

## **Reconciliation Day address at Chapel Street Primary School in District 6, by Horst Kleinschmidt.**

District 6: a place tears! The soil we walk on here today is drenched in tears; tears of yesterday, not dried yet, tears of today!

A few moments ago we walked past the Trauma Centre, here in Chapel Street – a very special place, dealing with the undue social and family violence in our neighbourhoods. But during the 1960's, 70's, 80's and early 90's, the Trauma Centre was known as Cowley House. Then, equally brave people worked in that building. It was then a reception centre for hundreds upon hundreds of wives and children of political prisoners incarcerated on Robben Island. The reception centre accommodated wives and lovers and provided what comfort the Cowley House staff could give, both before such fateful visits and after the pain-laden visits to the Island. Cowley House was a safe harbour for spouses and their children who arrived by train and bus from all over the country before boarding the rickety Willem Barends to make the crossing to Robben Island. Under the whip of warders and through the visitors-hatch, the prisoner and his spouse tried to convey news, love and affection, and commitment to the freedom apartheid denied them.

Let me today lift the veil on how the spouses of those on Robben Island got to Cowley House. From 1960 onwards Canon John Collins, clergyman at St. Pauls Cathedral in London, raised funds for the defence costs of those politically persecuted in, what was then, Southern Rhodesia, South West Africa and in South Africa. And then, he built an elaborate secret network to support the families of those incarcerated. A secret operation was crucial when Canon Collins' International Defence and Aid Fund was banned in this country in 1966.

What the Defence and Aid did was to select families all over the UK, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland,

New Zealand and elsewhere and match them with a persecuted family in Southern Africa. Their job was to write to the spouse of the imprisoned, detained, banned, banished or fled breadwinners. Political exchanges were discouraged, to avoid interference by the pervasive SA censors. The overseas families were allocated six amounts of money per annum, convert the money into International Postal Orders and send these with a letter to their allocated family here in SA. The money was sent to cover school fees of children and pay for a once-yearly train or bus trip to Cape Town. Many of these correspondence relationships lasted for close to thirty years – and some are solid friendships to this day. Each Defence and Aid correspondent promised to send the letter they received and a copy of the letter they wrote, to a concealed contact in London. Each letter from SA was treated as a receipt - that the money was received.

A small group of UK and South African exiled women worked at Defence and Aid offices, on conditions of elaborate secrecy, to manage this correspondence and postal order traffic – no mean feat: to sustain several thousand relationships, one outside SA with one inside SA, for over three decades. Cowley House, more than any other place symbolises this incredible monument of international solidarity. When Canon Collins died in 1981, I had the privilege to take over the reigns from Canon John Collins – a man whose praises have not been sung in SA. I challenge St. George's Cathedral or St Marks to make amends for this omission. Canon Collins is not the only person deserving of recognition here. Two women stand out for doing this work in the dingy basement of the Collins' house in London. They are Rica Hodgson, later succeeded by Peggy Stevenson. They deserve our applause and recognition, together with other unsung heroines beavering away in that basement.

The entire correspondence of that period has survived and was brought to SA, in two ships containers, in the 1990's and today forms the heart of the Mayibuye Archive at UWC.

The archive is testimony to tears and tears again

As we walk here today we must believe that one day, we, all South Africans can be reconciled; reconciled across the many things that continue to divide us.

Healing the wounds of the past demands restitution, contrition, acknowledgement and reparation that is done by all, each one of us, who derived benefit from the colonial and apartheid era. I believe this can only be done if we discuss a restitution tax, if land reform is energetically managed and negotiated and if our social order builds economic and social equality. This is what we, the people of this country, must stand up for and demand from our far too comfortable political establishment, in the ANC and DA and splinter groups. Political failure demands that we re-build a social movement with as wide a base as possible. We need a new United Democratic Front, led by working people, the faith communities and all those our social dispensation marginalises.

We need to build such a movement, stone by stone, set aside differences and build a negotiated united front.

Today's walk is one important building stone toward a people's movement for a just, restored and equal SA nation. Let us build on our powerful history of resistance; let us learn from the past that which was best in our civil society struggles – let us learn from this proud tradition and build a people's voice that those up there, in the Mayoral and Parliamentary offices, have to hear! Let us express this through our constitution and the provisions under our Bill of Rights. Let us build the society we desperately need.

Only when that happens, will the tears finally dry.

I stand here today in solidarity with the Right2Know and Social Justice Coalition campaigns; I stand in solidarity with the people of Bromwell Street, Tafelberg and with those thousands of District 6 awaiting restorative justice!

We cannot accept that apartheid policies are replaced today with the language of market forces, highest return on investment and the crooked developer sector that sold us the CT Stadium.

Today's Reconciliation Walk might well be called the walk of tears. Arguable more tears have been shed on this soil than the many tears shed elsewhere in our troubled history.

Half a century ago the 60,000 residents violently evicted from here, shed tears. They are still shedding tears; men folk who feel that they let their families down by not being able to counter the Group Areas police who removed them from their homes. Mothers still shed tears. The families evicted and strewn across the sandy wastes of the inhospitable cape flats, when they meet today, still shed tears over the humiliation they suffered – the humiliation de Klerk and company still do not confront and say and do 'sorry' for what they did.

We stand on this soil, drenched in tears, today because we tell the City, the Province and Parliament: You have failed these people! You have made promises but you did not keep your promises! You lack the will and leadership! Instead, you collude with those who offer the highest price – and thus, in effect, continue to build the apartheid City where the rich get the best and the poor are destined for Blikkiesdorp. – Shame on de Lille, Zille and Nkinti – you do little more than re-produce an apartheid city under a different name!

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