



**Gemeinsame Konferenz Kirche und Entwicklung (GKKE)**

Joint Conference Church and Development

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Good governance –  
the role of the churches –  
a South African perspective

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# **Good governance – the role of the churches - a South African perspective**

## **1. Introduction**

It is a privilege for us to welcome you in Stellenbosch – after several previous consultations that took place in Berlin, Germany. The dialogue between different church partners (GKKE) in Germany and South Africa – focussing on the role of the churches in democratic and pluralistic societies, not only has a long tradition, but it also influenced state – church cooperation in recent years. We also welcome the opportunity of this consultation to broaden this dialogue and to include more African partners in our consultation.

The history of dialogue and cooperation between German and South African churches goes back a long way – starting from the work of several missionary societies in South Africa, the fight against Apartheid – looking at the tradition of the “Confessing Church” movement in the German church struggle (and the similar way that Dr. Beyers Naude and Dr. Wolfram Kistner lead our own church struggle). In more recent times we have focused on concrete development cooperation between the state and the church, as well as the role of the church in society.

In reflecting on the role and contribution of the church to “Good Governance” within a constitutional democracy, I will do this in three steps: Firstly, a few remarks to the concept of the church and its relevance to public processes and challenges.

Secondly, a short reference to the history of our own consultation processes and what we have achieved, focusing on an approach of “critical solidarity” and subsidiarity.

Thirdly, in view of our general conference theme to strengthen good governance, are we at the end of “critical solidarity”? What does it mean being church today?

## 2. The role of the church and public issues

By way of introduction a few remarks about the concept of the church. In my own Reformed tradition, but also in ecumenical circles, "church" can refer to different meanings or levels of being church: it partly refers the "institution" in its formal structures, but at the same time it refers to the individuals – to the members of the church; even in terms of its structures, "church" refers both to local congregations, or a fraternal or circuits of congregations, or regional and national synods, or even being members of global forums like the World Alliance of Reformed Churches or the World Council of Churches. Thus, the witness and the activities of the church are both on local and international level, could be part of formal campaigns through official structures, or it could refer to individual members acting within civil society networks and even as members of parliament – representing different parties.

The history of the ecumenical movement (World Council of Churches) and the global fight against apartheid are examples of a global coalition for social justice, for a global social movement. In this sense the church is one of the oldest forms of Globalisation in a positive sense – representing views and interests from both the North and the South in the world. A common feature of these movements and formal networks, is their advocacy and lobby work to foster a specific agenda: more social justice, more democratic participation, more peace and development for all communities, in all parts of the world – taking sides on behalf of the poor and those excluded or marginalised. The campaign of Reformed Church to declare a "*status confessionis*" (a fundamental confession) on the great inequality between rich and poor in the world is another example.

Thus, this global agenda of the church was always directed at influencing the public agenda – and in this sense the agenda for social movements, as well as political institutions such as parliaments or elected governments. Sometimes, through specific campaigns, this also include the lobby for priorities in public spending – are resources used in such a way that the poor really benefit, that social justice is advanced?

In our South African struggle against apartheid, and after our transformation to democracy, there were several such national campaigns, e.g. declaring a “kairos” with regard to the fundamental injustices, of “standing for the truth”, a national consultation process to highlight the plight of the poor (poverty hearings); to highlight the plight of people that suffered in the struggle against apartheid (Truth and Reconciliation process).

Thus, the challenge for the church in this regard is to be provocative – to be political, without being bound by loyalty to a specific political party; to analyse economic systems and their consequences, without adhering to one economic theory or ideology; to challenge and question policies that exclude or marginalize specific sections of society; and to challenge the priorities of public spending.

In this regard, by way of example, there are general questions in the current public debate in South Africa that are prominent: in economic terms – should the state spend more on social grants for the poor (including the campaign for a “Basic Income Grant”), or rather ensure higher economic growth by lowering taxes to ensure that more jobs are created? Or, why do we buy weapons for billions of Rand, whilst we do not have enough funding for proper social housing, quality medical services and more affordable education?

