

# Appendix

## **Reverend Bongani Finca’s Keynote Address at the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Swearing In and Seating Ceremony, June 12, 2004<sup>1</sup>**

Rev. Bongani Finca: I bring you all greetings, very warm greetings. I also bring you a lot of respect and admiration and a message of congratulations, solidarity, and encouragement from South Africa. And I bring it to this occasion which is unique, an occasion which is indeed the first of its kind in the history of our struggle to build reconciliation based on truth. As South Africans we believe that this occasion perhaps better deserves to be referred to as one small step for man and one giant leap for mankind.

To the commissioners about to be inaugurated into office, I bring a special message of support of love and solidarity from the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, from our esteemed chairperson, his grace the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who writes in his personal letter to yourselves as commissioners, and I quote, “The task of a Commission such as this is to bring to life the truth in order to promote reconciliation.” He continues to say, “You have the additional burden of initiating the first TRC in the U.S. Many will be looking to you to assess whether similar commissions might be helpful in other communities also.”

Let me begin my own remarks with the words I wrote in December 1995, when I stood, as these commissioners will stand today, and took my oath to be a commissioner in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I called my thoughts that day “When Hope Decays”:

When hope decays there is a particular stench in the air, of bitterness, of strife, of holding on for dear life to things that neither heal nor help. When hope decays there is anger that pulls down what others try to build. There is frustration with those who build, with those who dream, and with those who think, for how dare they dream and hope and think, because

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our hope has decayed. But when hope is reborn, we dream the dreams which others scorn. We sing the songs of birds that fly. We embrace our past with all its shame, and say to it you, too, belong to us. We hope, we dream, we think, because our hope is reborn.

We, as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are humbled and honored that the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established using the model of South Africa. As we think of that model, we pay tribute to Nelson Mandela, who became the author and the pioneer of that model. As you will remember, he emerged out of prison, having spent twenty-seven past years of his life, crushing stones and confined in cells. But he emerged with a message which was later adopted as a preamble to our constitution, and I quote from that preamble: "We need to find understanding, but not vengeance. We need to find reparation, but not retaliation. We need to find ubuntu, but not victimization."

These are the pillars of the route you have chosen to deal with the shame of November three, 1979, eleven hours twenty-three, at the corner of Carver and Everitt Street. You have awakened, as we did, to the truth that bygones will not be bygones until they are confronted honestly, truthfully, and responsibly addressed. You have realized, as we did, that the tears on the eyes of those who were victimized will not be dry. No amount of ignoring those tears will make them dry. They will only be dry when we stop and face them and confront our shame and dry them. You have found, as we did, that the truth must be told, that the record must be set straight, that forgiveness must be asked for and pardon must be given, before we can move together as communities and as nations. You have learned, as we did, that our past will continue to haunt our present, until we agree to face that past with all its shame and address it.

So people of Greensboro, we as South Africans, we salute you. We do not wish you success, because you have already succeeded. The installation today of this Commission in the U.S. soil, the first of its kind, is a victory beyond words. Truth has won over lies. Memory has won over amnesia. Understanding has won over revenge.

But as you take this step today, and as you travel together on this road for the next eighteen months, we assure you that it will be a long walk for your commissioners. We urge you, be gentle with them. Be firm in your demand for the truth, but be kind to one another.

In our language we have a saying that a person is a person because of other persons. In that saying we recognize that a person is not complete until she embraces other persons and struggles to make them complete also. We recognize that a person cannot be fulfilled until she finds fulfillment for others also. We recognize that we cannot have real peace until we move in isolation and find peace for those on our side and for those who live on the other side. But ubuntu goes further than that. It says if you appear a bit taller than others who stand with you, it is not because you are really taller than them, but it is because others are carrying you in their shoulders. For this Commission to fulfill its mandate, and to do the task that you have set for it to do, we urge you as the community of Greensboro, to carry the commissioners on your shoulders, to support them, to encourage them, to be with them, and to pray fervently for them.

It is the first of its kind in the U.S. It must set a model that must succeed. If it does succeed, it will give us all hope that one day there will be truth commissions on Iraq, that there will be truth commissions on Ireland, that there will be truth commissions on the Middle East. If it succeed, as it must, it will give us hope that one day we will know the truth of Rwanda and know the truth of Burundi and know the truth of Angola. If it succeed, as it must, it will give us all hope that one day we will know the truth on neighborhoods and ghettos, on villages and towns and cities, where the blood of the innocent has been spilt, and the cloud of silence has hovered over the national shame.

Today I am proud to be South African, but today I am also proud to be a little tiny part of Greensboro. We salute you. We praise you. We thank you. We will travel with you, until the dream of realizing the truth is realized, because there is no alternative to truth for us to be healed. We need it. So let truth reign.

I do thank you.

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