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OF

HARMONY

For well over two decades the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has consistently emphasized the necessity for establishing a more just society in South Africa which would provide all sections of the population with equal opportunities to advance economically, politically and socially. In recent years there has been significant progress in these fields. It appears to be clear that despite setbacks, the momentum towards an equitable society will continue to gather pace and racial discrimination will eventually be phased out.

It is to be hoped that the transition to such an era will be smooth and peaceful, thus ensuring a sound basis for a stable society. However, acquired and prevalent attitudes of contempt and prejudice towards people of different "colour" will impede progress in this direction. It is therefore important for all people of goodwill to adopt positive attitudes in thought and deed if a society in which racial equality is to be the norm would have a fair chance of success. Negative attitudes or even virtually unconscious habits of speech which offend people could have unfortunate consequences, which are counter-productive to racial harmony.

Does the Jewish community have a special role in this unfolding scenario? In the first instance Jews have themselves been victims of discrimination, which has been responsible for much suffering in the course of our history. Furthermore the moral teaching of our religious tradition demands respect for the dignity of every human being and in the words of our Torah requires us to "treat the stranger like the home-born". These precepts should motivate our behaviour irrespective of what political opinions we hold as individuals. As citizens, Jews do of course have the right to express these opinions through the political party of their choice, but it ought to be done within the framework of the moral teachings of Judaism. Coupled with the need to improve our attitudes towards black people in particular, we should bear in mind that this approach also has a practical side. In particular we should ask ourselves whether we are paying adequate salaries to those who work for us in our homes, factories, shops and offices. We should be sensitive to their human and material needs - which are similar to our own - particularly in such areas as family care, education, housing and nutrition.

By and large our community has a good record concerning a humane outlook. However, there is no doubt that there is room for improvement. Let us begin now and make our Jewish contribution in terms of ethics and history, to help usher in a new age in which there will be greater equality and justice for all in this country, as this is the best guarantee for a peaceful and happier society in the future.

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