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ASSOCIATION OF ROUND TABLES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
- VERENIGING VAN TAFELRONDES IN SUIDER AFRIKA

Opening Address by - Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi
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Black Alliance

Durban City Hall 26th April 1984

I felt privileged when an invitation was extended to me to open this Conference of the Round Tablers of Southern Africa officially. I must confess that I experience a sense of loneliness as I stand before you. It is the kind of loneliness which all of you must experience in varying degrees as you play leadership roles each at your own levels. Whenever I stand in a place like this to address people like yourselves on the destitution of my people, their eyes

- â\200\224â\200\224are focussed on me, â\200\224and-their-expectations magnify the loneliness which one experiences as a leader. In a country like ours on whichâ\200\224 - the entire international community focusses attention, a leader â\200\230like me who represents a voiceless people who are both politically and economically deprived, feels even more lonely than a leader would feel under normal circumstances. The pangs of this leadership loneliness are made more poignant when at times a feeling of hopelessness settles on me. In a situation such as the one in which we find ourselves in our troubled land, one often feels a sense of hopelessness that one is getting nowhere in the pursuit of one's objectives for one's people.

I am totally committed to the use of non-violent strategies to bring about fundamental changes in this country. Non-violent â\200\230strategies are much more difficult to implement than a strategy of violence. Those who are involved in violent strategies feel that progress is made each time one or two Molotov cocktails are thrown. Such actions are publicised by the media. When you knock at the door until your knuckles hurt, as happens when non-violent strategies are used, the media is quiet about both your pain and frustration. When this happens, when the immoral is publicised, when the moral is ignored, one sometimes begins to doubt the humanity of man. \

It is often forgotten even by those of us who use non-violent strategies that changes brought about by non-violence are bound to be evolutionary. This implies that haste must be made very slowly as one rightfully demands what one's human dignity dictates. We often forget that radical change does occur through non-violent means. We forget because change through non-violence occurs as the accumulative effect of numerous different acts by different individuals which take place within an abhorrent system rather than through delivering a couple of massive blows on it. I find that in trying to do what is right, one is often cast in a wilderness by the sheer demands of human impatience when we take too long to reach our goals.

This is the background which I am certain will sound familiar to

many of you. I am asking you to see with me how important your existence and your role as Round Tablers are even for people like myself. By effectively reminding me that human decency still

exists and that it exists even in a society which looks as God-foresaken as ours appears to be, you give me hope. When the clouds of gloom hang over me, your organisation is an oasis of hope which I and all men need if we are to survive the frustrations which flow from our failures and those of others.

Quite often I ask myself whether I would have managed to remain sane if organisations like yours did not exist. Organisations like

the Association of Round Tablers manage to give flashes of

assurance that human beings are still capable of human decency, however dark the sky might appear. An organisation such as yours says to me that whatever man's failings may be, man can still be his brother's keeper.

For generations many in this country have risen to be great human beings and have risen above the prejudices of their society to

tower above their contemporaries. That they have done so in a situation as difficult as ours proves that man is indeed the very height of God's creation. I know that in the spirit of the well

known English saying that one swallow does not make a summer, we must recognise that these individuals have not liberated our country. There will therefore be those who will shrug their shoulders and say that exceptions to the rule can never be the measuring rod of the extent to which any society rises to its responsibilities. And yet if there were no exceptions to look up to, life's struggles would not be worth our while. I think of prominent churchmen such as Bishop Colenso who lived in this Province in the last century, and worked amongst the Zulu people as one such exception who became a tower of strength to the deprived,

to the destitute and to the oppressed. I think of outstanding clergymen who have lived here in our own times such as Bishop Trevor Huddleston, Dominee Beyers Naude, to name just two. I think even of laymen such as the late Chief Albert Lutuli, the late Dr. Zacchariah Mathews and our own Dr. Alan Paton in this Province. I pay tribute in particular to scores of decent men in your own organisation, the Round Tablers, who have been amongst our unsung heroes in various parts of Southern Africa. Your objectives are indeed very noble. For me as a political leader, it humbles me to be reminded that there is an organisation like yours whose members make it their business to encourage high ethical standards; who promote social intercourse and fellowship among professional men; who promote the quickening of individual interest in everything affecting the public welfare and who promote understanding amongst peoples of different cultural, language and political backgrounds. It is wonderful to be committed to these objectives without upholding a flag for any particular political faction. I know it is one of the most difficult things to be open-minded but your great organisation tries to do all these decent humane things, not on behalf of any particular political grouping, but on behalf of humankind.

