

# "RESOLUTIONS" FOR NEW YEAR 2009

Peter Henriot

New year 2009! Well, it is coming, whether we are ready or not! And as usual, for me and for you, it will be a time of thanking God for the gifts and challenges of 2008 and for making the needed resolutions for 2009.

## BEING THANKFUL

There is certainly plenty to be thankful for, even in these difficult times of the effects on Zambia of the global economic crisis. Here in this beautiful land, amidst plenty of problems, at least we are spared the sad deaths of the armed conflicts in our neighbour to the North and the tragic consequences of the selfish dictatorship in our neighbour to the South. Indeed, in so many ways, we in Zambia are the envy of our neighbours.

And of course we can be thankful that the presidential by-elections, precipitated by the sad and unexpected death of President Levy Mwanawasa, went forward in a somewhat peaceful and effective manner. I say "somewhat" peaceful and effective because there still is a big agenda item in the days ahead of examining whether the elections were truly free and fair in all aspects. We still have much to learn. Zambia will never have a good electoral system if we don't address the obvious faults that show up each time citizens go to the polls.

Thankfulness, too, we should show for the hard work put in by so many Zambians, often underpaid and in bad situations, to assure that there is food on the table and a roof overhead.

The end of the year is a good time to count blessings - even if few in number - and express gratitude to our gracious God and to the families and neighbours and friends who enrich our lives in often unexpected fashion.

But I don't think I'm presumptuous by suggesting that we should also take some prayerful time to make a few resolutions as we move into the New Year. Making resolutions at this time is a tradition that can help all of us. So let me offer some resolutions to ponder over as we move into 2009. You, kind reader, may have some other suggestions - for me and for the nation as a whole!

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICIANS

Our elected Government leaders, especially those at the highest level, should resolve to show their love of the people of this country by their selfless dedication and inspiring intelligence. Less talk and more action will be appreciated. For example, will the New Year show a Parliament of more effective oversight of the Executive, more creative work on legislative reforms, and greater willingness on the part of MPs to learn from other groups without demanding exorbitant "sitting allowances"?

Our politicians should resolve to call each other fewer names and instead propose specific programmes to benefit all the people. It really doesn't help the ordinary Zambian to have our leaders daily accuse each other through big headlines in the newspapers of all sorts of stupid and selfish deeds. Why not ignore the opponents and concentrate on putting forward in words and deeds some plans for improving agricultural outputs, increasing education and health services, building better homes, promoting gender equity, etc.

That would require that our political parties resolve to dialogue with their own members and not be so ready to expel those with different ideas of serving the nation. If a party is truly democratic, it should resolve to submit itself to elections of its leaders, to debate over its positions and to accountability to its members. Surely there will be differences of opinions, and members may want to move out of one party into another. But decisions about massive expulsion - with consequent expensive by-elections - should only be taken after plenty of honest and

humble dialogue.

The members of the National Constitutional Conference (NCC) should resolve to pay more attention to the Draft prepared by the hard work over several years by the Mung'omba Constitutional Commission. It's not very encouraging to hear some NCC members - especially those representing the Government and Ruling Party - dismiss outright the well-designed recommendations for electoral reform and a new Bill of Rights. A very encouraging resolve would be to work hard enough to be able to put before the electorate a National Referendum on a new Constitution with a new Bill of Rights by mid-2010.

#### BUSINESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The large mining companies should resolve to straightaway pay up the outstanding royalties on their 2008 earnings. Before the current turn-down of copper prices, there were plenty of hefty profits made and hence the appropriate taxes should be willingly paid.

Moreover, the many external investors coming into Zambia, attracted by our tremendous economic potentials, should resolve to readily meet all the proper wage expectations, environmental concerns and safety regulations.

Our vibrant civil society sector in Zambia should resolve to immediately adopt its own self-regulatory regime without being subjected to a Government-sponsored NGO Bill that appears designed more to cripple than to enhance civil society activities. And all the civil society organizations should resolve to be completely open in reports of where they secure funding and how they spend it. That resolution might help to restrain the growth of the NGI ("non-government individual"!) that appears with fancy names but no details of membership or agenda other than endorsing Government actions.

Churches in this "Christian country" should resolve to follow more the example of their Founder than the attractive lures of "prosperity" or being "winners" of material riches. That might mean more closeness to the majority of the people in this country, the impoverished. Such a resolution would encourage churches to take political stances - not "partisan" stances - to challenge programmes and policies and practices that don't benefit the poor.

The press and electronic media should resolve that in 2008 we will see more professional reporting, more investigative journalism and more editorial balance. The Government-owned newspapers are not expected to be Government mouthpieces, and the private newspapers (including the one you hold in you hand) should maintain an independent stance at the service of all. It is encouraging to see more radio and TV stations, but all should resolve to upgrade the quality of their programmes.

#### PERSONAL RESOLUTIONS

Finally, what about the author of this weekly column, what are my resolutions for the New Year? Well I'm indeed open to suggestions - and my e-mail address is below! But surely one resolution is to be positive about Zambia, a country where the many potentials outweigh the many problems.

But keeping the conditions of the impoverished in this rich country high on the personal agenda certainly must remain a high resolve. After all, Matthew 25 reminds me quite bluntly about with whom Jesus identifies himself.

Surely that's a solid foundation for any 2009 New Year resolutions!

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