

Africa and Justice: Justice in and for Africa

Surely, should we not really speak of “Africas” in the plural? Such a huge Continent, comprising over 700 million people living in over 50 countries. When I was travelling from Zambia last week to come to the USA to offer presentations like the one I am offering this evening, I looked at the map on the small TV screen in front of me at my seat. Africa, such a huge Continent – you could fit the mainland USA into it three times and still have some space left over! It took over six hours of very fast air travel to cover only two-thirds of the Continent. And such a wondrous variety of life below me!

And justice – what definition would be appropriate and helpful for us to focus on here? You who are participating in the AFJN Conference will already have heard much about the important topic of *Restorative Justice*. And we all know that justice takes many forms: economic, political, cultural, religious. To speak of “social justice” might cover it all. And so let it be *social justice* that I particularly focus on, even in general terms, this evening.

Understandably, I look at Africa through the lens of that part of the Continent that I know best, where I have lived for the past 20 years, Zambia. Yes, I come from Zambia. Many of you in this audience will know Zambia – you won’t mistake it for Zimbabwe, or for Gambia! And you may know that it is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of resources: land, water, agriculture, minerals, tourist sites, and peace. Yes, peace -- 46 years of Independence with 73 tribes living together without ethnic conflict.

We are the envy of our neighbours! Southern African neighbours like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where over four million have died in the past decade in conflicts that are local but largely are international, fights over the DRC’s immensely rich minerals; or Zimbabwe, where a previously rich economy has suffered a melt-down because of the megalomaniac stance of its aged President; or South Africa, which will host the World Cup next June – where real “football” is played – soccer!

Yes, Zambia, such a rich country. But with some of the poorest people in the world! The United Nations *Human Development Index* (HDI), ranks us 166 out of 177 countries, according to measures such as life expectancy (just over 40 years for Zambians), literacy (especially low among women), and meeting basic needs (so unequally distributed in our rich country).

In the research, education and advocacy programmes of our Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), we speak of Zambia as a country of great potentials and great problems. But we seriously believe that *the potentials outweigh the problems!* The task, then, is to get those potentials applied to those problems. We call that equitable, integral and sustainable development!

I want to suggest that for Zambia, and indeed for all of Africa, justice is important if we are to attain that equitable, integral and sustainable development. Justice both *in* Africa and *for* Africa. Justice both *in* Africa and *for* Africa. Of the many things that could be said about this, I want now to briefly highlight only three aspects under each heading. These aspects are not of themselves all-inclusive, but highlight for me, from my Zambian experience, dimensions that are absolutely necessary.

Justice *in* Africa:

First and foremost, this would relate to how we understand, how we promote, how we implement development. For me, the definition given many years by Paul VI in *Progress of*

Peoples is the clearest: *development is movement of people from less human conditions to fuller human conditions*. Or a description of development offered by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (who often sounds to me like Paul VI!) when he speaks of the freedom necessary for persons to enhance their God-given *capacities*.

Such a holistic emphasis might appear to you to be all too obvious but sadly it is not always the guiding definition or governing orientation for development. All too often standard and narrow economic indicators are used to measure development – GDP, inflation, investment – to the exclusion of social indicators. People and their social conditions are secondary in practice if not in rhetoric.

In my country we sorely experienced the consequences of such a distorted emphasis when we passed through a decade of the *structural adjustment programme* in the 1990s – the most rigid, most rapid, most radical structural adjustment programme in Africa. SAP – my Zambian friends told me that this stood for Starve African People, Stop All Production, Send Away Profits, or, in the local language, *satana ali pano* – the devil is in our midst! As concern for people was left out of programmes of liberalisation, privatisation, retrenchments, budget cuts, opening of borders, the quality of life plummeted.

So justice requires that people are put first in any definition of development. Calls for new models of the economy, for new roles of government in the economy, for new priorities in the economy are calls for justice in Africa. Benedict XVI emphasised this in his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*.

Second, justice in Africa requires much greater attention paid to ecological justice, the protection of the integrity of creation. This is a topic that really needs little elaboration tonight since we all have become more accustomed to the demand for a respect for our common home, the earth. But this respect has different implications in different contexts.

I want to highlight here the justice implication of managing a trade-off between attracting investments and safeguarding the environment. Take Zambia for example, where a turn-around in the economy is much dependent on the revitalisation and expansion of our copper mines. As in many other parts of Africa, major new investment partners come from China. And Chinese investors have not always been keenly sensitive to environmental impact studies and demands.

