

“CULTURE AND CREED: TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES”

Chairperson,

Let me begin my presentation by expressing my profound gratitude to you for your gracious invitation extended to me to serve as a Yale Stimson Fellow in 2003. The Stimson Fellow programme is about sharing of ideas on a variety of complex issues that confront humanity. It is a true reflection on the person of the statesman Henry L Stimson, after whom it is named. I must add that it serves as a useful forum for cross-pollination of ideas among people with differing viewpoints. It is therefore of great value to society.

The subject for discussion is interesting and complex. The Mexico City Declaration on culture which was adopted by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, in 1982 defines culture as the “whole distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs”. The definition further states that culture gives the human being the ability to do important self-reflection. To add to the definition, I believe that it is culture that makes humans rational beings endowed with a critical judgment and a sense of moral commitment. And I believe that it is through culture that humans discern values and make choices.

Chairperson, I am of the view that the above definition of culture suffices for our discussion. It is clear, from this definition, that creed, which, in my understanding, also refers to a system or statement of belief or opinion especially in reference to religion, is in fact within culture. Broadly speaking, when we refer to culture, we are by implication also including issues relating to creed.

Chairperson,

I believe that in order to comprehend the discussion at hand, we must, as a basis of our deliberations, refer to the Lord’s Commandments. Two of the Commandments embrace all others. Let us get the entire quotation from Mark 12:

And Jesus answered him, “The first Commandment of all Commandments is: ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first Commandment.” And the second like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other Commandment greater than these.”

In the first instance, the Lord God Almighty is saying, “Love God your Creator with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”. Indeed, this is about the relations between the Creator and us who have been created in GOD’S OWN IMAGE.

The other Commandment says: “Love your neighbour as you love thyself”. This refers to the relations among ourselves as God’s creatures. The “neighbour” being

referred to here need not be of your race, tribe, ethnicity, religion, creed or any other artificial factors. Your neighbour is any other person whether black, white or brown, or other colour.

By the teachings I have mentioned above, it is clear that the Lord wants us to live in peace and harmony as Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, among others. These teachings are not only found in the Christian faith but are common doctrines found in other faiths too.

Chairperson,

A human being is by nature very inquisitive and always eager to explore the uncharted waters in order to find answers to difficult and intriguing issues. The unquenchable thirst for knowledge and the desire to domineer over other creations has led humans to continuously search for knowledge. A human being is never satisfied with failure to find answers to difficult questions faced daily. In fact, even in matters that are said to be “supernatural,” a human being desires to know the truth. We are also aware that while some people may strive for the truth, others prefer to ride along the path of deceit for selfish reasons. Greed and selfishness will always lead one to deceit and untruthfulness.

It is not always easy to walk along the path of truth, yet truth will always keep you at peace within yourself and also with your Creator. History is full of examples of truthful people who were persecuted and even put to death. But even as they died, if they died in truth, they died in peace. Consequences of truth may seem unattractive, but truth is always rewarding for the upright mind. Our traditional societies in Africa are founded on sincerity and honesty. In fact, in some traditional societies, deceit is heavily punished. Children are brought up to always tell the truth or some bad omen will befall them if they deliberately tell a lie. Children are made to believe that some watchful ancestral spirit would come and take them away if they told a deliberate lie. All this is a way of socializing children to grow up knowing to tell the truth.

Yes, we need cultures that greatly seek and express truth. With a truthful human world, this world would certainly be a better place to live in. There would be no need to betray one another. There would be no wars in this world. But because we are usually overwhelmed by selfishness, we have resorted to extortion, falsehoods and abuse of one another. For example, slavery and slave trade were practiced for a long time to the benefit of the West and to the detriment of Africa. The brutal force with which slavery was enforced clearly demonstrates the fact that the practice was not fair and just. Evil as the practice was, it was enforced with so much vigour even by institutions that purportedly anchored their very existence on truth, justice, and fairness. These include religious groups; all because of greed and selfishness. Up to now, the effects of slave trade make influence present cultures and behaviour.

