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# UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN S.A.

## General Synod

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**14 April 2010**

**Introduction**

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), regards it as our sacred duty to speak a prophetic word, to witness publicly and express our concern about a number of issues in the South African society that need urgent attention. We do this in celebration of our 16th anniversary, today 14 April and as an expression of our commitment and loyalty to our country's wellbeing and prosperity. We thought it also helpful to reflect on our country as we celebrate Freedom Day and the 16th anniversary of our democracy on 27 April 2010.

**Inflammatory speeches**

The Holy Scripture, teaches us in the Book of James, chapter 3, about the problems we humans cause by an out of control tongue. The Scripture says that our tongue has astonishing potential. It exercises considerable power and influence for good or evil. The great power of speech can be turned to evil purposes as it has been throughout the human existence. Undisciplined speech has a dangerous and destructive effect. The Scripture says that the tongue is a world of iniquity. The tongue represents the world with all its wickedness. It is set on fire by hell. It is dominated by hell itself, the final abode of evil and source of all iniquity. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison, akin to the venomous tongue of a snake. What the Scripture emphasizes is the dangerous potential of uncontrolled speech. All of us, especially those who lead people should carefully watch their words, because our words can have devastating and deadly effects.

We are therefore, deeply concerned about the extremist and irresponsible statements that certain politicians make from time to time. These statements do not only create uncertainty and tension in the nation, but also sparks fear among citizens. It also creates a stumbling block for the process of the normalization of South Africa into a just and reconciled society. We are especially deeply concerned about the revival of the singing of the struggle song, "Kill the Boer", by the president of the ANC Youth League, Mr Julius Malema and the reaction of some of his supporters to this on the social network, Facebook. Leaders must realize that people follow them in what they say and do. Sometimes they do so without questioning issues, because they trust their leaders. The power and influence that leaders have over their followers is a tremendous power. It is for this reason that leaders should be very careful with words.

Words are like feathers released in the wind. It goes where the wind takes it. So it is with words. When it's out its out and you have no power over it. You cannot gather them back. It develops a life of its own.

Words can kill!

The Uniting Reformed Church regards all human life as sacred and precious in the eyes of God. We uphold the Biblical principle of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not kill". Daily our nation experiences the senseless loss of life through crime. It is therefore unimaginable, irresponsible and insensitive in this crime ridden country, that somebody like Mr Malema, who is a leader of people and who serves on the National Executive of the ANC, the ruling party and government, act in such a deplorable manner. We cannot emphasize enough that violent crime grips this country and that all South African should see it as our duty, especially the duty of government to preserve life, rather than create conditions where life is endangered and making calls for people to be killed.

The statements made by the ANC in the beginning to defend this song by saying, among other things, that it is part of the history of liberation, is totally out of touch with the new reality that the ANC, together with other political parties have accepted when they entered the Codesa negotiations and the subsequent inauguration of the democratic dispensation in South Africa. To continue to sing of war against any section of the South African population is dishonest and a betrayal of the agreements reached at Codesa and the inauguration of our democracy.

We agree that the consequences of apartheid, as a social, economic and political system, still ravage this country and must be eliminated from our lives. We have however, opted for a peaceful transition and for democracy and we should use this new dispensation more effectively to, eliminate and eradicate the ramifications of apartheid. It is the responsibility of government, in all spheres of its work, to enact the necessary laws, create the social and political framework to eradicate the consequences of apartheid. This is not a time to revive old struggle songs as if we are still pre- 1994, but a time to govern and govern effectively and deliver to the nation, especially to those who were deprived and disadvantaged by apartheid.

We acknowledge President Zuma and the ANC's attempts to berate Mr Malema, but it seems that he is defiant in his stance. This does not reflect good on the President as head of state, on the ANC as ruling party and South Africa. His continued disrespect for the president and public spats undermine the authority and dignity of the head of state and his office. This situation creates uncertainty in terms of political stability. The institution of the presidency should be respected by all, so that we as citizens can live secure in the knowledge that our head of state is able to govern according to the dictates of his conscience and the constitution.

We therefore call on the President of the Republic and the ANC to take the necessary firm steps to remedy this situation for the sake of justice, security, reconciliation and nation building.

## **Freedom Day**

Within a few days time we will celebrate Freedom Day. We will look back on 16 years of democracy. We are grateful for the progress made in the past 16 years. We are however disappointed that these changes did not fundamentally changed the life of the victims of apartheid. In fact it seems to us that those who have perpetrated apartheid still enjoy the fruits of their past and the fruits of this democracy.

