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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Bridging the Gaps and Uniting
Different Communities

LECTURE

Second Mandela lecture
Speech by

Farid Esack

Amsterdam, 20 May 2005
De Nieuwe Kerk

**MANDELA** lezing

The Nelson R Mandela Lecture

by FARID ESACK

Amsterdam
20 May 2005

*How shall we speak of human rights, justice
and reconciliation after September 11th?*

Chairperson, Mr Peter Hermes, Mr Ahmed Aboutaleb, former comrades, comrades and future comrades and friends,

I am absolutely delighted to be here tonight. It's a wonderful honour to have been asked to deliver this prestigious lecture to celebrate the person and commitment of a giant of our age, Nelson Rohlilahlah Mandela in this wonderful city of Amsterdam. This is a city that first sent us people like Jan van Riebeeck and Hendrick Verwoerd and later – hundreds of years later – tried to make up for that blunder by sending us others like Sietse Bosgra and Connie Braam. You gave us the Dutch East India Company and Shell. Much later, you also gave us KZA, AABN and Kairos, and much later of course, we bought Shell House from you. In return for all that you gave, we give you the life and struggles of Nelson Mandela.

Thank you so much for this honour extended to me tonight. I really feel honoured to be here with you and to deliver the Nelson Mandela Lecture.

And much more...

I do not envy the task of those who are charged with the responsibility of choosing the person to deliver this lecture. Some years ago when Release Mandela Committees were flourishing all over South Africa and, indeed, all over the world, I, being the eternal critic of all orthodoxies, approached Ismail Ayob, an attorney and then one of the few free individuals with access to 'the old man'. I asked him if Mandela was really the man that all of us made him out to be. 'Was he worth the fuss?', I wanted to know. 'Yes', Ismail replied, 'he is that man and much more.' All of us who have encountered Mandela have since learnt the truth of this. It's a bit like South Africa itself, isn't it? All of you are told by others how majestic and beautiful a country it is by those who have been there before you. And when you finally encounter the land you cannot help but say: 'Yes, all that I have been told and much more.'

This is the first challenge – to speak in a way that somehow does justice to what this man represents for all South Africans, for those abroad who have devoted years of their lives in solidarity with the people of our land in a struggle for an undivided, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa, and for the many people in our world whose dream of such a society in their own countries is still so seemingly an impossible one.

Mandela and South Africa, given what we have invested in that country, represent for many of us all that we want to be and that we want our

societies to be. Recently, at a conference on religion and AIDS, I was chatting with someone who had just come from South Africa where she had gone to discuss a joint research project at the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine, formerly known as the University of Natal Medical School. I was struck by how she kept on repeating her connection to the 'Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine', gently savouring every vowel and consonant in the same way that children tend to slowly lick on a piece of candy – enjoying it and at the same time desperate for it to not disappear. So I was reminded once again about what Mandela and South Africa – both its struggle for liberation and the peaceful manner in which we handled the transition to a non-racial democracy – mean for other people throughout the world.

Yet, I must reflect in a way that is also critical and truthful. How do I allow you to enjoy the candy but alert you to the fact that too much candy is not good, and besides, candy is never a substitute for real food? How do we lead our own lives and struggles, vindicate our own existences through commitment and not vicariously through the heroism of others? How do we refuse to let adulation, affection, and admiration for Madiba not become a substitute for concrete work, for engagement in real solidarity with the people of South Africa and elsewhere or for critical thinking?

The second challenge is to speak in a way which resonates in this society represented by this audience here tonight – a society deeply wounded by recent events such as the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh and the discovery that all is far from well on the scene of racism and xenophobia. Part of Europe's problem today is that – if I may paraphrase Amilcar Cabral – it 'told lies and claimed easy victories' – over the demons of Islamophobia, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. So now, many of its citizens are confronted with demons that it had presumed were slain quite a while ago. Traumatized societies often require being comforted by those whom it may view as somehow representing the ones who are guilty – in this case Muslims. How do I speak in a way that both comforts and simultaneously stirs because it is only in continuing to ask hard questions of ourselves and our conduct in the world that we really become more human?

