

Speech at the Gala Dinner of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues

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The Challenges of the 21 Century."

Master of Ceremonies, Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi, Cyril Harris, Distinguished guests;

Despite the many elaborate preparations being made throughout the world to celebrate the 1st of January, 2000 as the beginning of the new century and millennium, the reality is that, in terms of our calendar, the 21st century will begin a year later, in the year 2001.

This, of course, will have no impact whatsoever on the festive activities which will take place at the end of this year, during which all of us, even secretly, will harbour hopes for a new century, which, merely because it is a new century, should herald a better future for all humanity.

Since none of us are endowed with the full gift of foresight which only the Omnipotent, can possess, it may very well be that, in the end, those who embark on the hazardous road of foretelling the future, will be distinguished one from the other not so much by the accuracy of their forecasts, as by whether they are optimists or pessimists.

I would like to count myself among the optimists, believing that humanity would not allow that some of the terrible things that happened during this century would recur and persuaded to the point of view that, at the same time, the foundations have also been laid for us to do better than we have done during this century

This year we will be commemorating the centenary of the beginning of the Anglo-Boer-War of 1899 - 1902. Designated the Anglo-Boer War, this war claimed the lives of tens of thousands of both black and white South African and therefore marked, for our country as a whole, the beginning of the 20th Century.

When he spoke in London at the first Pan African Congress of 1900, the African-American scholar and liberation fighter, W.E.B. du Bois uttered the new famous words - the problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the colour line!

Both Boer and Briton locked in mortal combat as du Bois spoke those prophetic words, might have thought that the problem which confronted them was the problem of who shall emerge as the colonial master, who it was who was destined to be the master of allude, with none to dispute their right.

But for us as South Africans, du Bois was proved right. Our own 20th century problem was and remains the problem of the colour line. But of this, later!

Beyond our shores, just over a decade after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the First World War broke out, at whose end the League of Nations was established as an international instrument to ensure that this was the first and the last world war.

And yet, two decades later, the Second World War engulfed humanity, at whose own end the United Nations Organisation was established, again as an international instrument indeed to ensure an end to war, with its most senior organ, the Security Council, charged with the principal task of ensuring international peace and security.

It is fortunately true that humanity has not been subjected to what would have been a calamitous Third World War, fought with nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Nevertheless, since the establishment of the United Nations, many local wars have been fought in many parts of the world, with at least 11 currently taking place.

Thus, if it were to be said that the 20th century has been a century of wars, few would elect to contest such a conclusion.

An indelible blight on our century was, of course, the Holocaust, in which the criminal Nazi regime sought to annihilate the Jewish people in a heinous and systematic campaign of genocide through the European continent.

Closer to our own shores, in 1994 we saw the massacre of 1 million people in Rwanda, targeted on the basis of their ethnic origin. The threat continues to haunt all of us that, given the opportunity, the genocidaires would continue their criminal work and take even more lives of the Tutsi people both in Rwanda and in the Congo.

For its part, contemporary Europe has supplied to modern political and military science the term "ethnic cleansing" emanating out of the protracted conflict taking place in the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans in general.

We too, as a country, continue to suffer the consequences of a form of ethnic cleansing imposed on our people by the implementation of the system of apartheid which, correctly, the international community characterised as a crime against humanity.

Thus, again, it would be difficult for any honest person to deny the contention that one of the distinguishing features of the 20th century has been the commission of the crime of genocide, driven by anti-human ideologies of racial superiority and exclusiveness.

The recent crash of some of the East Asian economies, followed by the economic crises in Russia and Brazil, once more raised the spectre of a world-wide economic depression worse than the one sparked off by the collapse of the US stock market in 1929.

Indeed, some continue to make the prediction that a protracted, international economic slump is inevitable.

All of us can see from the terrible suffering imposed on the people of Indonesia what the consequences of such a slump would be, enough to give an indication to those of us who were not alive at the time, what it must have been to live through the Years of the Depression of the twenties and the thirties.

