

## Notes of an address to the Christian World Community (CWC)

Johannesburg, 25 October 2000

First of all let me welcome everybody, our friends, our brothers and sisters who come from outside of South Africa. We are very, very glad that you are here.

When Bishop Mvume Dandala of the Methodist Church told me you would be coming, I was very pleased; in particular because it gives us an opportunity again to say thank you very much for what you did to liberate this country.

We would not have got our freedom in the manner and the speed with which we did, if you had been absent from that struggle against apartheid. That contribution is a permanent feature of what has happened to South Africa. I think that if the Christian Church had stayed away from that struggle a lot more people would have died. I think we would not be speaking now of the success of the process of reconciliation in this country.

I want to say thank you very much indeed for that. I do wish that this occasion had come earlier, just to celebrate what after all is your own victory. But nevertheless it is never too late to make amends. You are welcome. I am very glad indeed that you are here.

Last week as we flew into Rwanda you could see from the air that there is a lot of pressure on the land. Every little centimetre of land seems to be occupied. Later we drove from Kigali to Lake Kivu and those of us from South Africa who were visiting Rwanda for the first time saw things which looked absolutely remarkable - people farming on very steep mountains. As you look at it you wonder how a person can stand straight, but that is part of that pressure on the land.

And I said to the President of Rwanda that there is no way that we would be able ever to achieve a better standard of living for the people of Rwanda, if we depend on the crops that Rwanda is growing now, without other developments in the Rwandan economy. It is quite clear. But when you looked at this country you could see that when we talk about a better life for the people of Rwanda the scale of the challenge is enormous.

We went to a place where they have decided to build a monument of the genocide of 1994. Those of us who have been to Rwanda or seen pictures on television have seen the scores of dried and preserved human bodies, row after row. They said to us that at this particular place just over 40 000 people gathered during the genocide, during those hundred days in which a million were killed. They fled there because it was a place of safety. There was also a unit of French soldiers at this place.

One morning at 3 a.m. people came with pangas, with daggers and guns. And between 3 a.m. and 11 a.m., in eight hours, they killed over 40 000 people. Forty thousand people were killed in eight hours.

I asked President Kagame: What explains this? What kind of person is this who would sit there and methodically do this? And when they are done they would go around to check whether there was anybody still alive, maybe still breathing, and they would kill them. When you hear this story or read about it, when you are told it, including by people who managed somehow to survive, it is difficult to grasp. A million people killed in a 100 days, deliberately, systematically.

President Kagame explained to me how this had come about, how people had been taught and incited to hate, to define another as an enemy. But what was most striking about Rwanda was the position that they have taken, to say that the only way that we can recover from this extraordinary disaster, is that we Rwandans must reconcile ourselves, one to the other. That we must do everything we can to root out the

hatred among ourselves. That there should be nobody among ourselves who carries revenge in their hearts .

For a whole year they have been holding meetings every Saturday throughout the country, saying to everybody: can you please come, and relate your experience. It does not matter which side you were on in this genocide. Explain what you thought, what you did , where does this thing come from. Let all of us in Rwanda share a common experience. Even those who are going to say, I was among those who killed, let them speak without fear. And let all of us respond to these people not as enemies but as Rwandans.

It was marvellous to see and hear this, coming from this disastrous experience. If you have people who could overcome disaster in the manner that they are overcoming it, then it is clear that there is something here in this African world which is very valuable to all humanity. These are poor people who have many, many needs. But I think that what they are saying as Africans is that however poor we are, the one thing we must do is value human beings. We must act in a manner that values the sanctity of human life. Whatever our past, we must act in ways which encourage a better future.

I think that what is represented by what Rwandans are doing, in a very dramatic way, you would find generally around the African continent.

I am convinced that there is an atmosphere that is developing on the African continent which says we have had enough of wars, we have had enough of military coups, we have had enough of all these conflicts which result in millions of people being displaced and driven out of their countries as refugees.

It says that we have had enough of corrupt people, who use positions of authority to enrich themselves, and who have villas in Europe and elsewhere while millions of people are starving - we have had enough of this poverty some of which is a result of our own actions.

And it says that we must as Africans stand up and do something about all of these things. And in doing so, create a situation in which the peoples of our continent, I think the Black people generally around the world, cease to be an object of pity and cease to be a section of humanity which in many instances is despised by those who carry racist notions in their heads.

I am saying I think there is a spirit of this kind that is developing on the African continent.

It may be that if one watches Africa at a distance, and the only way is by watching television, reading newspapers, and listening to radio, what I have just said may not be coming through.

It may be that the predominant messages and images that continue to be conveyed are images of the Cote d'Ivoire's military overthrow of a democratic government in December, of a retired General who decides, despite all our advice, to legitimise a military coup, and when he sees that he is losing, he steals the votes.

That image will be communicated across the world and that communication will not be telling an untruth, but it does not represent the Africa that is emerging.

The Africa that is emerging is the Africa that is represented by those people in Rwanda, and by millions of Nigerians who said: "Enough of military government." There are many examples of this kind.