Any institution which gathers together talented young men in a common concern for their fellow human beings must be fundamentally important. It is for this reason that when I was approached I had

no hesitation in accepting an invitation to open this Conference. The more I thought about what I should say the more I regarded your invitation as quite a challenge. Round Tablers are picked from among the ranks of those who are breaking out into real achievements in society. They are distinguished in one way or another and before them lie careers and lives of promise. Round Tablers are therefore a particular kind of audience with whom one should discuss fundamentally important things. Their commitment is to high ideals and they are practical in their commitments. One should therefore not only discuss fundamentally important things with them but one should do so in the context of confronting them with the real challenges of our day and age. R

The state of mankind and problems of human co-existence, whether they are found in the national or international field, are only partly the responsibility of governments and international agencies which governments form. The future of mankind lies more in the hands of men and women around the world than in the hands of governments. It is ordinary men and women themselves who direct governments, who spur governments on to greater challenges or who tolerate bad government. There is no system in the world which does not in the final analysis rest on the shoulders of ordinary people.

Round Tablers throughout the world concern themselves with charity and with upholding the values of those who fight for the under-dog and strive to achieve a better world in which there will be no under-dogs. Round Tablers constitute a kind of human buffer zone which buys time while governments, national and international agencies grope their way towards national and international responsibility.

The choice of .South Africa as a venue for this year's Round Table Conference could, I think, not have been better. We are confronted in this country with a crucible of human affairs, heated by the politics of fear and anger. South Africa is a melting pot of human affairs where things of real value are being discovered, rejected, re-discovered and tried and tested. The struggle for liberation in this country is a noble struggle based on values that really matter. It takes place in a context in which the government of the day has been in power for 36 years and has espoused internal policies which have made South Africa the pariah of the Â«civilised world. There is in this country a great gulf between the haves and the have-nots. Wise reformers compete with those who want to employ terror to bring about change. The Church is lost and is

groping its way towards an ever more vital role in bringing about the kind of changes which Christian values demand. In a very real and deep sense South Africa is passing through a crucial time.

It is now common cause amongst all thinking people in this country that we have to grasp the thorny nettle of change and the challenge I am going to throw out to Round Tablers today will be a testing challenge. I hope that when I do so, I will not be misunderstood. My challenge to Round Tablers is that they should come to a greater realisation that what we need in this country and in the world is what one can perhaps call transformational charity. Round Tablers could consider fundamental issues at any venue anywhere in the world, but perhaps the pangs of hell can best be considered in hell itself. Within a proverbial stone's throw of where we meet here today, there is destitution on a scale found only in the worst of Third World situations and that destitution co-exists with the kind of affluence which is found only in the best of a First World situation. Here perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, we are confronted by the needs of government, and perhaps here more than anywhere else in the world, we are saddled with bad government. The co-existence of poverty and affluence in this country should provide Round Tablers with the context for their international conference which will not be easily paralleled elsewhere.

Round Tablers have over the decades evolved a philosophy and a sense of commitment of their own and I do not see it as my place to advise Round Tablers what to do and what not to do. As one who is not a Round Tabler, I see it as my duty today to speak for the poor and the destitute and to hold up to Round Tablers the challenges which come from the people themselves. I myself was born a peasant and my daily life is dominated by deep concerns for the poor and the destitute. Virtually every day of my life I am confronted with the issues which flow from poverty and destitution, and I am confronted with them in a country with a strong and vibrant cash economy benefitting the one-fifth of the population which is White and which enjoys a total monopoly of formal political power. I exist in the cut and thrust of Black politics and I have on many occasions had to consider, reconsider and reconsider yet again, the options which lie before me as a leader. Again and again I have come Dback to my fundamental political standpoint. This is ' that somehow or another we have to make South African society work. We have got to transform it and we dare not destroy it before we attempt ' to do so.

