

PROPOSAL FOR STOPPING VIOLENCE AMONG AFRICANS

BY

HERBERT W. VILAKAZI
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

(10 October 1992)

Since the very beginning of the terrible violence going on within the African political community, I have been pleading and proposing that only the collective determination and action of the African community, represented by the top African leadership of political, civic, and religious bodies, can begin the reconciliation necessary, among African people, which shall lead to the final end of this fractricide.

We must mobilize the COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP of the African community, and the CULTURE of the African people, towards ending this violence.

I am suggesting the staging of an event, around which we should focus, mobilize, and organize, the attention and emotions and minds of our people, in a way similar to the manner in which the emotions, minds, and attention of our people were focussed, mobilized, and organized around the release of Dr. Mandela from prison on that entire day in 1990. That focus of the Press and statements ignited and mobilized the imagination, emotions, and

minds of the entire world around the figure of Nelson Mandela and the freedom struggle whose symbol he had become. Since Dr. Mandela insisted that he was inseparable from, and synonymous with, the ANC, that political organization accordingly glowed together with the figure of Dr. Mandela.

VIOLENCE within the African political community is an issue which is the most serious concern of almost all African people in this land. The African family is at war with itself; and the responsibility for bringing about reconciliation, and ending this violence, is on the African community itself.

It is worth stressing that, as well-educated and urbanized the political leadership being attacked and assassinated may be, the overwhelming majority of people embroiled in this violence, and suffering from this violence, are ordinary working-class, rural and semi-rural, people of the African community, in squatter camps, townships, and rural areas of the country. Culturally, these people are emphatically non-Western, but are part and parcel of African culture, traditions, and civilization. This means that, for best effect, these African people must be approached through the medium of African culture and African languages.

Here lies the biggest cause of the failure of the Peace Accord, so far, namely, that the entire project is conceived through the

44

medium and imagination of Western, educated, culture, and the guiding lights of it are individuals whose upbringing has kept them very distant from, and unacquainted with, the African culture of ordinary African people embroiled in the violence.

The meeting of 8 October 1992, at Ulundi, of the top leadership of IFP and PAC, and the audience that the PAC leadership had with His Excellency King Goodwill Zwelithini, constitute quite possibly a major turning-point in African politics, in our time, and lays a foundation for possible effective steps which should be taken towards ending the violence in the African political community.

In the 1960s and early 70s, when the Boers designated certain rural areas of the country, officially, as 'homelands', and in 1976 began implementing the climax of their policy of Apartheid - granting 'independence' to 'homelands' - I realized most clearly, then, that the Boers were sowing seeds of disaster for African liberation politics, in this country, seeds that would flower into terrible disasters for our liberation struggle, ten, fifteen, and twenty years hence.

I wrote a long manuscript, South Africa Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, in which I tried to warn the leadership of our liberation movements on this issue. The burning issue was simply this: what political and tactical attitude and relationship

45

should liberation movements adopt towards the areas that the Boers had officially designated as 'homelands'? What political and tactical attitude and relationship, should liberation movements have towards the political structures and leaders existing and recognized by the Boers in these areas?

Should the exiled liberation movements boycott, and fight against these areas, structures, and leaders and declare all these people 'reactionaries'? Or should liberation movements work with, assist, win over those that still needed to be won over, and work towards the liberation of the entire country together with the leadership and people operating within these structures -adjusting their tactics accordingly? These were the two options open.

Most people who took themselves too seriously as 'progressives', and as 'revolutionaries', thought that the answer was very simple: they opted for boycotting these areas, declaring all people operating within these structures as 'reactionaries', and for waging 'liberation struggles' against these people.

My position was that liberation movements are duty-bound to opt for the other policy -if we wished to avoid disaster, not just political but moral disasters, ten, fifteen, twenty years hence. My advice, based on the study of the experiences of other liberation movements around the world, was that we should avoid labelling these people and leaders 'enemies'; that we should

avoid driving these people against the wall (for obvious reasons: we all should know how people driven against the wall, and pressed to probable early death, are apt to respond!); that our starting-point should be that all African people re-defined by Boers as 'homelands' people, should be still considered our brothers and sisters who must be helped in their terrible difficulties -that, if we adopted this position and policy, we would be sure, sooner or later, to see ourselves and all African people in 'homelands' marching together towards a common liberation, still guided by African humanistic principles.

I sent copies of the manuscript, in which I argued for this position, to the leadership of all the exiled liberation movements: ANC, PAC, UNITY MOVEMENT, and SACP, as well as to the Black Consciousness Movement leaders abroad. I also gave a copy of the paper to Chief Buthelezi, when we met in New York in 1975 or 76.

