



Visit of the United States Bishops Conference Delegation  
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**State of the Nation Address**

**Introduction:** In order to appreciate where we are now as a nation one would need to look back at where we came from. Even the South Africans here today sometimes forget just how far they have come as a nation. To begin with, it would be important to have some idea of what apartheid was!

**Where We Came From:** Few political structures have captivated world attention in the way apartheid did. It united socialist and capitalist countries against it; it brought about a unity of purpose between rich and poor, East and West, in their opposition to it. Volumes have been written on this subject and yet it is almost impossible to describe apartheid. To understand it, one would have to be born 'a black person' in South Africa and have survived the struggle to exist, the daily humiliations, in order to be able to attempt to describe it. No 'white person' has the right to say what apartheid was in those days!

Like Hitler who tried to convince the Germans that the Jews were not really human beings, so the Afrikaner believed that the black person was not really a human person. They were seen to be some kind of an inferior breed of being. This I believe to be at the essence of understanding apartheid.

The black people in South Africa stood naked in a state of limbo, completely stripped of their worth as human beings. They were in the eyes of the State no more than statistics, mere definitions without culture, without history, cosmic accidents haunted by a guilt complex. "We are God's creation, we are equal to all but we are non-white, we are non-beings."

That the struggle against apartheid was often portrayed as a struggle for equality is a false portrayal. The blood that flowed in the streets of South Africa for decades did not flow because black people wanted to use the same toilets as whites, travel in the same bus or live in the same neighborhood. No, the struggle was for an identity, a search for a lost humanity, a search for their own soul. Rather than being an ugly aberration, South Africa was really an extreme parable of an entire global system. It was literally the First World and the Third World living side by side in the closest proximity - with one literally killing the other for the sake of its own wealth and privilege, and the other suffering and dying, just out of sight and hearing of its executioners. This bleeding land was a microcosm of the oppressive dynamics which now govern the world order.

**The Transition:** The world at times looks on South Africa and says that it was a miracle that the country changed in such a peaceful manner. It was no miracle. That God blessed South Africa is not in question but the human sacrifice of thousands of people is the price South Africa paid for a new political dispensation. However, the country was blessed with good leadership, most well known of which is Nelson Mandela, but there were many other good leaders who participated in the two-year negotiation process known as CODESA from the beginning of 1991 to the end of 1993. Leadership is the key to understanding the political dynamics of African countries and indeed perhaps throughout the whole world. We have only to look at Zimbabwe to make the point.

When I speak about the economy a bit later I will explain that one of the tragedies of the negotiation transition period was that the liberation forces emphasized political transformation to the detriment of economic transformation. In other words, while political power is clearly in the hands of a new democratic and stable government, economic power to a large extent remains in the control and hands of the minority, mainly white, who governed the country up to 1994. This is a key issue facing the country today, but I will speak about that later.

**The New Dispensation:** South Africa has had three general elections since the first in 1994 (1999, 2004, 2009) and the African National Congress (ANC) have proven to be the overwhelming choice of the people. Despite a break-away group who formed their own party called The Congress of the People (COPE) in late 2008, the ANC polled 65.6% of the vote in this year's election. One can safely describe the South African political scenario as one of political stability in the middle power range. For example, South Africa is a member of the G20, along with India, Brazil and countries like that. By and large, opposition is weak in South Africa and still tainted with the racial divides that were so much part of the past. If good governance needs strong opposition to govern well then South Africa is found wanting.

**The Constitution:** Perhaps the most important achievement in South Africa since 1994 is our new constitution. This was a people-centered and people-driven process with consultations taking place the length and breadth of the country. The outcome was a people-owned constitution. The Catholic Church was not happy with all aspects of the constitution but accepted it in general while rejecting the issues such as Section 12 (a) in Chapter II of the Bill of Rights, which reads, "Everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity which includes the right to make decisions concerning reproduction." This clause paved the way for legal abortion, a situation that the Catholic Church in South Africa continues to condemn today. However, the greatest achievement of the new constitution was to make a Constitutional Court and not Parliament the custodian of the constitution. Though there have been attempts to water-down this tremendous safeguard of the constitution, to date, the Constitutional Court has by and large been able to remain independent though it is under pressure. I would venture to say that the politicians either didn't realize the importance of this court or want to reduce its power.

**The Truth and Reconciliation Commission:** It should be pointed out that South Africa did not embark on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission came about as a result of political compromise. Let me explain. The impasse centered on the then ruling party's (the National Party led by F.W. De Klerk) insistence that some form of amnesty be granted to the agents of the apartheid state. The opposition (mainly the African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela) conceded to this request that amnesty would be granted and this decision paved the way for the signing of an interim constitution and the infamous elections of April 1994. The task of drafting legislation fell to the new Justice Minister, to bring to birth the stipulation of the interim constitution, a mechanism for the granting of amnesty. At this stage organizations of civil society objected vigorously, questioning how amnesty could be given to perpetrators of human rights violations, while no mechanism existed for addressing the pain, suffering, sorrow and loss of victims and survivors. After intense lobbying, a compromise legislative text called the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* was promulgated. The Act defined how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would operate. It is an important distinction as it curtailed the possibility for a Commission that would have only one

objective that of national reconciliation, rather than a Commission that was based on political compromise!

