

Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the kind invitation to be here with you tonight. I am proud to <sup>be</sup> associated with this organisation which has such a wonderful record in the ~~xx~~ history of resistance to injustice in South Africa. You have been around for a long time now, driven not only by deep care and concern for people in need, but also by a genuine desire to work with others towards those ideals which have come to mean so much to the people of our world: human liberation, freedom, justice, peace and fulfilment.

The struggle for these ideals in this country has been long, and your own contribution to it shall not be forgotten by the oppressed <sup>and</sup> suffering people of our land.

Since the first day you have joined this struggle in your own galant way, much has remained the same in this <sup>our</sup> beloved country. We still have apartheid and discrimination; in so many areas of our national life injustice still reigns supreme. Inequality is still sanctified by law and apartheid still justified by theology. In too many places too many children still die of hunger and malnutrition and too many old people still languish in too many resettlement camps. In too many eyes the years of endless struggle have extinguished the fires of hope and joy and too many bodies are bowed down by the weight of that peculiarly repugnant and slow death called hopelessness.

But the decade of the eighties has brought its own demands and new elements are evident in the common struggle we face.

First, and most important, is the slow but sure evolution of our country into a national security state. At almost every level we are taught to accept that the security of the State is su-

preme. All other things: human rights, human dreams, and hopes, freedom, democracy, are of secondary importance. Even worse: some give the impression that to hold on to these values is in itself a dangerously subversive activity which the State dare not tolerate.

The catchword of the national security ideology in this country is the "Total Onslaught". The mere mention of this concept dispells all rational discussion on what really is the source of unrest in South Africa, the <sup>real</sup> reasons for the protracted war on the border of Namibia, <sup>and allows for the unprovoked militarisation of our security</sup>. It makes it impossible to understand that security for the people of <sup>the</sup> this land does not lie in draconian measures and the quite frightening powers of <sup>the</sup> security police, but rather in the pursuit of justice for all South Africa's people, and the creation of a society in which human values are ~~expressed~~ accepted and human dignity is recognized by all.

In the national security state, critical thinking is dangerous, press freedom is suspect and resistance is suicidal. There is a compulsive desire to control all of life and to make as much as possible in society subject to the dictates of the ~~dominant~~ <sup>dominant</sup> ideology: science and culture, personal and communal life, religious institutions and theology.

It is the national security ideology which to a large extent determines the nature of the struggle in South Africa today. It is also this ideology which is becoming the focal point of the conflict between the church and the government in South Africa at this point in history. Within this context there are two things which reveal startlingly what we are facing. The one is the incredible ease ~~with~~ with which the white Dutch Reformed Church at its Synod last October in Pretoria, could allow representatives from the Army and the National Intelligence Service to set the tone for ~~their~~ their deliberations in a secret meeting at the beginning of that Synod.

The second is the current investigations into the affairs of the South African Council of Churches by the Eloff Commission. Here the Church is on trial, and a careful reading of the report submitted by the South African Police, leaves no doubt that the Church is indeed on trial. But I am absolutely certain in my mind that history will prove that it is not the Church which is on trial, but rather this country and its government, and if put on the scales of eternal justice, <sup>it is</sup> they <sup>will</sup> be found wanting.

While I am talking about the report of the South African Police, let me say this: that report reveals more about the South African Police and about the government it serves, than it does about the South African Council of Churches. And furthermore, the Council is being accused of helping the victims of oppression, of giving legal aid to those charged in political trials; of helping the dependants of those who are banned, imprisoned on Robben Island, detained without trial; of helping black children to get education. I want to say that we should actually be proud of these accusations. It is not a shame to be the voice of the voiceless and to struggle for justice for all of God's children in this land. It is not a shame to give <sup>Subsist. (sic)</sup> a few measly rands per month) to the families of those who are in prison. It is not a shame to help those charged under laws which should not have been on the statute books anyhow. It is not a shame when the Church in its own weakness, seeks to help the weak, the lonely, the dejected, the poor and the destitute. And inasmuch as the Council has been able to <sup>do</sup> that vicariously for all the churches, I say: Praise be to God! And I thank Him that He has been able in spite of our weaknesses, to use the churches in this way.