Finally, how do I speak about all of this within two contexts – the one is the all pervasive sentiment in the North, that of security concerns after September 11th, and the other – deeper, not entirely unrelated ongoing realities in the South – the realities of AIDS, starvation, dispossession and occupation, and more specifically the dispossession and occupation in Palestine.

The Post-September 11th context of the Human Rights and Reconciliation Discourse

I want to make a few observations about the current context of the debate on human rights and reconciliation before moving on to what I believe are some of the fundamental principles that ought to guide us both in respect to where Europe is at the moment and with respect to the struggle of the Palestinians for freedom and justice in the land of their birth, as well as reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians.

First, there is much greater emphasis on more human rights in a number of carefully selected Muslim societies. We are not too interested in human rights in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Kuwait because, well, they are 'our friends'. Syria, Lebanon and Iran, on the other hand, had better democratize real fast or else we are going to go in there and do it for them. This demand for human rights in some selected Muslim countries is also coupled by a demand for less human rights for Muslims where they live as minorities, i.e. in non-Muslim societies. Here you find that neo-conservatives are increasingly speaking about a 'post-human rights era'. In fairly respectable circles in the United States, arguments are now being made that the large scale internment of US citizens of Japanese origin during the Second World War was appropriate. We are now being offered the Patriot Act, that allows indefinite detention without trial; torture has been now described as 'one of the most important secret weapons in the war on terror' and 'extraordinary rendition' or outsourcing of torture to countries where inconveniences such as its 'illegality' or 'due process' and 'civil liberties' are either non-existent or simply irrelevant, is justified. So the equation becomes: human rights for some Muslims countries that are an obstacle to our immediate geo-political goals, more repression and an end to the rule of law in those countries that we need in our War on Terror. Clearly, none of this is about rights – it is all about using a discourse of rights as a weapon of subjugation.

There is a similar duplicity about reconciliation, a term increasingly reserved for vanquished peoples. Let the people of Afghanistan and Iraq be reconciled – them we have overcome. As for Iran and Syria, on them we wish only the wrath of God and plan to drop all sorts of bombs on them or to turn a blind eye when Israel does it for us.

About reconciliation – between minority Shi'ite communities in Saudi Arabia and the majority Sunnis, between women in the Catholic Church and all the men who are in occupation of the Vatican, men who dress up like

women but who control the lives of the women, between the poor people in our inner cities and those who have taken flight into the suburbs, between humankind and our only home, the earth – about all of this the powerful in the world are silent, because it does not serve immediate political or economic interests.

My second comment on the post September 11th context relates to the intense and even ruthless battle for the soul of Islam as the title of Gilles Keppel's book *The War for Muslim Minds* would have it. For many non-Muslim Westerners who are driven by conservative ideological imperatives, Islam and Muslims have become the ultimate 'other'. Many liberals, on the other hand, move from the assumption that 'global harmonies remain elusive because of cultural conflicts'. The problem they argue, to put it nicely, is with the inherent differences in our cultures. To put it not so nicely, the problem is with the backwardness of Muslims and their propensity to fanaticism. Thus they are desperate to nudge Islam and Muslims into a more 'moderate' corner. While conservatives ask how do we drive these Muslims back over the Strait of Gibraltar – even if they drown – the liberals asks how can we make them become like us? Both of these options deny the authenticity of the Muslim other and the right of the Muslim other to be anything beyond the compliant worker animal that we first needed when Europe was in need of migrant labour. If only the men that we brought then did not need women. Then when the women had to come, if only they did not have to have sex. And if they did have to have sex, if only they used contraceptives and if they had to have children, why so many?

None of the expectations or demands that we place on Muslims challenges Europe to transform. There are no questions about Europe's racism, about its legacy of colonialism, about its disdain for other people's cultural values, its hand in the impoverishment of the countries where these foreigners come from and which then drives them here in search of a better economic future. There is no sustained critique about the way political policies of the North fuel fundamentalism in Muslim countries and at home.

