

## Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

### Sunday Times Op Ed

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Well, 2012 is almost over, and to nobody's great surprise, was not the year in which the world ended. The general response to this non-event was just to carry on, business as usual.

Yet circulating on Facebook was a photo of a grubby child, in tattered clothes, looking with big eyes at the camera, with the caption, 'I'm not afraid the world will end in 2012: I'm afraid it will carry on with nothing changing.'

This past year has been a mixed bag of highs and lows for our nation, and probably for most individuals and families. That's part of being human, and how the world works. But we must also ask what underlying attitudes, habits or policies are particular negative factors. Some things really do need to change.

2012 had some shocking low points, including the Limpopo text-book fiasco; the Marikana shootings; the Cape farm workers' strikes; ~~and~~-vigilante murders ~~and so-called corrective rapes of lesbians in townships~~. Behind these stand bigger problems of poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care and education, corruption and inefficiency. We have seen failing trust between government and people, employers and employees, citizens and the criminal justice system.

We need changes here. President Zuma may have been re-elected President of the ANC, but we say to all in positions of leadership and influence, we cannot have more 'business as usual'. There must be greater urgency, and deeper commitment, to doing more and doing it better. And there must be greater support for those very many, in every sector, who strive hard to make a tangible, positive difference, ~~especially from our business sector, who have quite frankly been as much spectators as we in the religious have been accused of~~

Working hard at working together is central to our capacity to make a change. The excellent National Development Plan rightly tells us that without developing new partnerships across all sectors and all old divisions we will not achieve our dreams for our country.

Kgosi Leruo Molotlegi, King of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, and I have taken to heart the call to pioneer new forms of partnership, launching the 'Winds of Change' initiative between private and not-for-profit sectors. ~~Wiphold (Women Investment Portfolio Investment Holding) are also responding to my challenge~~. We aim to forge new tools, with potential for wide applicability, for helping impoverished communities to help themselves in achieving social, economic and environmental sustainability, in ways true to our African heritage. We are moving forward slowly, taking time for trust-building, so we can learn to think together 'outside our own boxes' in new and innovative ways, not just applying old paradigms that don't deliver, or which only serve narrowly drawn objectives rather than the whole of nation and society. I am convinced this is the way ahead.

For, faced with the challenges of poverty, joblessness and inequality, we cannot just throw our hands in the air in despair, blaming corrupt officials or a failing political order for not creating conditions conducive to economic growth. These may contribute – but we must also all ask ourselves, 'What difference can I, can we, make?' People need restored dignity through concrete possibilities of taking responsibility for their own well-being and that of their families, not helplessness and

dependency. The litany of our lament must be a spur to action, encouraging all of us – not just politicians – to see that we can make a difference.

The potential is there. Our wonderful constitution acknowledges the importance of socio-economic rights, and the moral obligation to pursue a better life for all. These are not mere words: they are at the heart of the fairly shared, abundant, flourishing life, which faith communities see as humanity's proper vocation. Therefore politicians, business people, civil society, can know that we, with all the weight we can muster, will support initiatives directed towards this end. We will speak up where there should be change, not because we are in the business of judgemental criticism, but to point to better possibilities, and help people find a better way ahead.

So, as 2012 ends and 2013 begins, we congratulate President Zuma and the ANC leadership on their election, and encourage them, as the ruling party, to set the needs of all South Africans, especially the most disadvantaged, at the centre of their policy-making and implementation. We invite them to reach out across party and other divides, so we increasingly become a nation intolerant of intolerance, generous in our abilities to work together, **as we prepare to make our vote count in 2014.**

New Year's resolutions can be daunting. We may doubt our capacity to keep our best intentions. But the message of Christmas, and the birth of Jesus Christ, is that God is 'on our side', taking flesh, so that he knows 'from the inside' what it is to be human with all its struggles. So we can be sure that, whether in our personal lives, or whether in our contribution to our country, whenever we try to make the right changes, God will help us.

We think of Madiba, in the evening of his long life. We know our hearts will ache when God, in his mercy, eventually calls him to his heavenly home. But we will also give thanks that he looked to make a change, and found the strength always to strive for the best. May God give us grace to follow his example. May he bless us, and help us to be a blessing to others, bringing change for good, in the year ahead. Amen.