

Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane
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Some years ago, a journalist asked me what sort of world I wanted to see. The answer came to me instantly: I wanted a world with a human face.

In a world with a human face, every individual would be able to smile together in complete freedom, in unity, in peace, in prosperity. It would be a world where every human being can fulfil their potential as God created them to be.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Isaiah paints a picture of what this should mean:

No more shall the sound of weeping be heard
or the cry of distress ...
No more shall there be an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime ...
They shall build houses and live in them,
they shall plant vineyards and eat of their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit,
they shall not plant and another eat.'
(Is 65:20-22, extracts)

These verses speak of an end to infant mortality; health care for all and a dignified old age; secure housing and economic stability, where everyone may safely enjoy the fruit of their labours, in peace and joy.

Yet as we look around, what do we see? We live in a world where a few do indeed have such a life. But far too many others struggle even for basic existence.

Perhaps you are aware of some of the statistics.

Around half of the world's population live on about two dollars a day - or less. Indeed, over 300 million people in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than *one* dollar a day.

Extreme poverty is actually growing in sub-Saharan Africa, having risen by 72 million in the last ten years. Global hunger is also growing - the number who go to bed hungry is over 850 million.

The numbers float before our eyes - but the human impact is beyond our imagining.

Of this we can be sure: poverty is evil.

In all its ramifications and consequences, poverty mars the image of God within humanity:

- it mars the image of God in the poor as it deprives them of opportunities for abundant life
- and it mars the image of God within those of us who have more than enough, but who, through greed, complacency or even ignorance, fail to do the justice, to embrace the loving kindness, that our God asks of us.

Poverty is the new global apartheid.

Racial apartheid was rooted in accidents of birth. Economic apartheid is little different.

Far too many people experience poverty for no other reason than that their parents lived in poverty. They are trapped in spirals of poverty.

Inequality is growing between the richest and poorest - not only between nations, but within most nations of the world.

The gulf is scandalous. The three richest people in the world control more wealth than all 600 million people in the world's poorest countries.

Trade - the subject of our global week of action - has known unprecedented growth in recent decades. But almost all the benefits have gone to the rich. Indeed, some of the poorest countries are worse off.

As I stand here talking to you, global trade is worth \$10 million a minute. Poor countries account for a mere 0.4% of this. Worse, their share has halved since 1980. Income per person in the poorest African countries has fallen by a quarter in the last 20 years. The prices of many key exports of poor countries are at a 150 year low.

Meanwhile, agricultural subsidies by rich nations run at \$1 billion a day. Poorer countries cannot compete. Worse still, evidence abounds of subsidised surpluses, dumped to devastating effect in poor countries which have been forced to open markets without protection: rice in Mexico, onions in Senegal, cotton in Kenya ... the list goes on.

Intellectual property protection rules make life-saving medicine unattainably expensive. Two-thirds of those with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa - even though prices are falling, the necessary drugs are beyond the reach of most.

International trade rules rob poor countries of \$2.4 billion every day. This is 14 times what they receive in aid.

All of this is sanctioned by global institutions. It may be argued that poorer countries, as members of these, are party to the decisions that keep them in the poverty trap.

But when, for example, in the IMF, the poorest 50 nations share less than three percent of the vote, what choice do they have?

Meanwhile, one country - guess which - has veto power. Is that justice?

Recently the cartoonist Zapiro depicted personified International Financial Institutions, presiding over a divided world, looking down on Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, architect of South African racial separation, and saying 'Apartheid? You're just an amateur!'

What are we to say today? It is easy enough to criticise. It is far harder to offer constructive solutions.

Yet that is what we hope to do in this week of global action on trade.

Our slogan is 'trade for people, not people for trade.'

We need global trading and financial arrangements that benefit everyone - indeed, that make particular provision for the poorest and weakest.

The answer does not lie in the abolition of the international financial institutions. If there was one lesson from 9/11 or the earthquakes and tsunami in South East Asia, it is that we are all one vulnerable human family - inescapably interdependent. Globalisation is here to stay, and we need strong institutions to manage it.

The answer lies in the reform the international financial institutions - the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation - so that they may have a human face.

What do I mean by this?

Of themselves, they are neither intrinsically good nor bad. It is how they are used that brings morality into the picture. For too long they have allowed the rich to exploit the poor. 'Level playing fields' and blind commitment to privatisation may help increase trade volumes, but in the process they allow - even encourage - the strong to trample the weak.

Institutions with a human face would reverse this. They would uphold the intrinsic dignity and worth of every human individual. They would protect the vulnerable, strengthen the weak, empower the marginalised, give a voice to the voiceless.