Thirdly, after September 11th Muslims too, as never before, are conflicted about their relationship with both 'outsiders' as well as to the tradition of Islam and its ideals. The tensions of being in a world wherein the vast majority of Muslims feel trapped between the demands imposed on them in their existences as subjects of the Empire on the one hand, and the violent convulsions of a fascist-like Islamically invoked response by their co-religionists on the other, are palpable. At every step of our encounter with

our non-Muslim neighbours, colleagues, students and immigration officers, those of us – committed or nominal Muslim, confessional or cultural – living or working in the West, have to justify our existences, our faith, our humanity and our non-violent intentions. We complain, we lament, we try to make common cause with the remnants of the Left and with some Churches who recognize Muslims as the new underclass in the North. All the while we avoid asking hard questions about our tradition, our chauvinism, our racism, our stereotyping of ‘the West’, our homophobia. Alas every single complaint that Muslims have about how we are treated by the Empire can find an echo in how we as Muslims treat women, people of a different sexual orientation and darker skinned people within our communities. Let a Turkish or a Moroccan Muslim girl come to her parents with the idea of marrying a dark skinned Muslim man from Senegal and all hell will break loose.

My father was recently admitted to hospital in Cape Town for about twenty-four hours. The treatment was excellent, the care efficient and the staff friendly. When we went to pay the 36 Rand fee the next morning, we were told by the person at the reception that ‘pensioners get free medical treatment in the new South Africa’. My father was delighted and commented on how helpful ‘the darkie’ – a benign racist term for a Black man – was at the reception desk. Later I asked him how he had spent his night. He then complained bitterly about a ‘*kaffirkind*’ that was admitted late at night and who cried throughout the night. So the new South Africa is just fine when it comes to my free medical treatment and reconciliation is reserved for the helpful Black man who is still a Black – but the benign racist term ‘darkie’ is still invoked. Ah, as soon as I am inconvenienced, I continue to resort to the refrain “*’n kaffir bly maar altyd ‘kaffir’*”.

Reconciliation, human rights and peace are all just fine – as long as Muslims, Black people, women, sexual minorities, the Turks, the Moroccans, know their proper places...

So, how shall we speak of Human Rights, Justice and Reconciliation given the contexts that I have outlined above?

1. To be moved by our hopes and ideals rather than our fears

It is understandable that many Dutch and other Europeans are deeply concerned and afraid about the presence of many citizens – some new and some not so new – who seem to pose a threat to what has come to be assumed to be Dutch values. People are afraid and when people are afraid

they often behave in ways that are very different from how they really want to be. And so people who normally value inclusivism ask that more walls be built, people who normally value diversity ask that the Muslims be sent back to where ‘they come from’. Many of you know the story of the Freedom Charter. One of the many remarkable things about that document was how it was consistently held up as a beacon of where we wanted our country to go to after apartheid. Its clauses were incorporated into our struggle songs, in our slogans, scribbled on posters and protest boards and we conducted workshops around them. Our vision of a new society was actually defined therein and nurtured by it. We outlined who we wanted to be and tried to have our struggle shaped by that vision.

Europe must ask itself ‘what does it want to be?’. What have you learnt from your adventures in Africa and the Far East, from the ways of dealing with Jews and gypsies about how not to treat people **ever again**? How do we refuse to become the evil that we abhor? To refuse to become bigoted in these times of anxiety, to refuse to suspend the rule of law, to insist on the freedom of entry to asylum seekers, to insist on the full worth of all darker skinned people – especially if his name is ‘Ali B’ or ‘Muhammed C’ – and to withhold judgment until proven guilty in the court of law, these are all the things that define who we want to become. To not do so is not only doing an injustice to your victims, but to betray your own values and who you have the potential to become.

South Africa became what it has today – not because we were never afraid of each other. Those of us who were engaged in the liberation struggle saw what the regime was capable of doing to its opponents. White people too were afraid of us. The new South Africa was about providing a leadership that did exploit those fears – that did not want to leave for its children a society founded on fears of each other but one founded on our collective hopes.

