

The Rev. Achowah Umenei - President WACC-AR

Welcome to Africa. Welcome to South Africa. And welcome to Cape Town. By travelling to Congress 2008 in Cape Town, South Africa, some of you may be touching ground of Mother Africa for the first time and others doing so for the second or more times. As they say in Ghana, "Akwaaba", welcome!

Here is Africa. Perhaps you first read of it in books, heard about it from someone or saw a movie depicting its people wrongly. Mort Rosenblum, in his analysis of news coverage of Africa, talked of how the continent is portrayed primarily in terms of wars and earthquakes. Movie makers might have brought you Africa in "The gods must be crazy" or in "Tarzan" but WACC is giving you the unique opportunity to see things for yourself by attending Congress 2008 and that may change your opinion or harden it. All the same, you are welcome to see things first hand and when you return, you will have stories, good and bad, to tell.

As communicators, words are weapons for us. How we employ them can bring sunshine or rain. Our words can build or destroy and the choice is ours. One thing is clear, that is, when Christ is absent from Christian communication, that communication cannot bring peace and it cannot reconcile. We all say communication is power and that is true, but what kind of power? The power to build or to destroy? The power to shape and mould for good or the power to scatter and put asunder? Who benefits when we use communication as power?

These are not hollow questions, but questions that challenge individual communicators to reflect on what and why they communicate. Africa has suffered in the hands of some western communicators, both secular and Christian. They have published distorted stories, televised sensational images and - since they believe and make us believe that good news is no news - focus on what is wrong in Africa and very little on what is good. We are not here for a lecture on how to report Africa well in the western press, but practitioners of wrong reporting won't convince anyone that they can communicate peace and reconciliation. Nobody will take them seriously, except themselves.

We are humble enough to take our own part of the blame. Certain things are not in order across the continent. Our war-torn areas are present, so peace is not 100% here. Dictatorship and corruption are still blooming in some African countries. HIV and AIDS are killing our people daily, so do malaria and poverty. Sporadic ethnic conflicts, land disputes and political instability displace many, causing an increasing number of refugees within and without the continent. Other kinds of virus have invaded our continent too. If these ills keep Africa in pieces, what contribution can Christian communicators make to bring peace to the beloved continent?

Though troubles assail, this is still one of the best continents God created. If you want laughter from the heart, come to Africa. If you need genuine hospitality, Africa is the place to be. Perhaps individualism is not your thing; here you find communalism in full dose.

From Cape to Cairo and from Guinea to Kenya, check for rare species of birds, insects, and animals and savour the most beautiful landscapes and vegetation. On this mass of earth called Africa, you have minerals, warm weather, places where women and men with same qualifications earn the same salaries. Mother Africa is where we are known for singing and dancing, the land blessed with a variety of traditions and cultures. We are very stubbornly religious and the centre of Christianity is fast running to Africa.

Welcome to Africa, the continent that hits headlines, not only for what is bad but for what is good. Have you heard of the Mandelas and the Tutus? They are found in Africa. You probably know the Mugabes and the Gadaffis, they too are here. But world leaders of the ecumenical movement are here as well - the Nyansako-ni-Nkus, the Sam Kobias, the Musimbi Kanyoros, the Wangaris, the Ismael Nokos, the Setri Nyomis, and more, are Africans. So are the Eto's and the

Drugbas, the football craftsmen. In all walks of life, you have African women and men, alive or dead, who have made history and will continue to contribute their quota to world peace and justice. We thank God for them.

No continent has the monopoly of peace. We all have our share of peace and pieces. All of us as individuals, families, countries and continents have problems and difficulties. Our task as Christian communicators is to decipher how we can use communication to foster peace, justice, community building, mutual co-existence and the promotion of human dignity. If other communicators use the power of communication to scatter, it should not be so with us. If others go to forums like this and make them "talk shops", let it not be so with us. Let's talk and act and make our Association the true ambassador of peace.

Welcome to Africa and God bless you.

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