

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba
Social Cohesion Summit – Message
4 July 2012

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends

First, may I offer my apologies for not being with you, in person, this afternoon.

Second, let me express my thanks that, despite my absence, I am able to share a few words.

It gives me great pleasure to give my wholehearted endorsement of the objectives of this summit, and to offer my encouragement to you – and the assurance of my prayers – as you meet today and tomorrow.

Gathering in the historic venue of the signing of the Freedom Charter can only remind us of how far we have come in the last half century.

We should never forget how much has been achieved – even if we are sometimes disheartened at what remains to be done.

For it is true that the Charter's goals of a non-racial society, with true equality, and tangible freedom of opportunity for all, still lie beyond us.

We always knew the journey would be long and challenging.

But perhaps we did not fully appreciate how long, how challenging, would be the task not only of overcoming the divisive legacies of the past, but also dealing with the pressures of growing inequality (particularly in the economic sphere) that are common to nearly all countries of the world.

It can be too easy to become preoccupied with weaknesses and failings – and of course, these must be acknowledged honestly if they are to be faced and overcome.

But they should not become our focus, dominating the way we look at our country and ourselves.

For that will only drag us down.

Rather, we must commit ourselves to the highest of the aspirations of those who went before us – from those who signed the Freedom Charter, and those from all other walks of life, whether political or from faith communities or other sectors of society, who dreamed of a better South Africa, and strove to bring it about.

We should learn from them to place this goal, this vision, at the centre of our lives.

For it is this which should shape our talking, our acting, our policy-making, our working.

Our best hopes for our nation, not our worst fears, should drive us.

And this is especially important when it comes to building social cohesion – which we so vitally need.

For it is far easier to unite us, in our diversity, around such a positive goal – the goal of a caring society of which we can be proud.

Behavioural scientists today tell us that to focus on where we want to go is far more effective than letting what is holding us back dominate our lives.

This should come as no surprise. Almost two thousand years ago, St Paul said much the same, in his letter to the Philippians, writing: 'Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things' (Phil 4:8).

So then, dear friends, my wish for you as you meet in Kliptown is this – that, whatever the difficulties that must be named and analysed and countered, never take your eyes off the prize that lies ahead of us: never doubt that we can direct our lives to all that is good.

Let all that diminishes our nation, our peoples, our societies, take second place, and be overcome and consumed by a burning vision of hope and light.

This is the legacy of our forefathers. This is the promise of 1994. This is the treasure that is ours to earn, if we have the courage to reach for it together.

So may God bless you. Thank you. Amen.