2. Rethinking the way we imagine ourselves and others

The second point, related to the first one, deals with questions of self-understanding; who you are, how you define yourself and how you define us.

Apartheid was a crude form of racism that was enshrined in law and it was, in many ways, the crudeness of it all that enabled many of you not to reflect on how your own countries and your own values can be, in fact, also mirror racism. I have for long suspected that one of the reasons why many other countries condemned the apartheid regime was simply because it was a convenient way of not dealing with their own racism.

Who are you? How do you define yourself? When others are born here because their parents have been imported as necessary labour or because of your colonial links with their countries of origin, do they have the right to participate in a debate about what Dutch culture is, or is it an imposition that is seemingly about language and values – ‘let these imams learn Dutch and they’ll come right’ – but in reality is about race and racism?

Racism is really privilege for ourselves on the basis of what is presented as an essential group. In the case of religious nationalisms expressed in, for example, apartheid South Africa, Serbian nationalism or political Zionism, it is useful to have a God created in one’s image who will stand by one against one’s enemies, to support one in one’s real estate ventures and who can be invoked to add a mythical and an ahistorical dimension to one’s existence. To reduce the problems of dispossession, discrimination and exploitation in all their complexities to ‘apartheid’ is, however, rather misleading. Such reductionism implies that the problem started in 1948 when the Nationalist Party came to power and ended in 1994 with the election of an African National Congress government. The idea of forcibly separating people on the basis of race had already emerged in the eighteenth century with the Afrikaner notion of *baasskap* (overlordship) and in law since the nineteenth century when the British passed the Masters and Servants Act. These laws were invariably connected to the economic exploitation of our people. Today, in a post-apartheid era, our country is still saddled with poverty, economic exploitation and racism. Reducing the problems of the past to Apartheid leads to claims of easy victories. Besides, this enables far too many people, particularly White people, to walk away claiming that they were never a part of the problem because ‘we never voted for apartheid.’

The point is, friends, that it is far too easy to walk away and say, ‘No, not me’. Instead of a unilateral demand on others to ‘become like us’, we can ask how can we and they be constantly challenged to redefine ourselves in terms of a new awareness of what it means to be human and in solidarity with others. Instead of asking ‘how do we contain the Muslims’ or how do we re-mould Islam in ways that are acceptable to us, can we ask how do we define ‘us-ness’? How do we forge a common vision of us-ness with all other citizens alongside concrete social and political struggles? Is it possible for Dutch society to learn something from its citizens who come from Africa about the sanctity of human life at old age, about a child growing up and belonging to a community of caregivers? Is it possible for Muslims to understand how the way they perceive being treated by the dominant society is also a reflection of how they treat women and sexual and religious minorities in their own

communities? Is it possible that all of us can understand that one day – in the same way that we now look with shame upon slavery which did not recognize Black people as capable of having feelings – we will recognize our relationship with animals? Is there not a relationship between how we see people from other ‘lesser cultures’ as essentially being created to serve as our cheap labour or meet our market needs and the way we view animals as created for our sport or dietary needs? The point that I want to make is this: there is no frozen way of being Dutch or Moroccan, male or female, black or white or pink, or anything for that matter; we are continuously becoming and we – as human beings – owe it to each other to facilitate that process of becoming.

3. A Principled Commitment to Reconciliation Premised on Justice

The South African story of reconciliation is a complex one and those of us who know the country beyond the lenses of tourists know that first, it did not come cheap and second, that the business of reconciliation is far from completed. The story of Mandela is not only one of enjoying koeksisters with Tannie Betsie Verwoerd but also one of stubbornness in resistance. Mandela was indeed given the option of reconciling with the Apartheid regime at least ten years before his release but he chose not to because it would have been a superficial reconciliation with simply a regime – not with the various formations representing whites and certainly not one based on justice. Poignant as the image of Mandela in his no. 13 rugby jersey may have been at the Rugby World Cup in 1995, or the presence of FW De Klerk at his inauguration, reconciliation for us in South Africa is not something that has happened. It is happening – or struggling to happen – every day and it remains a painful and frustrating process. It happens in the struggles over corrective action, over land claims, over contestations for more police stations in black townships, over the re-introduction of the death penalty, over the recognition of same sex partnerships, over the rights of immigrants and refugees from other parts of the continent, and above all, over access to affordable treatment for people who are HIV positive ...