Should the Zambian government enforce strict requirements regarding opening of new pits, disposal of wastes, pollution of air and water, and so forth? Or should the need for employment generation activities, with subsequent rising standards of living, take precedence over environmental concerns – concerns often viewed by investors as abstract, ideological or irrelevant?

The Zambian case is of course replicated in so many other parts of Africa today, where the extractive industries are increasingly influential. Our neighbours to the north, the Democratic Republic of Congo, face even greater challenges along this line.

My own sense is that justice in Africa demands a commitment to a long-term sustainability that is impossible with short term environmental damage.

Third, justice in Africa demands a holistic approach to the challenge of HIV and AIDS. Let me emphasise at the start an obvious but often neglected point that HIV and AIDS is not an African disease, not primarily an African concern. But it is a serious challenge to the future development of the Continent. In Zambia, over 15% of the sexually active population is

infected, but fully 100% of the total population is *affected*. And so how do we respond to that challenge in a way that is congruent with and promotive of social justice?

I was encouraged to note the approach emphasised during the Second African Synod last October, an approach taking a much wider overview of AIDS, its causes and consequences. Proposition #51 approved by the Synod delegates states clearly about AIDS:

It is not to be looked at as either a medical-pharmaceutical problem or solely as an issue of a change in human behaviour. It is truly an issue of integral development and justice, which requires a holistic approach and response by the Church.

Attention to issues of gender, education, environment, employment, poverty, housing simply must come into the equations of responses to HIV and AIDS, not only distributing of ARVs, or shaking of fingers to encourage abstinence or condoms!

Justice and Africa? So there are three points for justice *in* Africa – meaning of development, protection of environment and holistic approach to AIDS.

Justice *for* Africa?

Let me now mention three points about justice *for* Africa. First, I believe that climate change is a factor that simply must be paid attention to, no matter how painful an effective response to it may be. Much has been said about the topic of climate change but I wonder whether you realise what it means for Africa today and tomorrow. Let me quote from a report released just two weeks ago by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union Commission. The report states:

Agricultural output is expected to decrease by 50 per cent in Africa, resulting in severe undernourishment as a result of unchecked climate changes. The health burden and conflicts will increase as populations fight over dwindling resources. The need for Africa to develop adaptation and mitigation strategies cannot be overemphasised. The costs of adaptation and mitigation are, however, extremely high and beyond the means of African countries. It is estimated that the cost of adaptation could be anywhere between 5 and 10 per cent of the continental GDP. It is therefore important for the international community to help in financing the cost of climate change adaptation and mitigation in Africa.

But why, you might ask, should that be particularly a justice factor? For the simple fact that the climate change being experienced in Africa at this moment – and I can tell you stories directly from Zambia – is not caused by the people of Africa. No, it is the lifestyles and industrial patterns of the people of North America, of Europe, and, increasingly of China. Unless peoples, governments and industries outside of Africa quickly and forcefully address that fact, for example, here in the USA, the people of Africa will suffer because of you. I'm sorry to say that so bluntly, but it is the truth, a physical truth, an economic truth and a moral truth that must be acknowledged and responded to if justice is to be done.

Second, justice for Africa necessarily requires trade justice. Our JCTR led the campaign in Zambia for cancellation of debt, the Jubilee campaign, and now champions a campaign for justice in trade relationships between Zambia and the countries in both the North and the South. Free trade is said to be a significant engine of development. But unless free trade is fair trade, there is no just trade for Africa. Let two examples illustrate my contention.

Cotton production is a vibrant agricultural industry in Africa, especially among the so-called "C-4": Mali, Chad, Benin and Burkina Faso. Zambia also grows very good cotton. But the world market price for cotton is obviously seriously depressed by the payment of USA cotton farmers over \$3 billion in subsidies each year. This has been a highly contentious issue in WTO negotiations, where such subsidies are considered unacceptable to free market negotiations. The USA has had bitter legal disputes with Brazil, in particular, and only last week was some mutually acceptable compromises at least temporarily realised, avoiding some mean trade retaliation measures. But what this Brazilian settlement will mean for justice for African cotton farmers, like my friends in eastern Zambia, is yet to be seen.