Unfortunately, most of the exiled leadership of the liberation movements, did not accept my advice. They opted for boycotting and waging a liberation struggle even against the leadership of 'homelands.'

This, in my view, was a terrible mistake, for which I was sure we would pay a terrible price ten, fifteen, and twenty years into the future, the terrible price we are currently paying. I was

particularly alarmed, as, then, about two-thirds of the African people lived in rural areas, in the very areas re-defined by Boers as 'homelands.' About half of the total African population, today, still lives in these areas; and, very well aware of the culture, traditions, personalities, and psychology, of rural people, I also knew that there is hardly a person in a leadership position, in rural culture, anywhere in the world, who does not have a following; therefore, that a struggle against such leaders would be most divisive in the African political community.

Therefore, the red line that, in effect, wittingly or unwittingly, liberation ideologists and leaders were drawing, up and down the length of the entire country, a line that ran over the very belly-button of our African people, was, in my opinion, clearly a suicidal line for the liberation struggle in the future. It was clear to me, then, almost twenty years ago, that 'homelands', and rural-based African political leaders, would constitute a gigantic rock upon which our liberation movement would smash itself to pieces, weakness, and confusion. I warned strongly in the manuscript about the terrible danger of a wrong liberation theory, which would later turn the raw energies and emotions of immature, politicized African youth against those African people on the other side of the 'red line'.

Alas! the leadership of the 'progressive' liberation movements have not been wise enough to turn 'homelands', and rural-based

African political leaders, into a gigantic rock upon which White Supremacy would crack itself to splinters and defeat. It is striking to me, and an example of the continuation of this terrible blindness, that some of the most 'progressive' leaders and ideologists of the liberation struggle, still conceive of a "patriotic front" of oppressed people in South Africa, without 'homelands' or 'bantustan leaders.'

In the **Luthuli, Sobukwe, Biko Memorial Lecture**, in December 1989, I warned and shouted again, to no avail. The last words of my lecture read as follows:

"The homelands are the key to the success of our liberation struggle. The Boers created homelands precisely because of that -to weaken and cripple the freedom struggle, to divide us. And we fell into the trap." (Tribute, April 1990, p. 61)

We must correct this terrible mistake; and correcting it means first publicly admitting that we made a mistake, and announcing the 'new course'. The public admission of political mistakes, by political leaders, is a very important moral lesson for society: it is an event which humanizes politics and redeems political leaders as human beings. It is also a great act of reconciliation.

The violence in the African political community, in our time, runs through this 'red line', which was drawn years ago by most

ideologists and leaders of liberation movements, a 'red line' which has become a deep and wide chasm running through the length of the African community, a deep and wide chasm into which enemies of true emancipation of the African people also throw flammable material, petrol, and ignited matches, raising huge fires within which are consumed and destroyed the bodies and houses and properties, and spiritual health, of innocent African people.

The death of every hostel dweller, of every squatter-camp dweller, of every township dweller, of every rural and semi-rural person, from this violence, originates from this 'red line' which was drawn years ago; so does the poisoning of the spiritual health of our entire African community.

We must put a stop to this violence, and heal our community. A crucial part of this restoration of peace, brotherhood, and sisterhood, within the African community, is the erasing or removal of this 'red line' drawn years ago, incorrectly, by most ideologists and leaders of liberation movements, a line, in fact, which was simply superimposed upon, and followed, the line drawn maliciously by Boers to aid their supremacy over us. Who, in truth, was leading whom?

In an interview, which appeared on CCV Television News, on 9 October 1992, PAC President Makwetu, sitting next to King

Goodwill Zwelithini, said that he hoped the bond of brotherhood and friendship that had been woven between PAC and KwaZulu leadership, would extend and become a bond of brotherhood and friendship throughout the African community in the country. I propose we take practical steps to make this a reality, thereby helping effectively to end this violence. I propose that the leadership of IFP and PAC take the following proposal into consideration, and, if acceptable, seek to implement it as soon as possible:

PROPOSAL

I propose a march/rally of the entire African community, led by the King, Paramount Chiefs, and other traditional leaders, the top leadership of political, religious, and civic organizations, such as IFP, PAC, ANC, AZAPO, President Mangope, Brigadier Gqozo, and all other leadership of all independent and self-governing territories, Bishop Lekganyane of ZCC, Bishop Mogoba, and all other Bishops and Archbishops of African Churches, Archbishop Tutu, Dr. Chikane, leaders of Traditional Healers' Association, the Association of Izangoma, Hostel Association leaders, Teachers' Associations, Students' Associations, WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, Sports Associations, Trade Unions, etc, etc.