Perhaps our story of reconciliation is only remarkable in its beginnings – beginnings that we can offer the world; it is a beginning free of bitterness and triumphalism. There was a sense of having overcome apartheid, never of having overcome white people. Far deeper than the idea of settling scores was the sense of needing the other, both for the inherent value of the other as well as for the economic development of our country and for all our people. It was and continues to be a reconciliation of negotiated values of justice, not simple majoritarianism. If truth be told, the vast majority of South Africa's people would support the death penalty and oppose gay

rights. Yet we negotiated and founded a country on making space for everyone and created independent organs such as the Constitutional Court to, in some ways, protect us against ourselves, to entrench the idea that, in the words of Nelson Mandela, 'never again will one group of people discriminate against another group of people, never again!'

4. *The comprehensiveness of a Human Rights & Reconciliation discourse*

How do we ensure that our 'never again' does not only mean a 'never again to me and my people' but a never again to me or anyone else?

Like many visitors to Jerusalem, I went to Yad Vashem – the Memorial to the 6 million Jews who perished in the Nazi Holocaust. Here, donning a paper *kippa*, I wept freely at the memory of those Jews and what they were subject to; but I also wept for the invective that I had recently heard being spouted by an Egyptian preacher, Muhammad Kishk – 'the Jews, watch out for the Jews!' –, at the hatred that I saw being spewed at an ahistorical 'the Jews' during my eight years of theological training in Pakistan, at the capacity of man – yes, 'man' – to inflict suffering on humankind, at the inability of the planners of this memorial to spare a candle for the many gypsies and homosexuals also killed by the Nazis and for the tragedy of the Palestinian people whom the late Edward Said has so aptly described as 'the victims of the victims', who now have to endure dispossession because of the unspeakable crimes that some White people committed against other White people.

I recalled a slogan from the days of the liberation struggle – 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' And now I understand that by 'all' we literally mean all. An injury inflicted on others invariably comes back to haunt those doing the inflicting; it is not possible to tear at another's skin and not to have one's humanity also diminished in the process. To thus recoil at the venom spat against the Jews is to fear how that venom will end up in what I may be compelled to consume one day; to defend the Palestinians against the daily humiliation by Israeli settlers and colonists is to defend the best in what the Jews have to offer the world. To stand up for all those imprisoned without trial in Guantanamo Bay and tortured is to stand up for yourselves so that my own humanity not be diminished by my silence.

This is the African notion of *ubuntu* – 'I am a person because of my connectedness to other persons; I am because you are'. If something lessens your worth as a human being then it lessens mine as well. To act in your defense is really to act in defense of my 'self' – my higher present self or my vulnerable future self.

An injury to one **is** an injury to all.

Being wrapped up in oneself is a nasty business. Observe how, in fundamentalist circles, the 'chosen' crowd becomes ever narrower and the frozen crowd ever larger. When one allows ideologies to be shaped by such bundles of self-centredness – whether in the name of religion, survival, security, or ethnicity – then it is really only a matter of time before one also becomes a victim. See what the United States is doing to the fundamental values of civilized society such as the rule of law, freedom from torture, etc. as it recognizes only its own hurt, as its vows of 'never again' mean 'never again to us' even as they inflict death upon Iraqis and Afghans where civilian casualties have totaled more than 120,000. For our own we offer memorials, for others 'We don't do body counts,' as was said by General Tommy Franks, who directed the Iraq invasion, and Donald Rumsfeld.

Albie Sachs is one of South Africa's great survivors of the liberation struggle, one of the drafters of our post-apartheid constitution and now a judge on the Constitutional Court. 'We (the framers of the constitution) did not insert the clause which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation for gay people, we put it in there for ourselves. Because it is in the recognition of the humanity of everybody else, where your own humanity is being affirmed, that of mine is affirmed. I am a human being because I recognise you as a human being. And when I fail to recognize you as a human being, then my own humanity suffers.'