As churches we must therefore engage and challenge political parties, parliamentary hearings and government representatives with regard to the priorities they set – bearing in mind that these choices and their outcomes are complex. We cannot assume that as churches we have all the answers to complex policy decisions.

What is expected of the churches, is that we should challenge political and economic decisions from the perspective of social justice: decisions on economic policies or priorities are too often defended in technical terms – as if the economy is a law in its own right, without considering the moral aspect of choices.

Another example from South Africa: at a point when public officials and political representatives were either not acting or arguing about Chinese weapons destined for Zimbabwe – in a very political volatile situation – a

court order by a retired bishop stop the unloading of weapons in a South African port.

### **3. Church and state relationship: “subsidiarity” and critical solidarity**

In one of our previous consultations with “the Joint Conference Church and Development” (GKKE) in Berlin, May 2003, I have highlighted the different responses of the church to societal issues against the background of the changing reality in South Africa: Before 1994 the church emphasized the “prophetic discourse” – by opposing apartheid. After 1994, given the democratic changes that had taken place, there were suddenly many types of discourses in view of many new issues in the public debate. For some the priestly or more pastoral function became the dominant discourse.

The challenge facing the church after 2004, ten years since the transition to democracy, is the political discourse (which includes elements of both the prophetic and priestly discourses) on the broader issues in society. The church has to become a credible partner in this discourse on three levels: national issues, regional issues (Africa) and global issues. In order to fulfill this challenge, the church must develop new leadership and capacity.

At the same consultation Bishop Kevin Dowling highlighted the importance of finding *a new development model* – in South Africa, in the region, but also globally. The two most important issues South Africa were facing: *economic policy* (in view of the reduction of jobs, as a consequence of globalisation) and the *HIV/AIDS pandemic*. The church has to put alternative policies on the table, and mobilize the support of the church leadership behind them. The social responsibility of the church, the state and business must be strengthened to help the majority of the poor people.

At this Berlin consultation, the South African participants released a special statement to guide our activities for the years to come in South Africa. In our statement we emphasized:

“The various inputs at this Berlin consultation underlined the serious challenges we face in South Africa to give hope to millions of our people that still live in poverty – facing a desperate struggle to survive every

day. We therefore commit ourselves to seek solutions and to establish partnerships in order to change the lives of the poor, the unemployed, the excluded and those at risk in our society. We accept the challenge of the UN Millennium goals, to half poverty in the World by 2015, but also in Africa and especially in South Africa. We will therefore strive to focus the role of the church on strategies and actions to liberate the poor from their daily struggle to survive to enjoy a life in fullness and dignity.”

“Since we know that this could only be achieved through a comprehensive partnership of all sectors of our society (state, church, business, etc.), we will actively seek formal partnerships to enhance our cooperation.....”

“Since the problems and challenges of South Africa mirrors the global challenges we face between North and South, rich and poor, we invite our German partners in the Church and in Government to be our partners in this process. We are looking forward to the continuation of this dialogue, to seeking solutions through joint studies and conferences, and to translate this dialogue into action that will benefit the poor in the world.”

Bishop Dowling emphasized at the same consultation, that “I believe that it is essential for the future of our people in South Africa, especially the poor and most vulnerable members of society, and indeed for the region and sub-Saharan Africa, that in addition to public and private sector cooperation, partnership and cooperation models between the church, as part of civil society, and [the] State need to be promoted and sustained with commitment – in spite of the problems and challenges.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we are faced with a new reality – **where poverty is the main challenge**. At his inauguration, celebrating 10 years of democracy in South Africa, President Mbeki made a number of important remarks – which captures in a sense the essence of the reconciliation process, but it also sets the agenda for the future:

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<sup>1</sup> The conference was hosted jointly by the EFSA Institute for Theological and Interdisciplinary Research (Stellenbosch, South Africa) and the “Gemeinsame Konferenz Kirche und Entwicklung” (GKKE – a joint Lutheran and Catholic Forum). Unpublished paper by Bishop K. Dowling: “Church-State Cooperation Models: Challenges and Problems”, 2004

Firstly he remarked: "(our) freedom gave us the opportunity to begin the long walk to a life of dignity for all our people. ... We are proud that every day now, black and white South Africans discover that they are, after all, one another's keeper...Reconciliation between black and white ended a violent conflict and created the possibility to build a new society – a society where former enemies take responsibility for one another's well-being. We know this is not an easy task, or something that can be accomplished in 10 years. But it is based on a commitment "to work together and build a South Africa defined by a common dream".

Secondly, he highlighted "the struggle to eradicate poverty has been and will continue to be a central part of the national effort to build a new South Africa.." A remaining division or fault line in our society is the gap between the rich and the poor, those with jobs, and those that are unemployed.

The idea of the church **working in partnership** with the State **is not without risk**; in fact, many theologians or church leaders warn against the danger of cooption, of being used by politicians who have their own agendas. In fact, there are many examples in church history which highlight the danger and the catastrophic consequences of getting too close to political power and political ideologies: the history of apartheid and its theological roots is well-known.

During my time as President of the South African Council of Churches, I have emphasised that, since South Africa's transition to democracy, the church has adopted **a relationship of critical solidarity** towards the state: it supports the state in its efforts to rebuild and transform South Africa, but it also reserves the right to criticize government in areas where this may be necessary. This can be done from the heart of the Christian identity.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the delivering of services to the poor, I have also emphasized that the church advocates **the principle of subsidiarity**. This implies formal cooperation between the church and the state to ensure the effective utilization of limited funding and the adding of value to stretch the opportunities for all our people. This should happen with regard to social grants or community development programmes. This principle is also

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<sup>2</sup> Unpublished paper by H.R. Botman: "The role of the Church in a plural society – a South African perspective." Berlin conference, May 2004.

important for democracy: the state accepts the role and contribution of partners from other sectors: it does not try to do everything for everybody. The role of the State is to coordinate (provide strategic policy frameworks), to set priorities and conditions, to address social and historic imbalances, but not to implement or control every project.<sup>3</sup>

In June 2004 President Mbeki addressed the national conference of the South African Council of Churches in Johannesburg. In my welcome address I posed the question: "Can we (as SACC and ecumenical movement) move beyond being a watchdog... to become real partners in development?"

In his address President Mbeki challenged us "The centre of our struggle is against poverty and underdevelopment. ...What are the churches going to do practically?"<sup>4</sup>

During 2004 and early 2005 a small Management Unit of ***the National Religious Association for Social Development*** (NRASD, under the leadership of Father Richard Menatsi and Dr. Koegelenberg, facilitated negotiations with representatives of the Presidency, the Directors General Forum and the Social Cluster of Government (including the Departments of Social Development, Health and Education). On 10 May 2005 a formal ***Partnership Agreement*** was signed in the Union Buildings between the State and the NRLF (on behalf of the whole religious sector) in the presence of President Mbeki, senior ministers of his Cabinet and senior religious leaders of South Africa.

The partnership agreement strives to address the social challenges confronting South Africa, particularly in relation to the following five key areas where joint programmes are envisaged: home and community-based care (HCBC); social capital and social cohesion; early childhood development (ECD); social housing, including emergency and transitional shelter; skills training; and access to information.

In general, the State and the religious sector agreed to strive together to foster sustainable community development. This includes the fostering of social cohesion and the creation of a caring society – integrating the marginalized into communities. They also agreed to mobilize and focus

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See their addresses in SACC conference report, 12 July 2004, Johannesburg



resources (at national, regional and international levels) to support community development. The agreement further highlighted the importance of fair access to public funds for all religious communities.

Despite many delays, the practical implementation of the agreement has started and approximately R 40 million has been allocated for the 2008/2009 financial year for joint projects in the different areas of cooperation. Not all the budgets and applications have been finalised yet, but it is expected that this amount could grow to approximately R 60 million per year from 2009 onwards.

