



Statements and Speeches

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THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

Statement by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations General Assembly, New York, October 31, 1985.

Mr. President. When Bishop Tutu finished speaking last Monday, my Canadian colleagues felt as though there was nothing left to be said.

I wasn't able to be here at the time, but reading the speech afterwards, I could see him in my mind's eye, as I've seen him before, standing, at this podium, urgent, passionate, lucid, looking for all the world like a diminutive version of an Old Testament prophet, his voice mounting, cadence upon cadence, building — unanswerably — the case against *apartheid*.

The beauty of Tutu is the simplicity of his eloquence. He reminded us, at the outset, of his "beloved country . . . burning and bleeding unnecessarily to death", and he reminded us, at the conclusion, that he would "remember (those) who helped (his people) to be free".

In between, throughout the argument, the analysis, the documentation, the soaring phrases, the pleas for peace, there was one thing, one truly phenomenal thing, utterly absent — there was not so much as a whisper of malice, hatred, or retaliation.

That characteristic of so much of the black South African leadership has always astounded me. No matter what the provocation, no matter how deep the nadirs of despair, no matter how ugly the coercive apparatus of racism, the Tutus of this world, like the Lutulis 25 years before them, reject vengeance, seek reconciliation, espouse racial harmony.

If I may be allowed a personal aside, it is the one dimension of the struggle with which I have some small passing experience. Back in 1959, I lived and worked with South African refugees on the campus of the University of Legon in Accra. Ghana was newly-independent; Kwame Nkrumah was flying refugees out of South Africa in the dead of night . . . attempting to create a life-line of escape during some of the darkest hours of the infamous Verwoerd regime. They were all youngish men caught up in the tragedy of their country, facing the whips of Afrikaner extremism were they to return; but not one of them, not one of them embraced, at the time, premeditated violence: they all talked — with quiet single-minded intensity — of equality, justice, democracy for everyone; white, coloured, Indian, black.

I heard exactly those reverberations in the words of Bishop Tutu this week. And just as I asked myself a generation ago, I ask myself now, how do such people manage to maintain such generosity, such dignity, such vision in the face of so prolonged and so malevolent an assault?

I don't know the answer; it may have a lot to do with religious faith, it obviously has a great deal to do