Dairy products are key to agricultural activities in Europe and in Africa. In the past few years, intense negotiations have been going on between African states and the European Union over Free Trade arrangements, the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Frankly, it looks and sounds good in documents and in speeches, but in truth the EPAs are not primarily development-oriented. Hence a country like Zambia might find itself forced, under the terms of free trade, to open up to subsidised European agricultural products at prices that wipe out local producers. Where is justice?

And third, justice for Africa must take account of the on-going struggle for more just power relationships in the international organisations (IFIs) that wield such influence in our globalised world. Voting power in two of the international financial institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, is on a weighted vote basis, where the rich countries strongly outweigh poor countries such as in Africa. While WTO votes are on a one-country one vote basis, such votes are seldom taken and decisions are made in a consensus mode that has been shaped to favour the rich countries.

In the most significant organ of the United Nations, the Security Council, the five permanent members wield the strongest power, including the veto. The ten non-permanent seats rotate among the other UN members and occasionally have included Africans.

Proposals for reform of the voting power in the IFIs have been made and are a bit too complicated to elaborate here for you this evening! And calls for expansion of the permanent seats at the Security Council are periodically made but periodically ignored. My only point in raising the issue here is that more just power relationships should always be on the agenda when speaking of justice for Africa. A basic norm of justice is that those who are to be affected by decisions should have a say in that decision-making process.

Justice and Africa? So there are three points for justice *for* Africa – climate change adjustments, trade relationships and power relationships.

Let me conclude by acknowledging that I made a presumption in preparing my presentation here this evening for the AFJN Conference. That presumption is that all of you are already interested in and, more importantly, committed to justice and Africa. That is indeed necessary and possible. I have not tried to argue that point with you, but allow me to explain what I emphasise to others about the need to pay attention to justice in and for Africa. This is because of the importance of Africa to the rest of the world.

About 20 years ago, after living in Africa only a short time, I was returning to the USA for a brief visit. The Jesuit who was driving me to the airport asked what I would be speaking about to various audiences. I told him Africa, its past, present and future. He simply and bluntly said to me: "Tell them that the future of the world depends on the future of Africa!" Well, I pondered and responded, what could such a sweeping statement possibly mean? "Think about it, pray about it, say about it!" was his answer. Well, I've done that over the

years, and tonight I shared more with you under the theme of Africa and Justice. For I do believe that my friend's simple and blunt remark to me almost 20 years ago is still very true. I do genuinely believe the truth— and I try to live that truth in my social and educational and pastoral work in Zambia – that the future of the world does indeed depend on Africa.

It is a truth I thought of again in preparing this presentation, as I was completing a very wonderful book that many of you may know. It's a very large book, almost 600 pages, published last year, simply called AFRICA, with the subtitle, *Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*. The author is Richard Dowden, a British journalist who has lived in and traveled around Africa for over thirty years. His is a love-hate relationship with the Continent -- for example, he offers an extremely sharp critique of Zimbabwe's Mugabe and Zaire's Mubutu, along with a delightful praise of Botswana and Ghana. But I was very much struck by his opening paragraph in the very last chapter of his long book, entitled "The New Africa." He writes:

Africa: where humans emerged some 4 million years ago. From where, some 100,000 years ago, Homo Sapiens spread all over the world. Africa: the mother of us all. It is our past. Could it also be our future?

Dowden mentions a fact that I had heard repeated several times last October, when I participated in Rome in the Second African Synod – a gathering of some 200 Catholic bishops from throughout Africa, joined by another 50 persons, a mix of bishops, laity and religious. The meeting had as its theme, "The Church in Africa in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace." The fact repeated was that civilisation began on the African Continent and Africa has a lot to contribute to that civilisation today. Remember that anthropologists tell us that Adam and Eve were probably South Africans! The final message of the Second African Synod called for a more positive perception of Africa. I quote:

Africa must not despair. The blessings of God are still abundant, waiting to be prudently and justly employed for the good of her children. Where the conditions are right, her children have proved that they can reach, and have indeed reached, the height of human endeavours and competence. There is much good news in many parts of Africa. (Message, #6)

Well, it's my message, my work, my hope, my prayer, that this expression of the Synod is really true and that justice in and for Africa can be part of that good news.

And may that good news continue to be part AFJN's message, work, hope and prayer – and yours also!

Thank you and God bless you!

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