

PROF RUSSEL BOTMAN

My taak is net om vir julle almal welkom te sê wat hier is en ook vir 'n aantal baie spesiale mense welkom te sê. The special welcome that I must do goes to the people who were part of the delegations to Dakar in 1987 twenty years ago. I want to do two things: give thanks to them; commemorate the wisdom of their decision at the time, and also remember those who have gone with them, from the different delegations and who are no longer with us, today.

Nou ek moet ook baie dankie sê vir Henry Jeffreys, die huidige redakteur van Die Burger. U sal weet dat sy aankoms hier in die Wes-Kaap ons harder laat werk as 'n tyd gelede. Ek weet nie altyd of dit goed vir ons almal nie, dat hy ons so laat hardloop nie. Maar ek wil vir hom baie dankie sê, want ek dink almal van ons is bewus dat sy aankoms hier in die Kaap maak 'n groot verskil vir ons omgewing en is ook belangrik in ons tyd.

In besonder dankie dat ons hierdie konferensie gesamentelik kan reël, oor 'n baie belangrike kwessie, dié van maatskaplike binding. Nou ek wil een ding baie duidelik stel oor maatskaplike binding, (the issue of social cohesion.)

The first debate of the need for social cohesion was started within a small campus some time ago in the Western Cape bringing together

civil society structures, and especially a significant number of people who worked in development in the churches. Max Neeff was the one who made the argument that we are taking far too long in focussing on the question of development. This is the real issue ahead of us - the question of social cohesion. He said that it was clear from all his research, in different parts of the world, and he tried to get us at that time to begin to focus on this question.

In the churches we struggled to keep the debate going, and beyond that, also we thought that it will grow, but it did not grow. Precisely because of the reason Max Neeff indicated. The ideas around development generates precisely the role; the direction for the debate.

His argument was that if you do not deal with cohesion as the real question, you may even miss the real issues of how development should actually lead to a better society. A society with a better fibre of life.

I feel myself continuing with a debate that we have been busy with on a very low scale only in civil society for a long time, that has now become something that within the political sphere people are saying let us take this up and do work around it.

Wat betekenisvol is van hierdie konferensie is dat dit nou plaasvind in die week wat saamval met die baanbrekers gesprekke twintig jaar

gelede. Destyds het hulle baie gepraat van die vyande wat bymekaar kom van verskillende kante af. Dakar getuig eintlik meer van die waagmoed wat jy nodig het om uit te styg bo die gewone en normale prosesse wat aan die gang is rondom jou. En ek dink wat ons vandag wil doen is om daardie waagmoed aan te gryp en dit te fokus op die uitbouing van maatskaplike binding. Dis nou 'n waagmoed wat gebore is uit die vergesigte van 'n vrye Suid-Afrika, waar mense nie langer gesien word as produkte van hulle pigment nie, maar as uitdrukkings van hulle onvervreembare menswaardigheid.

However it is also twenty years after the death of Ashley Kriel, a young man from the Cape Flats. Like many other activists, he paid the highest price for the dream of a liberated country. I would like to invite you to stand for a moment in silence in memory of the loss of him, but also the many heroes who were part of the delegations of twenty years ago.

Thank you. You may be seated.

PROF RUSSEL BOTMAN:

Colleagues and friends we are gathered here because we all feel a sense of loss. Our nation has a growing awareness of us losing the glue that should be holding our society together. Allow me therefore a few thoughts on social cohesion in South Africa today, from my point

of view, and I hope it will also help us to see the context for this gathering.

Our young democracy is stubborn to realise social cohesion, solidarity and nation building. We only have to look at our newspapers everyday and try to make sense of the accusations and counter-accusations about everything that is wrong in our country, to see that. Collected to the abacus of newspapers are characterised by our people's growing intolerance, lack of compassion, and continuous finger-pointing. All signs of the country where social cohesion still suffers from the many deficiencies. It is for that reason that in his state of the nation address, earlier this year, Pres. Thabo Mbeki also extended an invitation to civil society to do its share in the creation and promotion of social cohesion.

Social cohesion is something that civil society should do, not as an extraction but for its own sake, because a strong civil society creates the kind of society that keeps political worlds and political realities accountable properly and continuously. This is the task and the responsibility that rests on the shoulders of all of us, it is not something that the government can bring about successfully on its own. It is a task that has to be tackled on a much broader and much more comprehensive front. And in which all of us as citizens of this country and every institution therein, have a decisive role to play.