What of the Palestinians?

Why, you may ask, drag the 'issue of the Palestinians' into a lecture honoring Mandela? 'Until now, your presentation has been 'wonderfully universal' and all of us could buy into it; why don't you keep it this way?'

First, it is in the particulars that we become clear about what we mean and where we stand. Broad generalizations are fine to make us feel good, but I am not sure if I have come all the way from South Africa for that. I am not sure if any of the prophetic figures in our history ranging from Moses to Jesus to Muhammed or from Mahatma Gandhi to Pastor Martin Niemoller to Nelson Mandela were essentially about this.

Second, the question of our commitment to justice and reconciliation is not merely one of where we were when it happened in the past or where we would like to be in the future. It is, above all, about where we are now. What are we actually doing about current threats to people who are currently living under occupation.

What does our recognition of, say, the courage of the Dietrich Bonhoeffers or the Martin Niemollers say about an authentic appreciation of that courage? Is it really about us feeling good and leading moral lives vicariously without having to deal with an injustice in our own here and now? What is it about millions of people in the West dying to catch a glimpse of the Dalai Lama or spending huge amounts of money on any book or CD that has his face on it – yet they cannot get themselves to write a postcard to the Chinese government protesting the destruction of Tibetan culture? What is it about the powerful that enables them to take ownership of the Desmond Tutus, the Nelson Mandelas, the Dalai Lamas, the Martin Luther Kings and then to recreate them in their own images?

Third, the struggle of the Palestinians, in many ways, reflects our propensity to adopt ‘sexy’ ones and to walk away from ‘unsexy’ ones. Talking about adoption, perhaps our ‘solidarity work’ does sometimes operate like adoption. Some people adopt orphans because of their need and that is fine. But when we do so we look at the looks of the baby, the skin pigmentation, whether the baby is cute or not and whether it will bring joy to the adopting parents and family. Others – few indeed – see the need to adopt simply because there are abandoned children in the world. These people may even see the moral need to adopt children if those children are victims of wars that they started. So, Arafat wasn’t charming, had an ugly beard and a big nose, was short, could not speak English well, could not get out of his army uniform. Well, sure he was no Mandela, no one can ever be Mandela. Is it a crime to not be like Mandela? Does not having a ‘Mandela’ deprive your struggle of its legitimacy? In terms of global politics today, there is no struggle more ‘unsexy’ than that of the Palestinians and thus the need for people like myself to continue our attempts to bring it to the center.

Fourth, our responsibility to speak to the occupation of dispossession of the Palestinians is a part of our own unfinished business. We in South Africa are who we are because of people like so many of you who made our business yours, you who slogged in your Kairos office, in your KZA offices and in your AABN office and after office hours in pubs and in your homes. (Remember how you waited for us to come and teach you to chill out and party?). So too will others become because of us.

Finally, given what we have gone through, we have something significant to say about victimhood, reconciliation and justice.

So what do we make of things ‘over there’?

Those of us who are South African or who have worked on South African issues will have a deep awareness of the tragedy that befalls people when the boundaries collapse between the interest of a particular community and the will of God or of God's promises to particular nations relating to particular pieces of land.

The tribe, for all intents and purposes, creates God in its own image and appropriates God for its own immediate political and economic objectives. God is reduced not even to a realtor who is subject to laws but a Patriarch that is generous to His own and ruthless to others. In a world of shared space or in competing claims over space, the idea of being God's chosen people is a particularly difficult one for it leaves no space for authentic conversation between the chosen and frozen. How do you negotiate with others when you have God on your side? How do ordinary concessions not become a betrayal of God's will?

When God has entrusted land to you and 'your seed', then it becomes part of your 'God-given responsibility' to keep the lines of production undefiled. The idea of the purity of seed as well as any attempts to keep seed pure is, of course, today regarded as racism. The implications of biological purity with or without the relationship to righteousness are logically inescapable; other people not having the fortune of being born in one's own group are lesser human beings – if indeed they are at all.

