

GLOBAL WATCH SUMMIT

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NOTES

CHALLENGES OF RACISM-DISCRIMINATION GLOBALLY

I wish to join others in congratulating particularly the co-chairpersons of Global Watch for this initiative, which indeed is long overdue. I will make a few remarks to introduce the discussion – brief because, as we'll all agree, the many luminaries who spoke yesterday did frame the questions aptly, including the context within which this Summit is being held. Added to this are the wise words, this morning, from the President and the Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

Our task as this Panel is to reflect on Challenges of Racism-Discrimination Globally. It is a theme that spans many matters of epistemology, history, sociology and economics – which a brief discussion such as we are having today cannot adequately address. But I do hope that at the end of this panel discussion, we'll have identified the critical sub-themes.

At the turn of the 1900s, WEB du Bois opined that the problem of the 20th Century is a problem of the colour-line. We can quote many other sages on this issue, not least among which are Pixley ka Seme, Kwame Nkrumah, Edward Said, Olaf Palme, Marcus Garvey, Mahatma Gandhi, Frantz Fanon, Ho Chi Minh, Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela. Central to their articulation of the problem of racism and discrimination was not only their abhorrence of the theory and praxis of prejudice; it was not only their determination to mobilise for resistance to defeat it; but also to posit the anti-thesis to this scourge. Thus Mandela stoically declared that in fighting racism, he was prepared to die.

Du Bois' observation, we'll all agree, came to pass in various contexts and various epoch-making events of the 20th century: in the struggles and victories of the peoples of Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas to attain self-determination and civil rights. The slaves were bound to revolt. They successfully became agents of progressive change; masters of their own destiny.

But, as co-chairperson Sexwale illustrated yesterday, in relation to football in particular, Vashka the Cat continues eating, as the Russians would put it (about a spoilt cat). Ideologies to justify racism and discrimination have been refined. Religious texts and allegiances, and the so-called clash of civilisations, are conjured up to seek justification & rationalisation for social prejudice.

Yet, are we correct to confine the manifestation of this phenomenon to a problem of the mind – one that can be resolved simply through civic education? Sociologists and political economists have, quite correctly, identified access to power and resources as the material genesis of racism. Natural endowments have chased owners of capital across the globe, and so all manner of rationalisation was and is used to justify conquest, oppression and discrimination. Arising from this correct observation is the injunction that Global Watch cannot ignore – that is, how do we change power relations in politics, economics, culture and indeed sport, such that the current objects of racism and discrimination can become masters of their own destiny, in all these areas of human endeavour.

For instance, if excellence in European football cannot be attained without the dazzling skills of African players, is there a reason why African football cannot so excel in organisation, finance and

sponsorship, as well as sporting and management sciences that its dependence on, and glorification of, European football is eliminated? This is not to argue for footballing autarky or isolation, for this is not possible or desirable in a globalised world. Rather, it is to emphasise that integration and social intercourse should be among equals, without the dependence akin to economic neo-colonialism! This, in my view, should be the core long-term objective of Global Watch: to create the material conditions that will make it difficult for the theory and praxis of racism to thrive; to change global power relations in all aspects of sport.

We also cannot afford to ignore the question whether the resurgence of this phenomenon within the sporting fraternity and in broader society – as President Mbeki illustrated yesterday – is an accident of history; an aberration that distorts an otherwise beautiful picture. Hasn't history taught us that, it is precisely in periods of economic recession that possibilities increase for rabid chauvinists, revanchists and war-mongers to thrive? And so, the campaign against racism and discrimination in sport cannot ignore the social and geo-political dynamics that feed these scourges in broader society.

However, as we know, even where political and economic power relations are changing or have changed, racism and discrimination do continue to fester. As experience has shown, ideas and ideology do have a momentum of their own. Thus we cannot underestimate the importance of campaigns of positive civic education among the youth and society at large, about respect and accommodation of difference – be it racial, gender, orientation, religious or social status, among others – and to disabuse the racists of their warped mind-sets.

I would also like to argue that to complain and campaign against racism and discrimination does not, and should not, mean that the targets of racist practices should perceive of themselves as victims; as objects of pity who require sympathy. The symbolism of Dani Alves' response in that Barcelona banana incident also means that racism should be ridiculed for the backwardness that it represents. For, contained in some of the incidents that we have witnessed – and indeed many manifestations of racism during apartheid in South Africa – is also a deep-seated sense of insecurity on the part of the racists, a warped sense of inferiority that breeds irrational aggression, a projection of raw power to mask irrational fear.

In brief, what one is arguing is that our offensive against racism and discrimination, as Global Watch and all its partners, should be informed by a comprehensive and holistic understanding of these phenomena across society; so that even if we are chipping at it from one angle, we will do so conscious of the contribution we are making to what should be a multifaceted and transdisciplinary global campaign.

The draft Global Charter does contain this understanding. Further refinements to formulations can be introduced. But as most speakers have said, it is in the act of implementation that we shall learn and improve. No doubt, Africa including South Africa in particular, because of its historical and current experience, has an important global role to play in this regard. In the words of Steve Biko:

“The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face.”

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