We may even consider inviting prominent leaders of neighbouring African states, e.g., Presidents Mugabe, Nyerere, Kaunda,

Chissano, King Mswati, etc., etc.

THE FOCUS OF THIS MARCH/RALLY IS ENDING VIOLENCE WITHIN THE AFRICAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY, AND AFFIRMATION AND FORGING OF BONDS OF BROTHERHOOD, SISTERHOOD, AND HUMANISM, AMONG AFRICAN PEOPLE.

The aim here is to ignite, focus, mobilize, and organize the emotions, imaginations, and minds of ordinary African people around the issue of peace, brotherhood, and sisterhood, and humanism among African people.

Underlining 'ordinary African people' automatically defines the cultural medium through which we shall attempt to communicate with our people, and the key leaders of the march/rally. The dominant medium shall be African culture, and the key leaders shall be Africans.

This emphatically does not exclude non-Africans from participating in the march/rally. All we are saying is that, since this is a war within the African family, the African family wants to talk to itself. And since the overwhelming majority of the African family are culturally non-Western, we shall be compelled to resort to the African cultural medium.

The dominant languages used should be (1) a Nguni language, (2) a Sotho language, and (3) English for the media and non-Africans in

the march/rally; but under no circumstances should English dominate the proceedings.

(We have a terrible problem, here, indeed, an instance of psychopathology which was brought about by the African Slave Trade and enslavement of Africans in the Americas. The great German scholar, Frobenius, stated that this slavery, like all slavery, needed a moral justification. In this instance, the justification was that the African was a "semi-animal." Here began a major problem: all non-Africans henceforth wanted to distance themselves, conceptually, as far away as possible from the "semi-animal"; and a fear of the "semi-animal" became part and parcel of the inner personality of virtually all non-Africans in racist societies. Just as an upper-class person, who has been forced to walk through a lower-class neighbourhood, at night, gets very anxious and scared when he/she has to walk past a crowd of lower-class people on the street, so all non-Africans, particularly Whites, in racist societies, are struck by terrible fear to the very roots of their inner personalities, whenever they see, or conceive of, a large congregation, or unity, of African people. They usually feel very threatened by such a congregation, or unity, and their fear is only relieved when 'their own' are in the leadership of such a congregation. We repeat: peace, unity, love, brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanism, among Africans, is a pre-requisite for peace, unity, love, brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanity, between Africans and Whites, between Africans and

all non-Africans! So, non-Africans, please, do not be scared by the sight of the African family talking to itself, and sowing seeds of love, peace, unity, and humanism, within itself.!)

WHAT SHALL HAPPEN AT THE CLIMAX OF THE MARCH/RALLY?

- (a) Short speeches, focussing on brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanism among African people. (This emphatically does not exclude brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanism with non-Africans: HOWEVER, PEACE, UNITY, BROTHERHOOD, AND SISTERHOOD, AND HUMANISM, AMONG AFRICANS, IS A PRE-CONDITION FOR PEACE, UNITY, BROTHERHOOD, SISTERHOOD, AND HUMANISM BETWEEN AFRICANS AND WHITES, AFRICANS AND INDIANS, AFRICANS AND COLOURED. That is why every one is emphasizing that negotiations shall not succeed unless there is an end to violence: and this violence is violence within the African political community. If Africans are divided and are at war, with which section shall Whites make peace?
- (b) Prayers, short religious rituals, by leaders of African Churches, eg., ZCC, etc.
- (c) Rituals for peace -Izangoma, izinyanga, etc. ISIKHALO.
- (d) Cultural items: traditional dances, songs, etc.

(e) Distinguished African visitors from neighbouring countries.

The key aim here is to ignite the imagination and aspirations and emotions of the entire African community around this issue of peace, brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanism among Africans, which we must have before we can have brotherly and humanistic relations with Whites, Coloureds, and Indians.

WE ANNOUNCE A NATIONAL AGENDA FOR PEACE, BROTHERHOOD, SISTERHOOD, AND HUMANISM AMONG AFRICAN PEOPLE IN THE ENTIRE COUNTRY.

Once this national agenda has been announced, and African people's emotions and imaginations have been ignited around this issue, THEN, AND ONLY THEN CAN WE SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT THIS PROGRAMME AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.