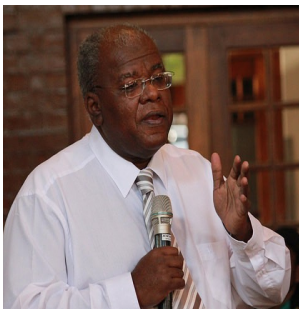


Freedom Our Responsibility

An international conference to build a culture of reconciliation, sustainability and empowerment took place at the University of Free State, Bloemfontein, from 26 to 30 September 2014.



The post-94 generation in South Africa is called the born-frees but they're not born free because they bear the bitter memories of others, **Prof Jonathan Jansen**, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Free State University (UFS), told the international *Freedom Our Responsibility* conference in Bloemfontein last month.

This five-day conference, addressed by more than 60 speakers from Africa, Europe, US and Asia, was held in September under the auspices of Initiatives of Change South Africa and the Lyndi Fourie Association International.

"We insist on the worst versions of each other; I want us to recall the best versions," Jansen said. "We must interrupt the bitter knowledge black and white carry deep within themselves."

Rector Jonathan Jansen

The conference was inspired by the reconciliation that took place between Letlapa Mphahlele, former PAC MP, and Ginn Fourie whose daughter, Lyndi, was killed in the Heidelberg Tavern massacre in 1993. The attack on the tavern was ordered by Mphahlele, then commander of Azanian Peoples Liberation Army, the military wing of the PAC, in retaliation for a raid carried out in Lesotho by the SA Defence Force earlier that year.

Beyond Forgiving, a 30-minute film of the story of Fourie and Mphahlele and how they are using their own reconciliation to promote reconciliation and empowerment in depressed communities in South Africa, was the highlight of the opening day.

Speaking after the showing of the video, Fourie said South Africans had to reach across the divides that separate them and "hold ourselves and our leaders accountable."

Opening the conference, the Mayor of Bloemfontein, Thabo Manyoni, said that freedom linked only to a democratic system was often imposed and not real. "If we leave freedom only to politicians we might be found wanting later," he said. He added that integrity was severely tested when politicians were entrusted with huge public money. "Integrity is a pillar of government," he said. "A society that doesn't value integrity can never produce leaders of integrity. In South Africa we are found wanting in this regard."



In her address, **Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela**, senior research professor in Trauma, Forgiveness and Reconciliation at UFS, said whites in South Africa generally lacked acknowledgement of their responsibility for the brokenness of the past. "This is something Ginn Fourie has done," she said. But guilt and shame remained and became trauma when it was passed from generation to generation.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Wilhelm Verwoerd, grandson of former Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, said young South Africans were struggling with how to take responsibility for a past they were not part of. "We're not asking that, as a young person you deny your ancestors," he said. "It is rather the ability to respond to the suffering of people who suffered as a result of our ancestors doing."



Photo courtesy of eNCA

Africa is the continent of the 21st century,” says **Bedan Mbugua**, CEO of Fountain Media Group in Kenya. “But corruption is a parasite eating Africa from within. I compare corruption to Ebola. Both kill people. The big difference is that Ebola evokes fast reaction when between 2 000 and 3000 people die. But corruption has killed millions.”



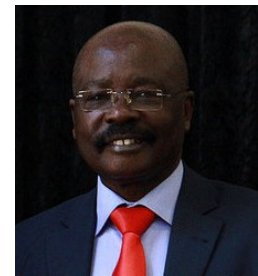
Akuru Aukot

His colleague from Kenya, **Akuru Aukot**, constitutional lawyer who has consulted to 10 African countries on constitution-making and who facilitated the writing of Kenya’s new Constitution, agrees. “We’ve got tired of leadership in Africa over the past 50 years. It’s become commercialised and commoditised. Transparency means nothing. We’re not really nation states. We’re becoming a conglomerate of ethnic identities. That’s what we could end up with if we are not careful.”

But neither is stopping at criticism. That’s just the catalyst for new ways to tackle what both call one of Africa’s biggest failings - lack of ethical leadership and integrity.

“We have been organising across the 47 counties in Kenya,” says Mbugua, twice jailed for criticism of corruption among Kenya’s political elite. “The aim is to raise 10 000 women who will tackle evils like the illicit brews from which some of the elite are growing enormously rich at the expense of many now addicted. They will go in numbers to where these drinks are brewed and stop the production.

Mbugua has also been challenging the tertiary institutions in Kenya. “We have 66 of them,” he said. “But they tend to focus only on analysing problems, not solutions. We want the best from our universities so we are holding debates in all 66, challenging them to come up with solutions for our problems. We’ll finally select the 10 best thinkers - one ambassador with nine deputy ambassadors to focus on solving the problems facing our youth today.”



Bedan Mbugua

Aukot is one of a group of Kenyans that has established G47 (for the 47 counties), a movement - “we will not register as a political party” - to change the political narrative in Kenya and to drive integrity and accountability in leadership. “It’s no use only complaining about bad leadership,” he says. “We’ve perfected the art of lamentation. We are like flower girls in the political game but don’t offer solutions. Could we be the real problem? After all, the leaders we complain about are our fathers, mothers, sons.” Join G47 and support us, he urges.

Paul Hoffman, head of the Institute of Accountability in South Africa, speaks a similar language from a different perspective. “The flame of freedom burns as long as it is fuelled and not doused by a flood of corruption, mismanagement and power struggles,” he says. Civil society is the vehicle for nurturing this freedom flame by lobbying and working for good governance. He praised the role played by individuals such as Hugh Glennister, who successfully challenged the Government over the axing of the Scorpions as an independent crime-fighting unit and the way the Hawks were set up in their place. “Good governance comes from good leadership and good leadership comes from good people,” he said.



Paul Hoffman

John Tesha of Tanzania, executive secretary of the Africa Forum, a body of 45 ex-African presidents who handed over power democratically, is clear that “we need a new type of leadership in Africa.” “In the past we stifled entrepreneurship and now sit with thousands of young people with degrees and no jobs,” he says. “But the important thing is that institutions like the AU are changing. New ideas are getting through and there are now charters in place to allow involvement of civil society.”

But Africa is not short of blueprints, he added. “We’ve just been unable to implement them so far.” His aim, through the Africa Forum and civil society bodies, is to strengthen the “weak governance institutions” in Africa.

“One outcome of the *Freedom Our Responsibility* conference is the formation of what we call a Coalition of the Willing, to promote integrity in leadership and to help strengthen the institutions of governance in Africa.”

The Coalition has drawn together representatives from South Sudan, Mali, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, United States, Tanzania and from several European countries, to support initiatives already under way and to encourage more civil society involvement across Africa.



Yeah Samaké

Yeah Samaké, Managing Director of the Empower Mali Foundation and Mayor of Ouelessebougou in Mali, said governments have never solved local problems. “If you seek solutions to your problems outside your own community, you’ll wait forever,” he said. “Issues have to be solved where the hurt is - locally. We must raise leaders at grassroots, among ourselves, people who are prepared to serve with integrity.”

Platfontein

Conference participants spent a day with the San community at Platfontein, west of Kimberly.

Speaking at the function, well-known author, **Credo Mutwa** said, “ I am seriously concerned with the lack of morals in South Africa today. I am a seeker of the truth. At the moment black people do not understand how great we are and white people do not understand cooperation. We should be proud and not look down on ourselves. We need to stop fighting, let the blacks killing each other stop. Let us be at peace, let us love each other.”



Credo Mutwa
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

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Mbindiyo Kimanthi*

Conference report by Anthony Duigan