But there is another element that we have to take cognisance of in our struggle in South Africa today, and this is the crea-

tion of the illusion of change. The prime example of this are the proposals of the President's Council, which have become the new constitutional ~~plans~~ plans of the government.

One cannot repeat often enough that these proposals are a sham, that they unashamedly entrench white domination and apartheid; that they leave the very basis of the system intact, and worse: that they are building an elasticity into the system which gives it both a longer lease of life and makes it even more difficult to bring about fundamental change.

A few "coloureds" and "Indians" in their own separate parliament will not make any difference to the harsh realities of the homelands, or to the life and death struggles of the families in the camps here in Cape Town.

The new plans may bring better economic conditions for a new "coloured" bourgeoisie, but it will not alter the fact that millions of South Africans have lost their citizenship and will continue to lose it because of an immoral and indefensible <sup>policy</sup> policy which these "coloureds" and "Indians" will help give credibility in the eyes of the world.

These proposals do not offer any solution. They bring serious and uncreative tensions, they enhance vastly the potential for violent conflict and disaster; they perpetuate a system which has no right to exist. And someday we will have to learn in this country, that thoroughly evil and oppressive systems cannot be streamlined, they cannot be adapted; they have to <sup>be</sup> irrevocably ~~be~~ eradicated.

A third element which comes to mind is the creation of confusion. For the company assembled here tonight, I am sure that the confusion lies not in the choice between Dr Treurnicht and Mr Botha.

Nor does it spring from the confusion currently rampant in the National Party itself in terms of where it is really going with the people of South Africa. No, I think a greater danger lies in the confusion that arises because of the apparent willingness of some black people to surrender themselves to the persuasive powers of the National Party and to co-operate with the Government.

The question that arises from that fact, and which very quickly becomes a reproach is: if these blacks are willing to work with us, who are you whites, and what right have you got to continue your opposition to the government?

In answer to that one will have to say that the nature and the quality of the struggle cannot be determined by the colour of one's skin, but rather by the quality of one's commitment to justice, peace and human liberation. And in the final analysis, judgment will be given, not in terms of whiteness or blackness whatever the ideological content of those words may be today, but in terms of the persistent faithfulness we are called to in this struggle.

But secondly: this country is as much yours as it is mine. Its future is not safe in the hands of people who despise democracy and trample upon the rights of the people, whether they be white or black;

Its future is not safe in the hands of people - white or black - who depend upon economic exploitation and human degradation to build their empires;

Its future is not safe in the hands of people - white or black - who need the flimsy cloak of ethnic superiority to cover the nakedness of their racialism;

Its future is not safe in the hands of people - white or black -

who seek to secure their unjustly required privileged positions by violent repression of the weak, the exploited and the needy. Its future is not safe in the hands of people - white or black - who put their faith simply in the madness of growing militarism. So, for the sake of the future of our country and our children, whether you be white or black, resist those people, whether they be white or black!

So let us not be fearful of those who sit in the seats of power, their lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification. Let us not be intimidated by those who so eloquently, so frighteningly, echo their master's voice.

We are doing what we are doing not because we are white or black, we are doing what we are doing because it is right. And we shall continue to do until justice and peace prevail.

A fourth element which calls for our attention is the creation of false dilemma's.

Many people in South Africa cannot face the challenges and the choices this situation brings. They lack the courage to take the clear stand on the issues of justice and liberation that the situation demands. And so escapism becomes part of their lives. But since no one wants to be known as an escapist, we think up little ways and means of throwing up a smoke screen. One way of doing that is by creating false dilemmas.

So we have people who express deep concern about the future. How can we be sure, they ask, that a black government will be better than this white government. At least now, we have democracy. What will we have then? Will such a black government protect the rights of white people?

But this is a false dilemma. The question is not so much what shall we do one day if a black government should do something wrong. The question is what are we doing right now, while this white government is doing what is doing. While it is not wrong to have legitimate concern for the future, it is wrong to use that as an excuse for not being concerned about the plight of those who are the victims of oppression and exploitation right now. And it is a tortuous logic to use the fear for the results of oppression as a reason for the continuation of it.

Another false dilemma is created in the debate about changing hearts and changing political structures and the laws of society. People argue that changing the laws of a society is unimportant really, because you need to change the hearts of people. Changing political, economic and social structures is only an external affair - what we need is the internal conversion.