I do not believe that there are ideological salvations for this country; I do not believe that in situations of haves and have-nots, political victories alone will remedy what is wrong. Any government which inherited power in this country would have to continue to face the issues we face. There is no leap into Utopia for South Africa and ideologues who promise Utopia tomorrow make no real contribution to the process of change. I believe that South Africa has to be transformed and that it is wrong to think that society as we know it has to be destroyed before it can be changed. I find myself coming back again and again to this realisation because I am a Christian and a democrat. When I look at the need to transform a society such as South Africa, I must necessarily place my faith in people, as creatures of God capable of transcending intolerable circumstances. It is in this context that I so deeply value the kind of role which Round Tablers are already playing. And it is in this context that I say that the role that Round Tablers are playing needs to be broadened in perspective and sharpened in focus on those things which are crucial for real change in this country. By saying this, I am not trying to underestimate the noble values which your noble organisation pursues.

I have no hesitation in saying that all charity is good. If we take the parable of the Good Samaritan and reduce the facts ipde to their simplest expression, we find that opne human being met another in trouble, put his hand in his pocket and continued on his way . All too often simple charity is decried. One hears the expression "soup kitchen mentality" which decries or belittles

simple acts of giving. I believe that the kind of charity which can play a role in transforming South Africa begins with valuing this very thing some people would call "soup kitchen mentality." The minimum requirement of true charity is that one human being responds to the needs of another human being in this most simplest and most direct form. The old lady who can do no more than give a bowl of soup to somebody who is hungry and under-nourished is a Good Samaritan, and when that old lady systematically gives more plates of soup to more people who are hungry and under-nourished, she becomes a better Samaritan.

Those who have passed through the dark valleys of destitution and have triumphed over adversity to emerge eventually as members of society making a contribution to ongoing life have often tarried at tables where soup is handed out on their journey to triumph. Not everyone who comes to a soup table poor and destitute is going to triumph over destitution, but amongst those who stand before any soup table, there are those who will triumph if they are given that

plate of soup. There are those who could triumph over life in destitute circumstances if they were given a bowl of soup at the right time. Simple charity of giving must not be under-valued.

Undoubtedly it is better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish without teaching him anything at all. I understand what is meant by those who condemn simple charity and use the term "soup kitchen mentality" to describe it. There is a need for us to go

beyond the simplest form of charity, but we need to keep our sense of

of proportion and we must not throw the baby out with the bath water when we talk about the charity of simple giving as being insufficient to transform society.

I believe that in a very real sense an over-concern with constructive charity, an over-emphasis on preventative measures rather than remedial measures; an over-concern with making charity a sharp cutting knife of change, are over-concerns which denude transformational charity of one of its essential qualities. Transformational charity is not a clinical exercise in the use of logic. Transformational charity is informed love expressing itself in practical ways and we must never cease practicing simple giving.

I would like to suggest that in this modern age of insights into the nature of man and society, we are prone to forget that these insights have to be internalised by individuals and generalised in society before they become the property of society and not merely the concepts a select few can find in text books. I believe what one can call "soup kitchens" are valuable entry points for ordinary South Africans into that vast field of human discovery which lies before true charity. How many times does one not hear South

Africans from affluent sectors of our society say: "What can I do?" How often does one not come up against human resignation in the face of a veritable sea of need? How often does one not find good people impotent in the field of charity? I believe there is a vast untapped source and a store house of goodwill in this country, and I believe that one of the keys which could unlock the doors of this untapped goodwill lies in the hands of people like Round Tablers.

When you open a soup kitchen in poverty-ridden squatter areas, where life expectancy is low, where disease is rife, where hope is dying, and where anger is being generated, you make a beginning where a beginning has to be made. You make a place where some beginner in transformational charity can stand and be involved in simple giving. I suggest that the only starting point from which many can go forth to real achievements in transformational charity are such soup kitchens. They are the first nets which Round Tablers should cast into the waters of affluence to reap those who capable of labouring in love.