I would mention also that the Civil Rights Movement in the United States had among its core leaders the black clergy. Among the religious leaders were those who believed, rightly, that a racially segregated society was not Just. If a system was not just it could not claim to be a truthful and fair society. Ruling out violence as a means of transforming the system, they opted for a peaceful agitation for change. If God was for all

His creation, why have a church for blacks and a church for whites, a restaurant for blacks and a restaurant for whites?

Needless to say that peaceful as the Civil Rights Movement was, people lost their lives - a totally unjustifiable outcome. They believed in a culture of peace but lost their lives. But such is the ultimate price that people like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr had to pay. Nelson Mandela was incarcerated in apartheid South Africa for over 27 years, just because he dared to speak out the truth on apartheid. Everything was done to try and break him down, but he stood by the truth. Similarly, during colonial rule in Africa, anyone who spoke the truth about freedom as a right for people regardless of race, colour or creed was seen as enemies of the state and were arrested and put in prison.

Chairperson,

The end of the Cold War has not translated into peace dividends for the world. We still have areas of tension and conflict in many parts of the globe. Some of these conflicts have their roots in some religious myths, beliefs or doctrine or selfishness as in the case of diamond rich countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone where war lords have waged wars for control of the precious metal.

The question of the Middle East has been on the agenda of the United Nations for about five decades without progress. During this period, efforts to bring about a Just and lasting solution in the Middle East have not yielded any positive results. Thousands of people on both sides of the conflict have lost their lives while many Palestinians to date, live in refugee camps with no modicum of hope for their return to their motherland. This is happening in a land that is home to many faiths, including Christianity. Why are we as human beings failing to live harmoniously in diversity? We often seem not to have accepted the meaning of the two Commandments - regardless of the demands on each one of us by these clearly spelt out guides. How do we work on peaceful cultures?

In 2002, the United Nations Millennium Summit, which was held at the UN Headquarters in New York, adopted a Millennium Declaration, in which member states considered, *inter alia*:

“that tolerance is one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the 21st century and that it should include the active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another in all their diversity of belief, culture, language - neither fearing nor repressing differences within and between societies but cherishing them as a precious asset of humanity.”

In another effort to promote tolerance, the United Nations General Assembly, at its 57th regular session adopted a resolution on Culture and Development, in which it, among other issues, welcomed the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2001. The Assembly also designated May 21, as the **WORLD DAY FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY FOR DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT.**

Chairperson,

The concern of the international community regarding cultural intolerance is an indication that we are far from strictly adhering to the Lord's teaching. Truth and honesty are being compromised for political expedience in some instances. And this situation presents a fertile environment for breeding hostilities and conflicts. The consequences for compromising truth can have serious ramifications on societies.

Chairperson, there is one other issue that demands the world's attention today. This is the question of HIV/AIDS that has afflicted Sub-Sahara Africa with devastating consequences. Millions have perished due to this disease and many more are living with the HIV virus. To make matters worse, the African AIDS pandemic is being aggravated by problems of food and general poverty. The United Nations World Food Programme estimates that 38 million people in Africa are not only threatened by hunger, but by large-scale starvation. This situation and lack of affordable drugs to treat the infected has compounded the HIV/AIDS problem in Africa. Africa is not on the top of the developed world's agenda, yet more people are dying there. We need to work together to deal with problems that are confronting humanity. **WHAT DO I MEAN BY THIS?**

Chairperson, let this great Centre of Learning which is using an extremely important name in this country and beyond, of Henry L Stimson, allow me to refer briefly to one other very important matter. Before that, I ask that we observe a moment of Silence in honour of Henry L Stimson, who continues by his example to bring us together every year to discuss issues of great importance to our development as human beings in this our ONE WORLD.[*Moment of Silence*].

Thank You.

