

## PERSPECTIVES

1992

### What Does Justice Require?

*By Rev. Frank Chikane*



Eric Miller/Afrapix/Impact Visuals

South African church leader Frank Chikane's address to a National Council of Churches conference in the Fall of 1991 provided a detailed briefing on the current situation in South Africa. Dr. Chikane, who heads the South African Council of Churches, described both the changes that had taken place and the government sponsored violence, political prisoners and other obstacles to change.

From Dr. Chikane's speech it was evident that freedom day may still be a way off in South Africa, and recent events have taught us that the transition period in South Africa may be very treacherous.

But Chikane devoted much of his speech to addressing the theme of the National Council of Churches Conference: What Does Justice Require? To this question, Chikane added another: "Can we pack up all our structures on southern Africa, or South Africa, can we dissolve the anti-apartheid movements and all the organizations that are campaigning for the end of apartheid?"

The Africa Fund believes Dr. Chikane's discussion of these questions address some fundamental issues that need to begin to be debated in this country. We reprint here excerpts from that second part of Frank Chikane's speech on October 27, 1991.



## What Does Justice Require?

What does justice require of us in the light of more than three centuries of colonial and neo-colonial oppression and exploitation? What does justice require of us when the African majority has been subjected to legalized discrimination and economic exploitation for more than a century?

What does justice require of us if approximately 80% of Black people were dispossessed of land? What does justice require of us if the Black majority has been subjected to more than 40 years of apartheid and were not allowed to own or participate in business except as labor units?

For me it was classic to find a letter written in 1963 to every Sowetan saying that as Black people in Soweto, you can not own or set up a business concern that provides more than basic commodities like bread, milk.

Blacks could not enter into partnership or participate in shareholding activities. They could not participate in the economy. Blacks were deprived of opportunities, education, technical skills.

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### *What does justice require if approximately 80% of Black people were dispossessed of land?*

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What does justice mean when only 2% of business ownership is in Black hands. What does it mean when 60% of the shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are held by Anglo-American Corporation and its subsidiaries?

What does justice mean when African people only share 11.2% of the National Disposable Income? When only 50% of Blacks participate in the economy of that country and the rest of the others are completely excluded even just as labor in the process. What does justice mean if more than 40% of South Africans are unemployed?

What does justice mean if seven million Blacks are without houses? What does justice mean when 40,000 exiles are expected to return home to this kind of crisis?

## The Freedom Charter

When we try to understand these questions, we are accused from all angles by those who benefit from the system. I went to a conference recently and one brother who was very honest said his fear is that the expectations of the oppressed are so high that he is scared about the implications.

I am also scared, because people who are in a shack don't expect to be in that shack when Mandela is President. They expect to be in a house. There shall be houses for all says the Freedom Charter.\* There shall be education for all.

\* The Freedom Charter is the African National Congress basic policy document, passed at a "Conference of the People" in 1956. — Ed.

This brother was saying his problem about the Freedom Charter is that it is something that is not achievable. And I said, "If that is the case then that is what I am struggling for." I am struggling to approximate the kingdom of God.

For us as Christians our reference point is the kingdom of God. It is the ideal that is in front of us. And the Lord tells us to struggle and strive to approximate and come closer to it. We have to do it, even when it sounds utopian, even when it sound crazy, even when it doesn't look real.

I have to strive for it because justice requires that all people of God live in peace and can express and participate in the creative reality of God in fullness without restrictions.

What justice means in South Africa is that there must be restoration and restitution. It is not easy to talk about that in South Africa. I discovered it is not easy to talk about it here. When you say, "Return the land," they say, "It is Communism." If you use the word nationalization you are even in a worse position. So I have decided I will not use the word nationalization.

I am simply going to argue that the land was taken away from the people by force without compensation, and the land must be returned to the people. I think it is simple logic; I don't give a history about it.

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### *What does justice mean when African people only share 11.2% of the National Disposable Income?*

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If you say that it is not possible to return land which was taken a century or two ago, I argue that my mother was removed in the early Sixties. The land she was removed from is still intact; it has not been used. The land was not needed; there was no shortage of land. They were simply applying and implementing apartheid laws. Therefore, it is easy to return the land to the people.

## Marginalized Young People

What does justice require of us? It requires that we correct the imbalances created by apartheid over the many years. We have a vast group of

marginalized young people that have never had the opportunity to go to school. Especially after 1976 we have thousands and thousands and thousands of those youngsters.