Listen to these words:

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

These words are over 50 years old - they come from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 25. Yet, half a century on, they remain a mocking dream for that half of the world's population who live on two dollars a day or less.

If the world is serious in its commitment to human rights, achievement of these minimum standards must be given a higher priority in our international institutions.

Some may ask 'What does this have to do with an organisation designed to facilitate world trade? Trade alone does not cause these ills; nor can trade alone solve them.'

True. But trade is an inseparable part of interdependent human living; and policies on subsidies, and on liberalisation of goods and services, can make a great difference to the availability of food, water, education, health services, in a clean, sustainable, environment - the fundamentals of life.

Trade policies must make the human dimension a more central priority, so that trade plays a fuller role within the greater goal of poverty alleviation.

Trade has the potential to be one of our most effective weapons in overcoming poverty. If Africa increased its share of world exports by a mere 1%, it would generate \$70 million. That is about five times what our continent receives in aid.

To do this, we need a WTO that is more just, more equitable, more transparent, more flexible. One size policies do not fit all - we need more differentiation, that will allow the poorest countries to tailor their policies to the needs of their populations. Blanket commitments to liberalisation and privatisation must go. Consensus decision-making must also be revised, since it stifles the varied needs of individual countries.

And alongside reform of the WTO, there must be reform of the rest of the world's global financial and economic instruments.

Differentiation in South Africa

Let me make a few comments on our own situation in South Africa.

Each country is different. Apartheid distorted our trade patterns with the rest of the world. We need to manage the transition to greater integration in global trading systems, even as we argue for their reform. We are becoming internationally competitive - but to try to do this too fast, without either interim protection or adequate support for restructuring, loses us jobs, and puts downward pressure on wages and conditions. This is part of the difficulty facing the textile and clothing sector.

Of course there are other factors - a major one is the strength of the rand, and the need to control inflation, alongside the impact this has on both exports and imports.

More generally, I should also like to see greater promotion of capital formation, and, at an international level, a brake put on foreign currency speculation. 'Hot money' can have devastating effects on fragile economies.

Then there is the need to strengthen our domestic economy, build up the purchasing power of South Africans, and develop our rural infrastructure. There is plenty of potential for a greater emphasis on the encouragement of sustainable livelihoods.

And of course, as part of this, I must repeat my long-standing commitment to the Basic Income Grant.

Achieving these goals

But for our own country, and for the good of those who are far poorer than we are, the overriding need remains reform of the international institutions and the systems they support.

How are we to achieve any of this?

Well, I must say that this year, 2005, I am particularly optimistic.

I am optimistic because of the changing international climate, and because of the growth of global public opinion in favour of change.

The Changing International Climate

Five years ago, the international community agreed the Millennium Development Goals. This year, alongside acknowledgement that we are lagging behind our mid-term targets, there seems to be a growing commitment to get the MDGs back on track through wide-ranging actions, including differentiated trade measures.

This year, poverty is a key priority for both the G8 and EU summits.

The Commission for Africa has also offered comprehensive and realistic proposals, including the recommendation that 'liberalisation must not be forced on Africa.'

These come at a time when broader discussion of the whole UN system is on the table.

In all these areas, there is a growing momentum for the sort of changes that will bring greater economic justice to the world.

Economists tell us - indeed, have been telling us for decades - that the cost of defeating poverty is easily affordable. It is tiny in comparison with the more than trillion dollars that will be spent on armaments this year.

What is lacking is the will power.

Growing Public Opinion

This brings me to my second reason for optimism.

We can help generate that will power.

Politicians respond to public opinion. Businesses are answerable to customers and shareholders.

And everywhere people are beginning to raise their voices more loudly than ever before.

We saw this with the Jubilee 2000 campaign - an unprecedented global coalition speaking up for the world's poorest. We made a difference - though we still have some way to go.

Today we have wider, and still growing, coalitions, that bring together faith communities, non-governmental organisations, and every branch of civil society - across every nation of the world. All are committed to 'Making Poverty History,' as one campaign puts it.

That is what this Global Week of Action on Trade is all about.

Through the mobilisation of huge numbers on every continent, we are declaring that no policy-maker, in politics or business, should doubt that trade justice is the growing demand of world opinion.

This is how to create the necessary political will.

My prayer is that our voices will be heard, and that justice will be done through the reform of the UN, IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation.

We need international institutions that are truly accountable - not driven by accounting. We must learn to measure success in quality of life, not just quantities of dollars. This must be our over-riding goal - until Article 25 is a reality for every human person.

Joe Slovo once said, 'The real question is not whether a system works, but for whom it works.'

For too long, these organisations have worked for the rich. The time has come to say that the poor must stop paying the price.

Amen