But this too we must accept as one of the distinguishing features of the 20th century, that we are all subject to an economic system which can, on occasion, seem to turn against the people, with pronouncements about a decent standard of living for all sounding no more than mere platitudes and pipe dreams.

As the United States sank lower and lower into the Great Depression, organised crime in that country, represented especially by the Mafia, gained in strength and the daring of its operations.

I mention this as one of the negatives of the 20th century - namely, the growth of international criminal syndicates and their ability to intrude into the national life of many countries, including the syndicates occupying significant positions in the system of governance and within the corporate world.

The ability to fund their operations on the basis of significant volumes of capital accumulated through trade in narcotics and laundered through financial institutions signifies that, throughout this century,

despite celluloid promotions of "The Untouchables", the power of international criminal syndicates has grown posing a challenge to the next century for sustained international action to deal with this problem.

It would clearly be incorrect to present the 20th century as merely or exclusively a century of gloom. It obviously was not.

In this, I believe, lies the hope for a 21st century that will be better than the present century.

Whatever its failures, the United Nations Organisation remains a credible instrument in the hands of the international community to address many of the common problems we face, including issues of war and peace and the deterrence of the commission of crimes against humanity, including the crime of genocide.

A body of international law has also evolved together with the development of international p • which, at least, provide the possibility for more effective action to deal with the matters which led to the founding the United Nations.

It is also clear that for the first time in the history of humanity, the world economy has the resources within it to enable us to end the scourge of poverty and meet the objective of a better life for all.

We are, indeed, faced with difficult problems with regard to providing the answers to the question - how could these resources be distributed so that we do, in fact, achieve these noble objectives.

Nevertheless, while this might be true of each country on the globe, it would be difficult to advance and defend the view that world poverty today derives from shortage of capital in the world economy.

Our century has also seen an extraordinary revolution in the area of communications and information. This information revolution cannot but reinforce the capacity of all humanity to deal more effectively with such questions as economic development, human resource development, health care, human rights and humanitarian assistance.

While it would be true that this information revolution, an important component part of the process of globalisation which is itself such a distinguishing feature of modern, has clearly been exploited by crime syndicates to spread their wings across the globe, this information backbone also provides better possibilities to confront the scourge of international crime.

Fortunately, an international system of co-operation against crime is developing, involving the United Nations itself, which, hopefully, will deny the criminals the possibility to take advantage of the limitations imposed by the sovereignty of states to expand their empires.

Having said all this, we must answer some questions what our view of the future of our own country is, given the international context, elements of which we have mentioned.

The first thing we must say is that we all share a common task to century should be a century of domestic peace.

We must maintain a sustained offensive against political violence, to ensure that the situation we currently faced in the Richmond area of KwaZulu-Natal is the last of its kind, the final and ultimate negative expression of our transition from our apartheid past to a stable non-racial democracy conscious of the abuse of ethnicity and nationality to foment violent conflicts, war and genocide, We must together ensure that we correctly manage our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith society to ensure that none among us uses the diversity of our society to engulf all of us in unacceptable confrontation and conflict.

In this regard, it is important that we deal firmly with the abuse of any religious faith and the efforts to hide behind any religious fundamentalism to pursue objectives that threaten any of our communities.

Among others, we cannot allow that unacceptable views of anybody justify the launching of a campaign of terror against the Jewish citizens of our country.

Similarly, we are still confronted by the challenge of racism in our society. Our national Constitution clearly states our objective to create a non-racial society representing the firm rejection by the overwhelming majority of our people of the practice and legacy of apartheid.

We have to strive continuously to uproot this legacy in all its manifestations, conscious of the fact that poverty and the racial imbalances that are so deeply entrenched in our society remain the greatest sources of social tension and be ignited with disastrous consequences, as we have just witnessed in Indonesia.