We must acknowledge that SA suffers from an incomplete, insufficient liberation and transformation on a number of levels. We wish to comment on the following:

### **Economic realities**

We have come to realize the well known saying in the world of oppressed people namely, that the oppressor will somehow grant you political freedom, but not easily and in some cases, never economic freedom. This is also true of South Africa. The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa believes that the second major struggle for South Africans is in the economy. This struggle is already been waged on a significant scale, but will increase in intensity with devastating effects for this nation, if it is not addressed adequately. The Economic empires in South Africa and in the world collude to keep the poor poorer. We realize with embarrassment the frightening increase in the income gap between the rich and the poor. Whilst the majority of the poor and economically deprived remains the black peoples of South Africa, we also see an increasing number of white South Africans in desperate poverty and also living in shacks and on the streets. Whilst the majority of the wealthy remains white, we also see a small, but growing percentage of black millionaires and billionaires. We can talk about small signs of the de-racialisation of the economy. Yet the system reproducing these glaring inequalities remains the same. Economic emancipation in the main, means today a small elite both white and black and some, well connected to the political establishment, who at the expense of the apartheid poor, are fleecing the public treasury. This is where a major fault line lies. Economic deprivation of the victims of apartheid explains in our opinion, the growth in disillusionment, desperation and anger in our society.

### **Justice and reconciliation**

South Africa, because of race apartheid is still a divided society. For this reason the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to deal with reconciliation. We are not so sure that fruits of national reconciliation emanated from the TRC. A major issue that was not dealt with in this process is the issue of justice. This is a major issue we try to avoid, while the apartheid system of which we want to rid and cure ourselves from, was a system of political, economic and social injustice. We need to reconcile South Africa's people, but to call for reconciliation without restorative justice or to ignore it is an exercise in cheap reconciliation. It is an act of refusing to acknowledge the clear realities of South Africa. This cheap reconciliation is haunting South Africa, because the victims of apartheid are still waiting for justice to be done. Only restorative justice in conjunction with reconciliation will bring about a new way of existence in South Africa. We cannot elevate reconciliation to an absolute principle, without dealing with the wrongs of the past. South Africa has unfortunately not dealt with this issue in a transformative and liberative manner.

### **Political: and electoral system**

Since 1994 South African elections were held on the basis of proportional representation (pr). Voters cast their ballots for a list of candidates nominated by a political party of their choice rather than for individual candidates. The PR system provides all parties, no matter how small, with representation in the national legislature proportional to their electorate. The PR provides for the representation of South Africa's racial minorities without resorting to the creation of reserved seats and separate voters rolls for different racial groups, as in some countries. The PR system is thus a non-racial system to facilitate racial representation, if parties would, as expected, draw the most of their support from different, racial and ethnic groups. This is a good system for an emerging democracy as ours, with its race and racial issues. This system is also good for a nation in transition. This however the current political system fails to really empower the electorate. We have no power to hold those elected officials accountable for their performance and delivery. This system does not allow legislators to be held accountable individually. The electorate can do nothing to effect change in the interim to the next election. Legislators are protected by their parties, because their parties nominated them and send them to parliament. These representatives don't even know what the needs of their local communities are and deal with it. Despite minor reforms that were made to the system, such as assigning members of the National Assembly to areas, where they don't even reside, does not suffice. Because these legislators are not representing defined geographic areas and communities, they are not accessible to members of the public. The PR weakens the vital link between government and the public/electorate that are the essence of democracy. It is not surprising that that all the majors' parties endorsed the continuation of this system, because it places power in their hands and disempowered the electorate.

We call on all political parties to engage a process to give real power to the people, by a system of direct election of the President and representatives to the legislatures. To give to the people the power to elect their representatives of choice and to democratically remove them from office if they do not deliver. By giving the people direct power, will ensure a better calibre of representatives, better service delivery, and accountability to the people. Direct elections, giving to the people real power, is a better and more effective way of moving South Africa forward. The current system gives the electorate only selective power on Election Day.

### **CONCLUSION**

When we reflect on the state of our democracy, we come to the following conclusion: 1994 was a tremendous moment of hope and euphoria when the possibilities came with the inauguration of our democracy. Over the years the euphoria had waned. The glow had gradually declined and is no more. Realities have sunk in, because the economic empires are still in place that once deprived us. The empire strikes again, however with a more friendly face, because our own have joined the empire.

The reality on the ground is persistently there: escalation of unemployment, underemployment, social misery, class discrimination (have and have not's). There is still too much leaning to the strong than the weak.

**We must hold our government accountable, but since the South African electoral system does not seem to do it, because of our disempowerment by the system, we need to do the following:**

We need a civil society that is strong.  
We need people in motion to effect change.  
We need organizing, mobilizing and demonstrations.  
We need voices to be heard.  
We need to bring pressure to bear on every situation that needs change.  
We need to be more critical.  
We need more in-depth discourse, dialogue and rigorous debate.  
We must respect our politicians, but they also need to be corrected.  
We must lift every voice, every prophetic voice, for the sake South Africa and its people  
and not accept things as they are.

**Issued by the Moderamen and Executive of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA):**

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