So far I have woven two ideas as threads in my challenge. The one is the idea that soup kitchen charity often plays a salvaging role in the lives of those individuals passing through the deep valleys of destitution to triumph as human beings in the end. And the other is that we can garner from affluent society those who will play a vital role in transformational charity but who need a starting point to do so.

Those who under-estimate the value of the simple act of giving forget this: what some people need most in some circumstances. Let me take the devastating floods which followed Cyclone Demoina as an example of the circumstances I have in mind. Hundreds of thousands of people in places like KwaZulu, Swaziland and Mocambique were rendered homeless. Thousands upon thousands of people had their homesteads carried away in raging floods. Not only did they lose their houses; they lost their furniture; they lost their clothes; they lost their cooking utensils; they lost their fowls; they lost their meagre stocks of food, and when the floods passed they sat destitute in the mud of despair. Their first and most immediate need was the need to eat and to be sheltered even with a bit of canvas. To meet their need, we simply have to put our hand in our pocket and be a Good Samaritan. Those who in such circumstances do no more than this do good, and those who carry the plight of such people to the attention of those who can put their hand in their pocket do a magnificent job. There are times in life when the true meaning of charity demands that the haves give to the have-nots and to do so would be good even if like the Good Samaritan we simply gave and moved on.

We are deeply concerned in KwaZulu because a great many thousands of people simply have to be fed each day and we do not know where that food will be coming from tomorrow or the day thereafter. The Red Cross has concerned itself with the plight of those who lost everything in the floods. The Red Cross recognised that the floods which followed Cyclone Demoina created a disaster situation which can be accurately described as the worst of its kind ever to be experienced by this country. To enable people to be Good Samaritans, organisations like the Red Cross and the Round Table have a vast amount of background work to do and if they decried simple giving, the hungry would become the starving. Charity which turns to espousing human reclamation in medium and long-term projects stands in danger of overlooking short-term needs which are desperate and which have to be met. We cannot afford a mentality in this country which says let our children die like flies while we concern ourselves with creating a better life for future generations. Nor can we in this country afford to concern ourselves only with preventative measures. Transformational charity remains. Charity concerned with giving where giving is needed, but it is also charity which is concerned with removing the causes of destitution.

When you stand outside this building and if you could see beyond the hills in front of you, you would see over a million Black South Africans in desperate situations which characterise squatter camps. The South African Government disowns them because in terms of

apartheid policies they should not be there. The Durban municipality disowns them for - the same reason, and they are constitutionally beyond the jurisdiction of KwaZulu. There is a

po-man's-land just beyond the hills which surround Durban where people are at this stage almost entirely dependent on charity. Organisations such as the Urban Foundation have moved into the area and are attempting to do something there which the Government has failed to do. Your own organisation has also made its modest contributions to alleviate suffering. But over a million people living in desperate destitution require more than what is already being done for them. Something like half of those million people are under the age of 15. The only hope for them lies in the untapped resources of goodwill which organisations like the Round Table have to unlock.

I have dwelt on the need for the simple charity of giving because I do not want to be misunderstood when I go on to talk about transformational charity. When people set out on a journey they should know both where they are going and how to get there. As we set about bringing about changes in this country, we should also

know where we are going and how to get there. One of my appeals to you today is to recognise that whatever political differences there may be between one of us and another of us, or between one group of us and another group of us, there are standards of human decency, and there are standards of civilised behaviour which can provide comments on where we should be going and how we should be getting there.

For me there can be no higher ideal in the field of social change than the acceptance of a common destiny for all of us, where we shall enjoy the best of life for most of us. However many cultural groups there are in this country, there must be ideals which are the best for all of us. When we propagate the concept that we have different destinies for the different race groups of this country, we fly against the face of all we know about man and all that we know about God. However some justify apartheid as a present necessity, they cannot gainsay the simple fact that the ultimate ideal for us is one society which enshrines the highest human values all men can share alike.

