



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

with qualities of resilience and decency in the human spirit. But of one thing I am certain: this pattern of almost supernatural restraint will not last forever.

As the fabric of society tears asunder, as the government of South Africa defies reason, those who counsel moderation will find their voices stilled by violence.

That is why we're in such a race with time. And that is why, in Canada's view, the next six months are crucial.

Somehow, we must keep the momentum going. There is a sense — perfectly real — that we're poised on the brink . . . that at any moment, South Africa could descend into the maelstrom of conflict and horror. We have to maintain the faith with the black leadership that never gives up; faith with those who suffer the police in the townships, with those who languish in detention, with those who face trial, with those who are hanged at dawn, with those whose lives are already forfeit in the desperate struggle for freedom.

And keeping the faith means keeping the pressure relentlessly on. In that respect, the world has come a long way in the past several months. Canada is strongly representative of that crescendo of conscience and action which now grips nation after nation.

I don't think it's necessary to recapitulate for this audience each and every measure which Canada has recently introduced — we have circulated all our relevant political statements as formal documents of the General Assembly. Suffice to say, that between July and September of this year, Canada announced a whole range of selective sanctions, cutting right across the economic spectrum, incorporating everything from the effective ban on the sale of *krugerrands*, to a ban on bank loans, to an embargo on air transport, to a voluntary ban on the sale of crude oil, to an end of the toll-processing of uranium from Namibia. In concert with so many other nations, we have strengthened our sporting boycott, and so anxious are we to give expression to an aroused public opinion that the Canadian government has opened a registry where every single voluntary measure undertaken by Canadian provinces, municipalities, organizations, even private citizens can be inscribed as a testament of our implacable opposition to *apartheid*. As the dossier builds, we will forward the contents to the Secretary-General.

Such items, however, are simply the specific ingredients of political policy. Conceptually, we have gone much further. We have, with determination, helped to negotiate and then signed October's Commonwealth accord — a document which not only contains within it selective sanctions collectively applied, but also the terms and conditions for dismantling *apartheid*. And then, last week, from this very platform, the Canadian Prime Minister made it clear that if South Africa resists fundamental change, we're prepared to impose total sanctions; more, that if *apartheid* is not dismantled, we would consider severing relations with South Africa absolutely.

There are moments in the lives of nations when the immorality of one invites the opprobrium of all. This is such a moment.

Canada recognizes that some countries and some critics argue that the world is moving too slowly on this issue. In truth, no one could have predicted a mere six months ago that so much would galvanize so quickly. The pressure on South Africa is inexorably mounting. South Africa feels the pressure. The strategy now must be never to allow that pressure to abate. Over the next six months — the time-frame of the Commonwealth accord; the time-frame which Bishop Tutu has endorsed — we must use every device, every initiative, every opportunity, every diplomatic skill, every debate, every appropriate forum, within the United Nations, beyond the United Nations, individually and collectively to persuade South Africa that peaceful change alone makes sense, and that peaceful change can only be achieved when *apartheid* is forever expunged from the vocabulary of human and political behaviour.

The so-called reforms are no fundamental reforms at all. There remain in existence more than 300 *apartheid* laws. They constitute a lexicon of oppression. They restrict and control, on the basis of race alone, virtually the entire range of human activity. They are anathema to a civilized society.

Despite the elaborate arguments of some, we are not dealing with a complex issue. We are dealing with colour and dignity. Whenever I speak to one of my diplomatic colleagues from Africa or Asia about *apartheid*, the elemental pain in their faces is the pain of a simple truth: colour and dignity. I've never felt that more strongly in my life than since coming to the United Nations. This is a struggle we all must win. South Africa must be persuaded that the dismantling of *apartheid*, the lifting of the state of emergency, the release of Nelson Mandela and all other political detainees, the revocation of the ban on the African National Congress and other political parties, and above all, an immediate dialogue with the representative black leadership — these are the preconditions for an orderly and peaceful transition to a free and non-racial democratic society.

Mr. President, some people ask, what exactly does the black leadership of South Africa want? Let me end on that note with this quote:

"In government we will not be satisfied with anything less than direct individual adult suffrage and the right to stand for and be elected to all organs of government. In economic matters we will be satisfied with nothing less than equality of opportunity in every sphere, and the enjoyment by all of those heritages which form the resources of the country which up to now have been appropriated on a racial 'whites only' basis. In culture, we will be satisfied with nothing less than the opening of all doors of learning to non-segregatory institutions on the sole criterion of ability. In the social sphere we will be satisfied with nothing less than the abolition of all racial bars. We do not demand these things for people of African descent alone. We demand them for all South Africans, white and black. On these principles we are uncompromising."

Who is the author of those words? Chief Albert Lutuli when he was head of the African National Congress. On what occasion? In 1961, in his speech upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

Two Nobel Laureates, Lutuli and Tutu, almost 25 years apart.

Mr. President, the people of South Africa have waited long enough.