We have others that have been deprived over the many years, those who were houseless and who by design were not allowed to buy houses in Soweto for many years. Even when I bought a house in 1982, even then I could not buy the land. It is only in the last two years that I could buy the land on which the house is. We need affirmative action to correct all these injustices. But affirmative action can be misunderstood as well.

What we are asking is that the damage done by apartheid be corrected. If it is not corrected, there will be no justice in our country, even when apartheid is gone and the apartheid regime is gone.

We need to face the reality that our people are victims and our people have to be helped. Some people are saying

what about paying for our torture? What about paying for our imprisonment? What do we do with Mandela who spent 27 years in prison.

We are saying, I am saying, maybe I must not say plural, I am saying that my torturers are still there walking in the corridors of John Vorster Square [police station]. When Khotso House [SACC headquarters] was attacked and we called the police, who appeared but the torturer to come and help me. It is a very strange situation.

When there is a security problem and you ask them to provide security, who comes? The torturer of the people. And so you say, "No you cannot provide security for us." Because the torturer cannot go to the township. Because people say, "There is the torturer and we must deal with him." And so there is a damage that is beyond repair.

But we are saying that there are things that are repairable, and we can deal with those issues. We need to commit ourselves to them.

## A Just Economic Order

Justice requires that we set up a just economic order for a future South Africa. We need to talk about a new thing that does not exist at present. We need to talk about something that is not just capitalism, not just what the experiment of the Eastern block was trying to do. We need something beyond all of them. We need to create a new order. But we cannot do that in South Africa alone. And that is where you come in. There is no way we can have a isolated experiment in South Africa, because the international forces of power will come and destroy us.

When Washington and Moscow began to talk some few years ago some of us celebrated. We thought our dilemma would be resolved. We were caught in between. When you said, "I am a capitalist," they killed you. When you said, "I am a communist," they killed you. When you tried to put an experiment in between, both destroyed it. So we couldn't even try an experiment. And so one day, they started talking and we thought now we will have the right to produce an experiment, a new order, a new formula, something ahead of us, beyond us, something unknown.

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*We are hoping that you citizens of the United States will participate in the struggle to produce an international economic order that will produce peace rather than debate profit and interest.*

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Then, of course, the disaster happened. Now we have got one superpower, and now it dictates to the world. And I must thank you for the churches in the United States of

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America for the stand they took in Iraq. And I know it is sensitive and very emotional. I don't want to debate it with you; don't ask me a question about it. But those of us who are victims of power in the corners of the world were encouraged that the churches can still stand even when they risk their credibility.

We are hoping that you citizens of the United States will participate in the struggle to produce an international economic order that will produce peace rather than debate profit and interest. We need a compassionate modern economy. We need to do something new and none of us have the formula. No textbook talks about it. We need to create new textbooks.

I am struggling because I have no economic training. The seminary did a disservice to me. They should have taught me to do economics, because it looks like all our problems are there. We can do our theology, but if we do not have an understanding of economic power and process, we will not produce justice.

I would like to invite you to join us in this program to build up a compassionate modern economy that will defeat the weaknesses of the past system. We are inviting you to join us to define a code for investments and divestments in South Africa. So that when those investments are made they are not made at the expense of the people of South Africa, to benefit other people than the victims of apartheid.

We are inviting you to participate with us in a struggle to reconstruct the country, to begin a new experiment. Help us to get the world to learn from this new thing. We are asking you to join us in our struggle that looks impossible, that looks too idealistic. We want a just order.

## A Brief Biography of Frank Chikane

Dr. Frank Chikane was born in January of 1951 in Johannesburg, South Africa. He and his wife, Kahiso, have two children. He has practiced as a pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Africa between 1976 and 1981. Between 1977 and 1982 he was repeatedly detained without trial, and often kept in solitary confinement, tortured and beaten.

After the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 to campaign against the Apartheid Constitution he was elected Deputy President of the Transvaal Region of UDF, a position he held until March of 1985. He also served as Deputy President of the Soweto Civic Association which became an affiliate of the Front.

He joined the staff of The Institute of Contextual Theology in 1981 and was made General Secretary in 1983. He stayed in that post until June of 1987 when he was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the South African Council of Churches.

Special thanks to The National Council of Churches for organizing the conference at which Dr. Chikane gave this speech. Additional copies of this publication are available from The Africa Fund for the cost of production.

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