I want to take a step into being deliberately contentious. White South Africans so frequently, knowingly or unknowingly, treat Black

South Africans as kaffirs, even though they resort to wusing appellations such as the term "Black." There are those who call us Blacks while - treating us as kaffirs. Sometimes jokes make serious comments. Like the joke now doing the rounds about a progressive White talking to another progressive White about conservative Whites, he said: "Man, the Whites in the Free State are so conservative that they still call their coons kaffirs." If there are Whites who cannot shake off ox-wagon political mentalities in this country, they have their counterparts in Black society. There are Blacks who think that Whites should be driven into the sea; there are Blacks who think that there is so little hope for Whites that the country will only be salvaged by being dominated by Blacks. Whether we are White racists or Black racists, and there are-a great-many of both in our midst, racists put themselves in a position where they cannot see that the highest ideals which mankind has evolved over the centuries are there for all of us.

Politics in South Africa is dominated by racist attitudes and politicians so often seek racist solutions to racial problems. The role of charitable organisations in this country which work across racial barriers " play a vital role. Every act of charity across racial barriers; every act which makes hands reach out from " the haves to the have-nots; every act which strives to remedy the terrible discrepancies in our society are acts which keep alive the

flame of hope and which work together to make possible the kind of social reconstruction in this country which we all want. Charity which is transformational holds up before the people ideals which are timeless and remind people that there is hope in mankind itself.

I believe that transformational charity should accept that the ideal society is a society in which all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; and in which race, colour, sex, language and religion, political or other opinion, social origin, do not bar people from that to which they are entitled; in which everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person; in which everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of his or her State; in which everyone has the right to a nationality; everyone has the right to own property in their individual capacity or in association with others; in which everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of opinion and expression; in which everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country; in which everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment; in which everyone has the right to education and to pursue their own job advancement to the maximum of their ability.

We should insist that people of all political persuasions accept these rights as their ideals. They are the ideals which direct transformational charity. We are wrong to water these ideals down because we live in a racially divided society. We should not allow the process of polarisation to take place in which the lofty ideals man has distilled from his experience over long years of time, are sacrificed on the altars of expediency. Transformational charity seeks not only to alleviate human suffering but to bring about a society in which human suffering is minimised. When we sacrifice any of these lofty ideals, we sow the seeds of human suffering as we do so.

Transformational charity is not a simple expression of high ideals. Transformational charity makes us reach forth with hands of certainty and guides us to be efficient and practical in bringing about positive changes which banish human suffering from our midst.

In order to be good we have to be practical. High ideals which do not work amongst men and women are ideals that cannot be put into practice and are worthless idealist daydreams. There is no good

in anything which does not work for man. Hare-brained schemes born of good hearts, and loving incompetence can make no contribution in transformational charity. There is as much need to be highly efficient in the work of charity as there is to be efficient in business and other important human pursuits. Rugby and tennis are "played at their best when the contenders are efficient at what they are doing. Whether it is sport and leisure or whether it is in work or business, or whether it is in charity, we must place a high premium on efficiency. It is this realisation which makes me regard my address to you to day as being so fundamentally important. Round Tablers are chosen to serve the community because, amongst other reasons, they are efficient in whatever they do. Round Tablers are practical men who do not divorce social conscience from professional efficiency. Round Tablers are achievement-orientated people setting out to conquer the world and to rise above others, and I address you on the question of charity as a very select audience.

I could hand out accolades and I could enumerate the achievements - of Round Tablers in South Africa but I see my task today rather as one who accepts the fact that you know about your own achievements. If I look at South Africa today and I look at the fact that there is terrible political, social and economic injustice in our midst; if I look around me and I see, for example, that the State spends R92 per annum on a KwaZulu school child but R1 021 on a White school child; if I calculate the chances in life for a new born Black baby and compare it with the chances in life for a new born White baby; if I look at the fact that there is gross inequality of opportunity-in-this country; if I look at the fact that there is a vast wastage of God-created human material in our midst, then I must come to the conclusion that there is something radically wrong with our society.

South Africans are under-achievers in the things of real value and I believe that institutions such as the Round Table can do a lot more than they have done in the past to salvage human decency in our midst and put it to work to transform society.