I think in this country, with all of its problems, we are moving in this way, I am sure that from what our fellow South Africans who take you around will show you, the predominant message that you will hear from the people of this country is a message of hope; a message which says we have got a long way to go, but let's work at it together as South Africans.

I am saying that is the new Africa I see and meet around the continent. So it seems to us that we need to do something to encourage that, not merely to stand and say, what a positive development, but to say: what do we do to encourage this? What do we do to reinforce these processes as Africans so that we fight against those who want to carry out military coups; those who want to impose wars and conflict; the corrupt ones and so on.

And it seems to us, we could say that which we have said: why don't we as Africans decide that this 21st century is an African century, let us make it an African century in which we would overcome all these problems that have confronted us.

I am reading a book from the World Bank, which is entitled: "Have the Africans a right to claim the 21st century?" It is a good question. They answer it positively fortunately. And when we say that we want to make this an African century, we are saying in the first instance that we have a task and a possibility and a capacity as Africans to battle to overcome these things that are bad. It cannot be a task of governments only. If it were a task of governments only, we would fail. We have to make this task of transforming this century into an African century a task of all our people, of everybody: of governments; of parties; of the church and other religious communities on our continent; of civil society; of trade unions.

What do we do together to produce this new South Africa, this new Africa? I am appealing to those of our brothers and sisters who come from the African church to take on this as part of their responsibility. We discussed this matter ourselves with the Christian leadership in the country to say: "What do we do here and what do we do on the African continent?" I think we haven't quite moved sufficiently with regard to the actual implementation of what we agreed. But I believe that the church is critical in this regard. I think that the African century has got to help us address the question in a sense of the souls of the people. We have to address the question: what is this moral climate which has enabled corruption to thrive in many of our societies. From where does it come? What do we do about it? It cannot be an African century simply because we build more houses. It can't be an African century because we start to bridge the digital divide. That is important, but it also has got to be an African century because something has happened which says that as Africans we reject the corrupt, as Africans we reject those who rape, as Africans we reject those who can carry out slaughter, so that these things are unable to thrive. I believe the church is critical with regard to the achievement of that objective .

I am in a bit of trouble here in South Africa. They are saying "Why is this president of ours spending so much time in the rest of the world instead of being at home?" Part of the reason is that we have had to do a lot of travelling, particularly this year. Even with all the determination that exists and is growing on the African continent, we will not succeed in this task of creating an African continent that can feed its children if we rely solely and exclusively on our own resources. We are part of the wider world, and so it seemed to us that we needed to talk to people with more resources than we have, And to say to them what I just said: There is a new initiative on the African continent, which needs your support - can we get your support? So I have been to London, I have been to Tokyo, I have been to Washington. I went to Portugal to meet with all the heads of government of the European Union, I went to Copenhagen to meet with all the Nordic Prime Ministers, I went to Japan and spoke to the G7 and the Japanese government.

I went to ask this question: are you prepared to join us in the struggle to make this into an African century? And happily, all of them without exception have said Yes! So, they then said, what next? So I said, it seems to me the next thing to do is that we as Africans, as part of that process of the birth of the century as an African century, should come to you to tell you what it is we want you to do.

Once we sat in a meeting two years ago with the President of the World Bank. He said we have to end the situation in which officials of the World Bank, because they have more money in their pockets than the governments, come to Africa as viceroys. So we said, we shall not have viceroys anymore. We will come to you with proposals as to what we think you should do to support the African continent. And so they wait now to hear from us.

There is a lot of pressure everyday to say where is the plan. It is a good thing that there seems to be willingness. But, I believe that success is going to require people who come from those developed countries to say to their governments that we as Christian leadership are concerned that we must play a role to help end these African troubles, and Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister or whoever, you must know that you have our support. As you extend that hand of friendship, you may find in many instances that the political leadership will say there is donor fatigue in our country; that the people have had enough of all this help, that I as a politician act in this unenthusiastic way to the challenges of development because I have no constituency for that development. I think that if the church leadership goes and says, but we are the constituency, it would help enormously to translate the very good spirit that there is among the leadership of the developed world.

We are confident that we will succeed. Whenever I go around the continent, one of the things that strike me is the way we are received by ordinary Africans. It is quite clear that the ordinary African people across the continent have taken this into themselves that we actually can win. I think we can't lose the momentum that we have on the continent.

And so, if you walk around Johannesburg what you will see is the old South Africa: rich white suburbs and poor black shacks; you will go from tarred roads onto the dirt roads. If you blindfold yourself you would know you have moved from white suburbia to black areas. You will find that, but it will come to an end because the people of this country are committed to make sure that we end that legacy, even though it will take us time.

The same legacy right across the continent will come to an end too, because the people of our continent have the same determination as the people of this country. Their problems are many: health issues; Aids; military coups in Ivory Coast; a difficult war to resolve in the Congo and Angola.

But, we will overcome.

We need the support of the church, the involvement of the church, in meeting those challenges.

Thank you very much.