***Thus, the point I want to emphasize, is that the advocacy and lobby work of the church could take on different forms and strategies:***

- Where necessary, we should ***criticize, question and even oppose*** where we believe public debates are weakening our constitutional principals, our democracy; or where funds are being spend on the wrong priorities. For example: why can we generate the national political will to make available R 23 billion for the stadiums and infra-structure of the Fifa Soccer World Cup (which is a very important opportunity for marketing and developing South Africa) – but when we as religious sector battle for the release of more funds to strengthen social programmes, then we almost receive peanuts through a complex system of bureaucratic layers? Why can big business networks or companies receive multi-million tenders for delivering services on behalf of the state, but when the religious sector and other civil society networks lobby for substantial funding to support special poverty programmes, then there is only a trickle available – and they are dependent on an in-efficient process of allocation funds from the national Lotto proceeds?
- In other cases, we could participate in ***policy debates*** – even making concrete proposals for alternative approaches to combat poverty: e.g. the campaigns to establish a “Basic Income Grant” for all South Africans.
- In the case of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Presidency and the NRASD and the NRLF, a ***cooperation and development partnership*** was formed for more effective service delivery, for the strengthening of social programmes.

- In the case of the Parliamentary offices of the South African Council of Churches and the Catholic Bishop's Conference, these offices facilitate the inputs of churches in public parliamentary hearings – striving to influence the policy making process at the highest level.

But how do we relate to the challenge of weapons production and exports? Both Germany and South Africa produce weapons that are exported. In this sense the industry creates local jobs. The usage of such weapons in conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Iran, or Zimbabwe, challenges us to remain vigilant and to be part of the debate on whether such exports are advancing or defending democracy and peace keeping processes.

We know that national and international companies have strong lobby processes to secure government contracts for production. As churches we need to be part of the public debate on the conditions for and implications of such agreements.

#### **4. Church and good governance – new South African challenges**

##### *Are we at the end of "Critical solidarity"?*

In his recent address at the University of the Western Cape (Bishop Tutu lecture), the Prof. Maluleke (President of the South African Council of Churches) raised several issues that are of great importance to the role of the church in the broader political debate, as well as the issue of social justice.

In his lecture he highlighted the perception that the church is become to close to government ("in bed with government") – based on the fact that former prominent church leaders are now serving in senior government positions. Part of the confusion in this regard may be due to the fact, that former church leaders may believe that they can still speak on behalf of "the church" – whilst serving in Government office. I think this is part of the crisis of the Moral Regeneration Movement – it can never replace the authentic role of church and other religious communities, acting under the leadership of their religious communities.

One cannot deduct from the fact that because some church leaders, who was prominent in the struggle against apartheid, have joined business and

or serve in senior government positions, that this represent the whole church. In fact, the majority of senior church leaders are still committed to their work in the church – although some may have focused too much on their priestly and pastoral role, at the cost of a prophetic role. The risk was that with the transformation to a constitutional democracy, church leaders and theologians were not as prominent as during the struggle years in the public arena.

Maluleke is right when he emphasised: “Given the crowdedness of the public space in which the church is supposed to operate, it is important, more than ever before, for the church to have a clearer sense of its own identity and its own agenda.”

I also agree with him when he underlines the unique identity of the church – representing a *unique and alternative vision of identity* – beyond the political ideologies of “African identity” versus “European identity” – and siding with the poor and the marginalised (social justice). In this the political discourse of increasing “ethnic nationalism” (either African, or coloured, or minority rights for white citizens) the church is challenged to defend its true identity as “new creation” amongst and against popular political ideologies.

But for me, this was part of a position of “*critical solidarity*” with regard to the relationship with the state.