Chairperson, I have never known two wrongs to make a right! We can never defeat **TERRORISM** by **TERROR** - anywhere on earth. I am, Chairperson, a believer in a genuine Globalisation. Today, however, I am a very sad African leader as I see what from the beginning I thought would provide for this our ONE WORLD a rare but powerful **LADDER** to lead us all to genuine Globalisation. I am referring to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation, **WTO**. The developed West has been and continues to use these as tools of what Jesus Christ said 2000 years ago – “To those who have, more shall be added onto them. And to those who have not, even the little copper they have, “little copper” is obviously my invention, shall be taken away from them.” We appreciate honest action. It helps. But we definitely need fair means of trade: We need a ground that is level in trade to develop and defeat **POVERTY** and **HUNGER**. The way these three organisations have been organised, they cannot help poor countries to defeat **POVERTY** and **HUNGER**. They are obviously instruments of the rich against the poor. Their culture creates poverty and injustice.

Chairperson, what did I mean when I said two wrongs can never make a right? I hear the USA has spent about \$400 billion fighting criminals who have been millionaires or billionaires by growing and selling bad and dangerous drugs. Wars have been fought with no real success. We all need to change our approach to this Drug War and in our fight against the culture of **TERRORISM**.

Chairperson, the invasion and defeat of Saddam Hussein will not protect the US and UK at all. By this War, we are creating a very dangerous situation. By failing to settle the Palestinian problem, we are adding to the hatred that the Arab and Moslem world is going to build against innocent US and UK citizens. I want to propose that the answer lies in all of us getting together to fight POVERTY, HUNGER, MALARIA, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases. I refer to Jimmy Carter's work in Africa, for example. ERADICATE those and you help to ERADICATE TERROR and all its off-shoots.

Chairperson, let us remember that, after all is said and done, when terrorism is aimed at the US, it does not only kill Americans. Please, don't forget in the Nairobi terror, more Kenyans died and got maimed than their American brothers and sisters. The same happened in Tanzania. In the recent terror attack against Israel, it is mostly Kenyans who perished. What I fear now is that those who may perpetrate acts of terrorism in the aftermath of the war with Iraq might be many more. Our task is to discuss this problem together truthfully, honestly. This is what is going to help us all!

In my time as Head of State in Zambia, in an attempt to improve relations and help in the freedom struggle, I met the rulers of racist South Africa and Rhodesia. Although it was difficult and challenging, through dialogue, we managed to have things changed. Military threats by the racist regimes were removed. Freedom fighters of Zimbabwe were released. So too we had Nelson Mandela, and his colleagues, finally released in 1990. A culture of dialogue is important for peace.

Chairperson, where ever I have gone and talked against the invasion of Iraq, I have emphasized that my criticism is not against the American people. Many of you are very aware of the implications. There are many and many in the USA who are strongly for peace. My concern has been with the position of the George Bush administration here and with the Tony Blair administration in the UK. My concern is with the effects of their actions.

On the current Iraq invasion by the George Bush administration, we note that members of the US administration worked with Saddam Hussein in those days when he fought Iran. They were together with him in his fight and equipping him with all sorts of weapons. The George Bush administration should not tempt us to the conclusion they are in there: a) to recolonise, in the year 2003, and, b) they are doing that for oil. Already, it has been widely reported that the administration has undertaken to give a post-war contract to Halliburton, a company linked to Vice President Dick Cheney. c) Unlike what Mr George Bush had been saying, by yesterday, Sunday 13th April, 2003, no Weapons of Mass Destruction have been found against Saddam Hussein. d) Now, the Bush administration has turned towards Syria. They have accused Syria of having Weapons of Mass Destruction. The threat has now been extended towards Syria. What do we make of this?

Chairperson,

Finally, while most people may perceive culture as it is represented in our traditional dances, songs, folklore, habits and traditions, I believe that it is much more

than that. In this era of globalization, where societies are integrating freely, culture has become more dynamic. We must remember, however, that it is important to preserve the good aspects of our rich cultures. In this respect, we must exercise tolerance of other cultures and traditions and strive to do our best not to compromise truth. Our interest should be the promotion of a culture of good neighbourliness, harmony, as well as international peace and understanding.

Having referred to the problem of HIV AIDS earlier on, let me end by singing to you, my wonderful audience, a song that we made in Africa to fight the Pandemic.

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I thank you.

God Bless.