**Victims and Survivors: Truth Written in Tears:** 22,000 people came forward to tell their stories. For the victim, the pouring out of grief, of loss and anger, and reliving the full extent of their suffering, certainly helped to bring about some healing. It was important that the Commission in no way minimized that suffering and ensured that the victim was treated with dignity and their pain acknowledged.

**Perpetrators: Trading Truth for Amnesty:** Close on 7500 individual applications were received for amnesty and about 1000 of these were granted. The vast majority of applicants were already in jail for criminal activities. They saw the Commission as a way out and chanced their arm. The reality was that most of them were indeed criminals and not people motivated by a political cause. Therefore, their amnesty application was refused.

**Reparations and Rehabilitation: Healing the Wounds of the Past:** The Commission recommended to the government the need to compensate victims who came forward to tell their stories. The victims and survivors argued that if there was no reparation there could never be healing and reconciliation. Having told their stories, people expected some form of concrete response and at times expressed the view that they felt victimized a second time by the fact that there was no immediate reparation. In fact, the general lack of clarity about possible reparation was by far the major flaw in the whole process. It was only in 2003 that the government finally announced the final reparation. The equivalent of \$3000 at the time would be paid to the 22,000 or so people who came forward.

**The Economy:** As I said earlier, economic power and wealth remains firmly in the hands of those who ruled the country prior to 1994. On top of this is the fact that South Africa has the greatest disparity between rich and poor in the world. For many South Africans who live in appalling living conditions with no access to sanitation, clean water and electricity and with poor education and deteriorating health facilities, they wonder where this new South Africa is. To their credit, the government over the years has been trying to address this issue. They started off with a more socially minded economic policy known as the Redistribution and Development Programme (RDP). However, it soon became apparent that if they wanted to be part of the world economy they would have to take a more liberal economic approach and so within two years RDP became RIP and a new economic policy called Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) was enacted. The late Archbishop Hurley described GEAR as “unbridled capitalism being unleashed on an unsuspecting population.”

Rising poverty is addressed in three main ways. The first is through taxation. Close on 50% of the national budget is given to social ministries each year (Education, Housing, Health and Social Welfare). The second is through social welfare (25% of all South Africans receive some form of a state pension), and the third is through targeted projects aimed at the poor. However, delivery and not lack of resources has been the number one obstacle to improving the life of the poor. The new President, Jacob Zuma, has positioned himself as the ‘President of the Poor’ and it will be very

interesting to see if his government can improve on this lamentable state of affairs in the months and years to come.

**Moral Issues:** Like it or not, the moral fabric of our society continues to deteriorate. It would be an interesting question to ask the South Africans in the room whether the moral situation of the country was better during the apartheid years. But let's not start an argument here. Corruption at all levels bedevils the new South Africa and seems to permeate all aspects of life like a virus out of control. Added to this is a culture of entitlement that people have where they expect the government to do everything for them. This has contributed to a high level of xenophobia in the country, given that those people in our country from other countries are much more industrious and managed to climb the economic ladder much quicker.

**HIV/AIDS:** The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to be a silent holocaust of death, both in the country and in the neighboring countries. It is having a devastating effect on the country, in particular where the youngest and brightest succumb to the disease and leave a vacuum of unskilled workers. It wreaks havoc in families leaving thousands of orphaned children to fend for themselves. The state simply cannot cope.

**Crime:** The overriding issue in South Africa that unites rich and poor alike is an alarming crime rate. Fear is the dominant emotion. That crime is related to poverty is not in question but poverty alone cannot be blamed. Respect for human life in South Africa seems to be at an all-time low and it will take the combined effort of all people of good will at all levels of society to come together and articulate a feasible plan of action to reduce this appalling crime rate.

**Conclusion:** Finally, one needs to find a way of hope in this scenario of doom and gloom that I have just spoken about and no doubt that is the fact that South Africa will host the 2010 World Cup. This sporting event offers a golden moment of opportunity for the forces of good in the country to unite and present to the world all that is good in South Africa. Will the country rise to the occasion remains to be seen, but the hope and prayer is that it will. Given the United States did so well in our recent Confederations Cup, getting as far as the final as they did and being beaten by no greater team than Brazil, I am sure your eyes will be fixed on our country in June and July next year, and this will bring back fond memories of the time you spent among us.

Thank you.

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