Ek het in my inhuldigingsrede op 11 April 2007 reeds aangedui dat daar vir my en die US belangrike strewes is wat ons aksies vir die toekoms gaan rig. Een daarvan is die afgooi van die persepsie dat ons agter die Bolandse berge ons probeer verskans teen die werklikhede en die uitdagings van ons land. Nou hier is ons vandag op die spoor van die Dakar-gangers, mense wat ver sal gaan om ons gemeenskaplike binding te soek en te herwin. Soos die Dakar-gangers van twintig jaar gelede (baie van hulle ook bekende akademici van die US) wat 'n versugting en 'n soeke gehad het van 'n beter toekoms vir ons almal, so glo ek dat die US 'n vername rol te speel het in juis daardie skepping van hoop en ook om by te dra tot die vesel van ons maatskaplike samehorigheid.

Ons wil graag aan die snykant wees van sake van openbare belang en aktiewe rolspelers wees, ook in die vorming van ons land se toekoms. Dit is waarom ons van die voorste denkers in die burgerlike samelewing vandag hier byeengebring het, om saam te besin oor 'n saak wat so kernbelangrik is vir die gesonde voorbou en uitbou van ons demokrasie. Dis deel van die wese van 'n universiteit wat betekenisvol wil wees, om in die smeltkroes te wees van strydige idees en die strydige navorsing en die strydige denke van sy tyd. Om daarin en daarbinne 'n rol te speel om ons bo die fragmentasie uit te lig en die belang van die gemeenskap te dien.

Just as those on their way to Dakar twenty years ago, we stand today before the challenge to face a true enemy of our democracy - the erosion of our social cohesion. Now we know that we have lost the art of loving one another - we all know that when we see a homeless person despicably kicked to death by school-going children. Or when a fellow-South African loses his life in a police holding cell after being assaulted by other inmates. We know that also when a precious child of our nation is raped, held in captivity and finally murdered because of the ignorance of alcoholic fathers and grandfathers, or their violence or their violent dominance.

We have lost the art of loving, and the signs are there for anyone to see. We know also that we perhaps have gone further than that – perhaps we have fallen out of love with one another. We experience that reality when we see the poor cringe in the face of an economic reality that tells them that they are misfits in a changing economy and in a knowledge economy. We feel it when we drive past the many walls of security between the rich and the poor. We know that we have fallen out of love with each other when we see the neglect of all working class areas.

So daar is 'n prys.

We know that when we read about corruption and exploitation. We face that when we also get in touch with people who feel really

marginalised because of their race, their sexual orientation, their gender and social location. We realise that we have fallen out of love, and that people are beginning to perceive that as reality when the people of Mitchell's Plain or Khayalitsha feel that they are on their own.

Ek is oortuig daarvan dat ons deur die loop van die dag uiteenlopende en soms botsende standpunte gaan hoor. En dalk besef ons opnuut dat 'n saak van hierdie belang nie maklik oplossings sal bied nie. Maar die uitdaging is vir ons almal om konstruktief en inklusief te bly dink en te soek na oplossings. En ek hoop uiteindelik dat die eerste seine van 'n modus operandi vir die burgerlike gemeenskap wat ons hier verteenwoordig, in ons soeke na 'n verstewiging van maatskaplike samehorigheid.

Our national efforts for regaining social cohesion must lead to actions on two parallel fronts - Unity and Justice. Too often have we been subjected to social actors, who separate these two: unity and justice. And now we are unfortunately facing serious drops in the level of social cohesion.

Some have taken race as the main course of justice at the cost of unity. Others have sentimentally embraced unity at the cost of justice, particularly when it was meant for the poor. Social cohesion in South Africa requires a dual memory of an action for unity and justice. This conference must remind us all how unity – our real unity – and

simultaneously inspire us to act for real justice. In unity we will capture our common South Africanness, however our South Africanness will never be fully shared unless the walls of injustice, towards especially the poor in our country have effectively been abolished.

I hope that we will continue the conversation even when and where we differ most. I hope that we will not fall victim to the traps in our diverse language, languages of social living and social occasion, and of the past, but also our language of the future. I hope that we will rise to the occasion to embrace each other, to turn this cradle of humanity into the personification of the glue of social cohesion that all humanity seeks and yearns for. That we will find strength in the human spirit to stop the erosion of our social cohesion.

Thank you once again for your participation, and your presence here today, I'm looking forward to a conference that will lay the foundations for revitalisation and for galvanising our social cohesion to new heights.

I thank you.