The challenge that Round Tablers face is to increase the efficiency of charity in this country, so that it becomes transformational in our society's progress towards ideals recognised for so long in civilised societies. We cannot be exempted from believing in those ideals because of our peculiar South African circumstances. The circumstances which militate against high ideals should spur us on to ever further heights of achievement in the pursuit of these ideals.

I expect those who are destitute in Black Society to rise above their terrible circumstances; I preach self-reliance to my people; I preach self-development to my people; I tell my people that liberation will not come like manna from the skies above. I tell my people that we live in a harsh world where we cannot expect anything for nothing. I repeatedly warn my people that they have got to endure suffering and grasp the reality of their situation and labour night and day for a better world for their children. I tell them that their terrible circumstances will winnow out real human values and I tell them that the fires of poverty will temper them into human beings of with sterling qualities. If I can say this to my own people, I am entitled to turn to those involved in the work of charity and say bluntly that in spite of all that I appreciate which they have done, that they have not yet completed their job; that charity in South Africa has not yet achieved its noble ends; that the very facts in our midst demand that we recognise that we have a long way to go before we can be satisfied with what we are doing. I say bluntly that we must recognise that

we are a nation of under-achievers in South Africa and nowhere is our

under-achievement more apparent than in our striving for social justice and the achievement of everlasting values in South Africa's political, economic and social institutions.

Your Conference has taken place in South Africa in what is an

extremely important time in the history of Southern Africa. The

importance of the Nkomati Accord is not as some people try to make it a magic wand that will resolve our problems in Southern Africa. The importance of the Nkomati Accord is that it underscored our interdependence in South Africa which drives us all to a common destiny, willy-nilly. It is significant that this Conference was scheduled long before there were any thoughts of any kind about the Nkomati Accord. If one talked about its possibility this time last year, people would have regarded such a thought as off beam.

I have taken the liberty to talk as a Black South-African to you Round Tablers and to give you a Black South African view of what charity should be about, and as I move towards concluding my address, I - want to turn our attention to the fact that political, social and economic reconstruction in this country must take place in the full realisation that we are part of the international community. I say bluntly that there will be no reconstruction in this country worth the paper it is written on if we persist in seeking solutions as though South Africa does not form part of the international community. Whatever happens in South Africa immediately and intimately affects the well-being of neighbouring States, and whatever happens in South Africa immediately and intimately affects the vested interests of the Western civilised

world. The South African question is not a question which - the international community can afford to ignore and the solution to South Africa's problems are solutions which must necessarily involve the international community. Whatever roles governments play and whatever roles international agencies play, we will in the end depend upon human decency if justice is ever to prevail here in this land of ours.

If Round Tablers in South Africa are to play the kind of role which they should be playing, they need to join hands with Round Tablers elsewhere. Round Tablers form a knighthood which is international in orientation. If the free enterprise system in South Africa is going to triumph to create equality of opportunity for all, and if it is going to triumph to create the kind of wealth which will enable us to eliminate poverty, ignorance and disease, we will have to work at the ideals which Round Tablers espouse. A truly free enterprise system is more than a form of economic organisation. It should be a way of life which supports human decency. International Western concerns about South Africa abound. I believe these concerns have been more apparent than real in the past, but I believe that this is so in large measure because they have been rendered impotent by the vested interests of affluent White South Africa. Round Tablers in their concern for the poor

and the destitute should open the doors of this country to international Western industrial concerns about what is happening

here. ST

I believe that it is when people like Round Tablers go forth to work amongst the destitute and concern themselves with the well-being of their fellow human beings that political sense begins to prevail. Destitute communities become known quantities and the tragedy of human deprivation ceases to be the subject matter only of moral debate. I believe that the political sense which is born in practical concerns for people is a kind of political sense we so

.. desperately need in this country. As Round Tablers concern themselves with transformational charity, and as Round-Tablers begin to organise the charity of giving and go on to become involved in transformational charity, they will to an ever greater extent see the need for a national and international effort to make not only South Africa but the world a better place in which to live. Charity may begin at home, but charity at home is the fertile nursery for national and international concerns. It is this frame of mind that I consider it an honour to declare this Conference of the Association of Round Tables in Southern Africa officially open.