our *ubuntu* is broken.”

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

“Democracy is more than just an electoral process. Democracy is the expression of an image of the human being...it is based on the conviction that every human being has the same inviolable human dignity. Every human being is created equally in the image of God. This conviction, expressed in the Bible (Genesis 1:27), is inextricably linked to the commitment to democracy.”

Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

“We ask God for bread not as individuals but as a community....A theology of Bread means working for a world without hunger. Hunger in a world that produces more food than can be consumed is a scandal and blight on the witness of the Church”

Bishop Ivan Abrahams

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