Whereas du Bois closed the 19th century with the prophetic words about the problem of the colour line as South Africans, have the possibility to help define the 21st century in such a way that as it ends, it would be acknowledged as the century during which the colour line ceased to be the problem of the century.

This is the challenge on which I believe all of us must focus, in a manner that will positively set our country apart in much the same way as the system of apartheid set our country apart, in the most negative way.

The third source of violence in our country is crime. We do not have the time to go into the varied causes of crime in our society.

What is clear is that, among other things, we have to strengthen and radically increase the effectiveness of the entire criminal justice system, improve the relationship and co-operation between the people and the law, change the attitude of the people as a whole towards issues of crime and corruption with the international community in the fight against crime.

I am convinced that we will make the necessary progress with regard to all three of these issues - political violence, respect for the diversity of our society and crime - and would therefore make bold to say that for us the 21st century will be a century of peace.

The perspective we have put forward to the country of a better life for all, is one to which we must remain firmly committed and which we must pursue with all means at our disposal.

For us, therefore, one of the challenges of the 21st century must be the challenge of ensuring that our economy grows at high and sustained rates of growth, that it generates new jobs and that it becomes internationally competitive, especially in sectors of the economy other than the production and marketing of raw materials.

Again, we do not have the time to treat any of these matters in detail. However it is clear that among other things, we have to focus on the development of small and medium business, the improvement of labour skills in order to increase labour productivity and improve the employability of our workers, the reduction of income disparities in our society achieve the objective of black economic empowerment as well as attracting larger volumes of foreign direct investment into our economy.

Contrary to the views that some repeatedly make about the attractiveness of our country to foreign investors, this I must say that our own experience leads us to a more optimistic expectation than is sometimes projected.

The international response to the government's privatisation processes has been most positive indeed and remains enthusiastic with regard to future privatisations.

Similarly, the negotiations currently going on with regard to the off-set investments that will flow into South Africa as a result of the defence acquisitions point to the reality that major international corporations are interested to invest considerable volumes of capital into our economy, to become long-term corporate citizens of South Africa.

Thus must we ensure that for us the 21st century becomes a century of an end to poverty and the realisation of the objective of a better life for all our people.

To achieve this goal, we must clearly draw on all the positive elements that have emerged in the global community during this century, including the availability of capital and the possibility to adhere to best international practice.

Inevitably, one of the challenges we will continue to face in the next century, will be the elimination of the HIV-AIDS. We dare not relax our efforts on this issue.

On other occasions we have spoken of the need to ensure that the 21st century becomes the African Century.

What we have stated as being the challenges of the 21st century that face us, are objectives we can never achieve if our Continent itself is not one of democracy, peace and prosperity.

The first contribution we must make towards the realisation of the goals of the African Renaissance is the accomplishment of these aims in our own country.

It is as a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous and peaceful African country that, in a spirit of solidarity and recognition of our common destiny as Africans, we can add to the efforts of the peoples of Africa as they themselves struggle to ensure that they transform the dream of an African Renaissance into reality.

None of us can pretend that the achievement of this Renaissance will be easy. Nevertheless we must continue to refuse to be discouraged by the inevitable setbacks we will suffer as we make our forward advance. If there was no problem, there would be no need to look for solutions. If everything was in order, there would be no need to call for an to struggle for an African Renaissance.

If by all I have seemed optimist, it is because I have the greatest confidence, first of all in all our people, that we have the intelligence, the conscience and the tenacity to overcome all the obstacles that stand on the way to our defining the 21st century for ourselves as a century of democracy, peace and prosperity for all.

I say this because none of these things can happen unless we, in our millions, regardless of class, race, gender and faith, join hands to bring about the better world which is the right of all human beings.

I am certain that the conditions exist in our country and the world that bring about this result.

What remains is for us, in word and deed, to define ourselves as the architects of a better century one of whose distinguishing features must be the renaissance of Africa and therefore the abolition of the problem of the colour line in world politics, and the economy.

Thank you

