

## **27 years later: "Offload the corrupt and upload the just and capable"**

Danie Mouton

"Offload the corrupt and compromised from society, upload those with integrity!"

A fitting battle cry for church and civic society from church leader, struggle veteran and former director general in the presidency, Rev Frank Chikane.

He spoke recently to Nelson Mandela Bay Christian Leaders about the church's role in healing and transforming society.

The struggle for justice is not over. Twenty-seven years after 1994, the same number of years Nelson Mandela spent behind bars, Chikane said, we seem to have regressed and are in a bad shape.

"Former struggle partners, tortured with us, fighting with us for democracy, have now become part of syndicated criminal brigades. They misuse public money destined to eradicate poverty and create a better life for all for own gain," Chikane said.

The arrogance of these syndicates boggles the mind. As soon as arrests started, their organised strategic backlash against the judiciary and other organs of the state was swift and brutal.

The church can have none of this. We need to defend our constitutional democracy in partnership with civic society.

Justice for the corrupt and compromised should become the new normal in our society.

Yes, he said, "offload the corrupt. Send them to jail. Ask them to go in peace. They must do so freely. And tell them not to play a Simson on us by bringing the pillars of society down en route to jail."

Justice for all will take a concerted effort after a decade of intentionally weakening the state to capture its resources.

Restoration of service delivery by the weakened state demands of the church to collaborate with civic partners and local governmental structures.

As pastor in Soweto, Chikane has first-hand experience of these partnerships. He co-piloted the implementation of ward-based action networks of help, support, and development. This model is now a template for others to follow.

You do the following, Chikane explained: churches start to look outside their boundary walls and connect with other churches. Together you map what he calls the pain of the community. Where is services and help lacking?

As a local action network these churches then develop services and include essential partners.

Much of this work is to keep local government structures accountable. The state has a budget to deliver services, but the money and the service does not reach communities. Go and knock on the door of the local councillor and ask about money, services, and delivery.

"How difficult can it be to remove garbage from a community? In doing so, you create jobs. Why then are people wasting away in filth with sewerage flowing down the streets?"

Some knocking to do on some doors, indeed. In this way the church can channel the anger of the community constructively towards improved service delivery.

For Chikane this is a deeply spiritual effort by a church touched by the love of God for the whole world. If you "let God be God, the God who created all and who loves all, even enemies, why would you limit the outpouring of God's love to your own little circle?"

God loves all and the Body of Christ is one. It is us who divides and breaks Christ's body into pieces. We elevate our fractured understanding to the final truth and set ourselves against other Christians. For the church to become a societal force in service of God's love, we need to discover our God-given unity. Churches need to see each other as partners, take hands and serve together.

The local elections later this year are an important opportunity to change the course of South Africa, Chikane argued.

The church never entertains party-political preferences. However, it should pressure all political parties to nominate candidates with integrity and ability.

Withdraw the church's support when compromised or corrupt candidates are fielded. "The voters sit in our pews!"

Every church should have sessions on good governance, rightful expectation of local political leadership, public accountability, and integrity in the public sphere.

If political parties know we calculate our support based on the integrity of the faces they put on ballot papers, they will change their tunes.

"When we work together no thief will be able to hide. Councillor should know lack of performance will have consequences. Those who tender to work, must know we will ask what happened to the money."

Chikane is a senior member of the SA Council of Churches (SACC). In 2017 the SACC declared the current government as "morally illegitimate". This resolution still stands.

However, he is encouraged by recent arrests and the current president's effort to rebuild the capacity of the state. Pres. Ramaphosa invited the church to participate in this process.

The danger is that criminals at all levels will keep on running the country. "If we can offload the corrupt and upload the just, I have hope."

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