I want to concede immediately that it is true that people's hearts must be changed if changes in society are going to be lasting changes. But we have also learned that although morality cannot be legislated, behaviour can be regulated. And when the pattern of behaviour is changed, pretty soon the attitudes will be changed, and with some people it is true that they will not change their minds <sup>can't</sup> ~~before~~ you change the law.

It is true that the law can't make a person love me, but it can prevent him from demolishing my home and breaking up my family. The law can't make my employer love me but it can stop him from paying me starvation wages.

The law can't make a person love me, but it can stop him from putting me in jail without trial and torturing me - and I think that that is pretty important also.

But there is a third and even more dangerous false dilemma that we have to deal with, that is going around these days, and that is the argument that refusal to co-operate with the government in the new constitutional plan, is participation in bloody revolution.

This may be a clever political tactic, but it is as empty as it is misleading.

There is general consensus (even from coloured supporters of the plan) that the plans are an entrenchment of white political dominance and of apartheid. What does that mean? Apartheid is an exceptionally violent political system. There is, first, the structural violence embedded in the laws, and the structures of our society. Every law which sanctions discrimination, is an act of violence. When human rights are disregarded, when education is not equal, when there is economic exploitation, when a system by design causes deprivation, malnutrition, hunger; when the law requires the breaking up of family life, <sup>this is violence</sup> in fact any act which erodes the human dignity if the other is an act of violence.

But secondly, there is also the violence needed to maintain the system, to safeguard the privileged position of the dominant group - the police and military violence without which apartheid will not survive for a minute. We have seen it: at Sharpeville, in Soweto, in Cape Town.

Saying "yes" to cooperation with the very government who maintains this violent system without first fundamentally changing it, is taking responsibility for the continuation of the violence. The choice for violence, therefore, has not been made by those who resist the perpetuation of the system in the hope of working for a better society, but precisely by those who have abandoned the struggle for a better society by strengthening the present one.



So let us stand firm. The heritage of non-violent resistance is a proud one, and one that you, in your own way, have made your own. Let us continue to seek ways to genuine peace for the people of this country. Let us continue to say: non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as cooperation with good. And let us continue to strive to build, even now, in the midst of struggle, the foundations for genuine reconciliation for black and white in South Africa.

As you continue your work against so many odds, do not get weary. As you stand alone on the streets, crying out your silent protest against the violation of justice and human dignity, do not lose faith. Remember that it is a vigil for truth and justice. And if it seems futile, and the dark clouds of despair blot out the sun and your hope, remember that we are guided, not by strength and power, but by faith in <sup>and we have given us</sup> a vision that shall not die:

a vision that one day people shall be judged by the humanness of their character and not by the colour of their skin;

a vision that even here <sup>in Johannesburg, Cap. Town, P.O. & A. S. !</sup> the sanctity of marriage and family life shall be respected, and no law shall require of man to put asunder what God has joined together;

a vision that in this rich land no child shall die of hunger; no infant shall die untimely, and the elderly shall close their eyes in peace; that the wrinkled stomachs of our ~~parents~~ children shall be filled with food just as their lives shall be filled with meaning.

a vision that here in South Africa white and black will one day truly learn to love one another and join hands in building a truly good and beautiful land.

We must not give up hope. We must believe that this shall come to pass. As Martin Luther King believed.

It shall come to pass because "the arch of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice..."

It shall come to pass, because no lie can live forever, and truth crushed to earth shall rise again...

It shall come to pass because "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne; yet that scaffold sways the future and beyond the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above His own..."

With this faith we shall yet be able to give justice and peace their rightful place on the throne of our land;  
with this faith, we shall be able to see beyond the darkness of our present into the bright and glittering daylight of our future;  
with this faith we shall be able to speed up the day when white and black South Africans will embrace each other as brothers and sisters, and join hands in praying

NKOSI SIKILEL I'AFRIKA !`

GOD BLESS AFRICA - GUIDE HER RULERS - BLESS HER CHILDREN

GIVE HER PEACE!

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Allan Boesak.

Address to the National Conference of the Black Sash,  
Cape Town, March 10, 1983.