

12 March 2016

Socio-Economic Future of South Africa (SEFSA)

Closing Speech by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

Giving power to truth and a voice to all

My fellow South Africans

We have set out to create a platform for dialogue – and we have achieved this.

There is much that is wrong with South Africa, but so much to be inspired by – and I have been inspired.

Despite our wonderful diversity, our differences of faith or ideology, race and gender, wealth and education, culture and language we all love our country and our country's people.

We face immense challenges – poverty, inequality, hatred, fear, sickness, disrespect and violence. This has been our past and it is in some cases our present reality – but it must not be our future. Our young people need a future that they can believe in - and older generations must not be fearful of building it.

What are we to do and what must we acknowledge?

Firstly let me say again: leadership is complex. In government, in the civil society, in business, in the faith community – in every organization. Yet we dare not shrink from the challenge of leadership.

We are a resilient people. We must now be inspired to renew the hope that birthed our nation – the hope that allowed us to see through the bars of our prisons of hatred and fear to glimpse and then grasp freedom.

But freedom is incomplete without justice.

No government can renew a society without the active participation of its people of every faith, interest and ideology.

Business cannot grow the economy or the state create jobs without a collective faith in the future.

Here as diverse leaders, we have committed to play our part to rebuild and renew our nation.

Yes we need analysis of our problems, but we also need action to implement solutions, and accountability for our actions as individuals and as organizations.

The destructive thread that runs through our conversations here today and which winds through the conflict in our beloved country is distrust. There is a deep distrust that cuts across our society. We distrust each other's motives and intentions, and this frustrates dialogue and undermines collective action.

We can build trust if we are honest with ourselves and each other; we can build trust when we act not just in our own interest but when we listen to others, see their humanity and then act in our common interest.

You do not need to share my faith to share my values.

Our constitutional values capture what for us all is basic and common decency: respect, tolerance, freedom and love for our country and all its people.

But we must be courageous in upholding these values – for ourselves and for others. To be my brother and sister's keeper is not to dominate them but to provide a safe space, a constitutional space, where they can speak for themselves.

We must give power to each other's truth and a voice to all.

To the young people, to old activists, to committed civil servants, to business leaders, to religious communities, traditional leaders, and to ordinary citizens let me say this: To speak out for justice is an act of courage not of rebellion; it is an act of love for others and commitment to creating a better future.

This is why we must value courageous comment and not frustrated silence.

We must not only speak truth to power – wherever that power may reside – we must also unleash the power of truth.

And the truth is that without a rising tide of socio-economic justice then South Africa will not belong to all who live in it. Poverty, inequality, unemployment and all the ills of an uncaring society can only be tackled by a more just economy and a growing economy.

Without a growing economy we cannot finance the transformation of our nation into one that offers hope, dignity, wealth and wellbeing to all who live and work in it.

The economy is the oxygen that keeps our dreams of redress and justice alive. Without a growing and inclusive economy we will stagnate in injustice and even conflict.

But if we are to unite behind economic growth we must also say that growth comes with responsibility towards the poor and the marginalized.

This is our message to business, this is our message to government, and this is our commitment as a faith-led and diverse group.

We must make the good stewardship of our natural and human resources the bedrock of any economic policy and the practices of businesses large and small.

As leaders and as a country we must recommit to respect.

To respect ourselves and to respect each other. Our diversity must be a strength and not a weakness. Knowing each other: our values, personal histories and interests, must be a duty not a chore.

As SEFSA we have committed to building this platform for the next five years where South Africans can come together and renew their commitment to our country through dialogue and respect. SEFSA is the over-arching bridge that will aim to bring together the many disparate initiatives that are emerging in different spaces across the country.

I have seen great energy in the room and in our nation. There is also a rising sense of urgency – a sense that we need to change our collective direction now.

We need action.

Leaders must lead by example so their followers can see their commitment and share their path. Their actions must give content to their values.

A leader whose followers do not emulate them is just someone with a big title who is walking alone. As a country we must walk together.

As we leave here today let me make a commitment.

I will use my position as the leader of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa to speak, listen and encourage everyone in my church and in other faiths to give energy and urgency to this dialogue about how we all can create a better country.

Our dialogue, in a climate of respect, must lead to action - and that action must lead to socio-economic justice.

Leaders I ask you to do the same in your organizations and areas of influence.

But simply leading in the silos of our faith-based or secular communities is not enough – we need much, much more. We must speak outside our silos and lead not just our own followers.

We must take productive action-orientated conversation into every organization at every level and every town, city, village and home in South Africa.

So I will personally take this message into the heart of big business to speak with management and workers; I would like to speak with a mayor and the municipal manager and their clerks and cleaners.

That is my commitment.

I ask you, what is yours?