I was part of the efforts of the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD) and the National Religious Leaders’ Forum (NRLF) that lobbied the state for a development partnership – to strengthen social programmes that benefit the poor. It is sometimes easy to oppose, to criticize, but if we are not willing to become instruments of effective implementation, of rolling up our sleeves and get our hands dirty to support social programmes, then our prophetic role has become an easy option out of responsibility.

Yes, we must guard our unique identity to avoid being co-opted by party political agendas or campaigns – and the NRLF and others should be watchful not to be used. At the same time they represent a very important national interfaith platform to work together, and to learn from one another – setting an example that this co-existence of religions are part of South

Africa's identity (against the backdrop of international conflict between religious fundamentalists of all religions).

But Government and the state, in our theological understanding – are also instruments and servants in the hands of God, for the benefit of the people – just like the church itself. Furthermore, there is a great competition for the resources of the country, as well as a great competition by different societal sectors to influence public and government policies – each for its own benefit. To compete for a share of these resources – in regular dialogue with government and party officials - to create a caring society with strong social programmes, is therefore just as important as standing with the poor.

### ***Current challenges in political culture and parliamentary system***

#### *Defending our constitutional principles*

We are a young democracy where our Constitution is being weakened or threatened by irresponsible political rhetoric of violence – to succeed at all costs with party objectives, even if it is against the values of the constitution. In a similar way institutions that should defend and advance the fundamental values of the Constitution (Human Rights Commission, the Gender Commission, the independence of the Judiciary, etc.) are attacked in an almost irresponsible way.

#### *Reviewing weakness of electoral system*

Challenge: the Van Zyl Slabbert commission has completed a report that was shelved by the ANC –highlighting very important weaknesses of our electoral system: the system of proportional representation in regional and national parliament has some positive strengths that guarantees constitutional representation even to minorities. The downside is, that the political party machine becomes the ultimate power – deciding who are on the lists for elections, without effective accountability to geographically drawn constituencies – who could fire incompetent or opportunistic politicians.

Thus, we may have a wonderful constitution, but if the party elites stifle real debate in view of their power to advance or end political careers, then it becomes questionable if the formal structures of parliament really serves the will of the people.

*Review our vision for a new society*

Creating a home for all – tolerance of ethnic, cultural and religious differences (xenophobia)

In one of our previous meetings in Berlin I have emphasised that the church is called to build a just and equitable society, a society that cares for all its citizens, especially for those that are weak and marginalized; a democratic society that respects our constitution, the rule of law, that guards against the misuse of power, that fosters our diversity and plurality, and that fosters the role of civil society. Such a society can only be built on the moral and ethical values founded in the Bible and our different church traditions – values such as the respect for life, human dignity, humbleness, honesty, and to serve one another.

*The values of a new society*

The church's vision is based on the following principles and values:

- A just and equitable society that protects the rights of the weak, the poor, and the marginalised. A society that fosters human rights, respect for life, and tolerance for differences;
- A caring society that reaches out to uplift, support, and improve, the quality of life of all South Africans, as well as visitors living amongst us.
- A democratic society that supports our constitution, the parliament, and our democratically elected representatives on all levels of government; that guards against the misuse of power; that fosters the role of civil society (religious communities, Non Governmental Organisations, etc.); that acknowledges the importance of the principle of subsidiarity (partnerships between different sectors) for democracy; that fosters our diversity and pluralism on all levels of society.
- A moral and honest society that opposes fraud, corruption and a culture of self-enrichment.

## **Conclusion**

As churches are most important contribution remains that we live out our true identity – that we are part of Gods new creation that have overcome ethnic, cultural, language, etc. divides. Our main mission is not to serve the church, but our mission is to be in the service of Gods outreach to the whole world – to be “a church for others” (Bonhoeffer). This is the true identity of the church.

Therefore, being true to our own identity is the biggest challenge we can pose to political and economic processes that seeks to be elitist, that only represent the interest or the ideologies of a selected group. In the process we will sometimes oppose popular (and even “majority”) interests – for the sake of peace, social justice and fairness. We need to do this in the public arena, but also within the church self.