There is no virtue in any kind of elevation of the self when the self is founded on the accident of birth – regardless of whether this birthright is seen as conferred by God or not. In fact, it is particularly pernicious when rationalized as God-given because it removes the question of the virtue of the other from the realm of rational and ethical discourse. Victimhood then merely becomes another tool to perpetuate superiority and to ensure that the stories of one's own pain do not resonate with the stories of the pain of others. It is almost as if our victimhood is unique in history and thus it closes our hearts in an ironclad righteousness rather than opening it to other people's pain.

Victimhood, however, is not peculiar to Jews in Israel. Palestinians too have become trapped in their own sense of victimhood; a victimhood that places all discussion about the morality of certain tactics such as suicide bombings or martyrdom operations outside the framework of a universal moral discourse. 'We suffer, therefore any and all means that we employ to effect our liberation are OK' is hardly an adequate response when we see how our humanity is so inextricably linked to that of others.

I do not want to suggest that in our own liberation struggle that we never erred, that we did not have our darker sides. However, in the same way that we learnt from other struggles that preceded ours, so too can we offer some insights into what we could have done better or some inspiration from ours to those who – for whatever reasons – come after ours.

Thus, a spiral of victimhood traps both the victim and the perpetrator and does not enhance the humanity of either.

While, as I have said earlier on, reconciliation is never a completely done deal, the South African story tells in an unmistakable way that reconciliation is possible.

A major challenge for all our friends working or living in Palestine/Israel is to avoid strategies and rhetoric that imply that others will forever be our enemies. To suggest that any segment of humankind is beyond redemption is to negate your own humanity.

From our South African story we know that people can overcome their deepest suspicion and fears of each other; that bitterness and hatred do not flow in the blood of perpetrator or victim and that while fears of the other can be rooted in how others are treated, the indisputable truth is that all of us have the capacity to overcome them. This capacity to grow beyond our personal and historical circumstances, this refusal to allow the oppressor to curtail our humanity and capacity to be forgiving, this ability to wage a relentless struggle for your human rights while always remembering that a time may come when the walls would have to come down and we will have to talk, pick up the broken pieces and reconstruct, this is perhaps what the South African story is about – a story that we offer in some humility to others.

Sometimes we speak about Nelson Mandela as an icon with a particular historical relevance. Yes, that may indeed be the case. However, his life is a continuing moral for all of us, a relentless enemy of racism, never of any particular race, builder of a non-racial nation while affirming the rights of Afrikaners to be Afrikaners, a source of inspiration for those who wish to grow up brave and who wish to grow old courageous, for those who wish to get into the trenches for a more just world – a world that promises not only to liberate those on the receiving end of suffering but also the perpetrators.

We celebrate the legacy of this father of our nation – a legacy that he continues to create every day – be it by his scathing condemnation of the

imperialist war on Iraq, by his work on children or by his advocacy for the biggest scourge that our continent has known – AIDS. We celebrate this legacy – yes, in the way South Africans can do best, by partying, but also by a renewed commitment to create a world wherein it is safe for people to be people.

I believe this is what the new South Africa and its constitution are about. The story is told of a Jewish rabbi whose disciples were debating the question of when precisely 'daylight' commenced. The one ventured the proposal: 'It is when one can see the difference between a sheep and a goat at a distance.' Another suggested: 'It is when you can see the difference between a fig tree and an olive tree at a distance.' And so it went on. When they eventually asked the Rabbi for his view, he said: 'When one human being looks into the face of another and says: 'This is my sister or this is my brother then the night is over and the day has begun.'

For us the day has begun, and we share this with you. The breaking of day, however, also means the beginning of work at a time when many of us may prefer to sleep in. There is a war being fought out there against human values, against a culture of life, against women, against people who are 'different'. There is work to be done so that we leave a world behind in which our children can also party and that they party not only with computer games, but with real children from real cultures and backgrounds which we will need to enrich ours.

I thank you very much and God bless you all.

