

African Renaissance: Reflections on the annual and international conference in Durban, South Africa, from 25 – 28 May 2008

The Editors:

1. the Zululand Observer
2. The Bay Watch
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Abstract

Africa currently remains one of the continents in urgent need of development in almost all sectors of society: education, health, agriculture and technology. Equally, the continent still has a long way to go in democratising nation-states and African communities. These socio-economic realities require contributions from all: African civic organisations, governments and private sector organisations. The challenges are complex and huge. They cannot be left to a single sector of society.

Conference Theme on African Renaissance from 25 – 28 May 2008

This conference, like others before it, was an attempt on the part of the organisers to remind citizens of African countries to promote and develop socio-economic values that add value to development efforts in the context of global economies. Geographical boundaries and ethnic affiliations that distinguish us should be accepted as strength in our commitment to live in peace and harmony with one another.

The Durban conference focused more on what should harmonise us as citizens of our respective African countries: economic realities, universal type of education, movements of people across nation-states and a commitment to have a world without wars of the past, and various types of human rights violations. Above all, the conference sought to advocate for ideas that regard every African as a direct or indirect contributor to continental peace, stability and prosperity.

African Renaissance

This was about understanding African history and the need for Africa to reflect on its past. First and foremost, current national boundaries that separate African states were drawn by colonial governments alone, and not with the consent of the then African leaders. The challenge Africa now faces is to promote and develop new socio-economic values based on self-reliance and self-development.

New socio-economic values require of African communities to give birth to a new range of issues relevant to modern societies and global economies. Such values might affect negatively or positively African art, music, language, race, customs, ethnicity, religion, beliefs and traditions. The complicating factor in this regard, is that it is simply not possible to talk about a common African culture, except to appeal to African communities to subscribe to values embodied in *ubuntu* or a negotiated and agreed common culture of human rights.

In practice, *ubuntu* is humaneness. It manifests itself in openness, sharing generosity, mutual help and tolerance. The principles of unity and group solidarity, across the racial, cultural and social spectrum are fundamental in *ubuntu*. This is based on the phrases that a person is human: "*Umuntu ngumuntu*", a person is what he is because of other people: "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*".

In essence, *ubuntu* means treating all people with respect and granting them human dignity that should at all times characterise an African personality. Values of *ubuntu* are passed on from generation to generation and should include such values as compassion, care, understanding, discipline and morality. Where is the issue of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals? This kind of behaviour, for whatever reason, certainly has no place in values of an African personality. If there are problems out there, one believes there are, such problems need to be resolved through dialogue and negotiation. In any violent conflict there have never been in the history of mankind real winners.

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