

## The struggle for justice without hatred

Speech delivered by General Joseph Lagu, 22 May 1994, in Yaounde, Cameroon to the conference 'For a New Africa', convened by Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change).

*Mr Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.*

My heartfelt greetings to all of you present here. I feel honoured by the invitation to participate in this Moral Re-Armament Conference, under the theme: 'FOR A NEW AFRICA.' I am happy to speak at the session, 'Africa: What are you living for?' My personal answer to the question is: 'To forgive others, so that I may expect forgiveness for my own faults from those I have wronged; also so as to deserve to ask for forgiveness from the Almighty for the sins that I committed against Him and other people; then to qualify as a Christian to say truly the part of the Lord's prayer, 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'"

I wish to become involved in an honest conversation on race, reconciliation and responsibility here, as I have done in MRA programmes in other cities around the world. I hope that this may help peoples in conflict lands, such as my own country the Sudan, to understand each other and finally aspire to peace.

Coming from a trouble-torn country myself, I found it difficult to select what to talk about here. Aware that I am one of those former leaders sometimes regarded as having failed their people, for which I accept my share of responsibility, I take courage from a spiritual song of my school days:

*Wide, wide as the ocean  
High as the heavens above,  
Deep, deep as the deepest sea  
Is my Saviour's love;  
I though so unworthy  
Still am a child of His care,  
For His word teaches me  
That His love reaches me,  
Everywhere.*

In the context of the song, my nation, though so confused and in disorder just as I am, is still in God's care. I then decided that this would be my message to you in Cameroon as well, that God cares for you and for your country; that God the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate, as the Muslims meekly say, is healing the hearts of us all. May that be so for all the peoples in all the countries of the world with similar problems as in my own. I wish to share with you my own experiences of listening to the silent voice which answers problems. Let me tell you my story:

At the Secondary School and later in the Military College in the 1950s, I became aware of the pressure by the Northern Sudanese on the people of Southern Sudan, to which I belong. We regarded them as aliens and intruders in Southern Sudan. I bitterly resented their pressure on us in the South to adopt their Arab and Muslim ways of life, which I came to call 'this cultural aggression'.

A few years after I graduated from the Military College, I felt obliged to respond to the call to join a liberation struggle that aimed to separate the South from the North. The struggle started when Northern politicians persistently turned down a democratic request that we in the South be free to follow our chosen cultural path in a federal structure. That was the popular wish of the South.

I participated in the military struggle for nine years (1963-1972), with the last four as its leader. I maintained hatred then against the Northern Sudanese, I regret to say. This sprang from the injury they

had inflicted on my fellow Southerners after the mutiny of the Southern Equatoria Corps in August 1955.

Ladies and gentlemen, those Southern soldiers who mutinied killed Northerners indiscriminately. Starting with their Northern officers who failed to get away, they then broke out of the garrison into the rest of the town of Torit. From there, they went on the rampage throughout the province of Equatoria and beyond, in the South, killing men, women and children. This was the result of accumulated racial hatred that I shared at the time. Later, I realised that the massacre of Northern civilians, simply because of their difference in colour of skin and appearance, was wrong. For that we in South Sudan were also guilty of racism. Racism in reality is a common crime being committed by all the peoples on our earth. It is not a disease that infects only people of a particular colour of skin. It occurs when one resents and discriminates against someone because of difference in the colour of skin or appearance. That is a temptation that often affects us all. It is the evil from which we need to be delivered and protected, as we remember the concluding portion of our Lord's prayer: 'And deliver us from evil.'

The Northerners took bloody revenge when the British Royal Air Force flew their units of the then Sudan Defence Force (SDF) to the South. Many Southern soldiers and policemen who surrendered in response to the call of the Governor General were nevertheless put to death after trial. Among them was a close relative of mine. The Governor General himself did not stay to see that justice was done. He left the Sudan before formally handing over responsibility to the Sudanese. Independence was declared by the Prime Minister, a Northern Sudanese, without him. The South in that state of affairs was left at the mercy of the Northern Sudanese. Then Northern soldiers, police and civil servants flooded in like an occupying power. All this sowed the seed of hatred and bitterness within me against Northern Sudanese and led me to join the armed struggle in 1963. It was only later that I saw the element of hatred in public affairs as irrational and counter productive. Of course, I still maintain that any people deprived of their rights have a cause to struggle for justice. I stand for 'The struggle for justice without hatred' because hatred does not make one think soberly. It derails one from the real track, poisons one's blood and harms oneself far more than the people hated.

On 6 December 1971, the test for me came when a civilian aircraft of the Sudan Airways crash-landed in a territory controlled by my guerrilla forces. In that incident, the pilot (a Canadian national) and one other passenger died, leaving 29 survivors. Some of my men recommended that the Northern elements (the majority) among the survivors be killed, others suggested holding them to ransom. That was the situation! It gave me a very difficult time indeed. I had a sleepless night. Various thoughts passed through my mind, positive as well as negative. Reminiscences from the Christian Scripture guided me to act on the positive thoughts:

- (a) Christ had compassion on a hungry multitude. What about me, should I not have the same for innocent travellers?
- (b) The conversation between our Lord and the disciple Peter, when the latter asked, 'How many times do I forgive my brother, should I forgive him seven times?' The answer was, 'Seventy times seven,' meaning on and on.

My compassion for the survivors became stronger than any hatred for the Northern Sudanese, and my Christian upbringing stressed the need to forgive. The teaching of my people's traditional belief warned against taking innocent lives of others. During that sleepless night I clearly thought I should release the survivors unconditionally. I then remembered the words of the chaplain at my secondary school back in 1953: 'The good thoughts that come to you in the coolness of the night or early morning hours may be guidance from God. Act on it and do not go about consulting other people. The guidance is for you.' With that ringing in my mind I refused to let my thoughts be diluted by any other ideas. I simply conveyed my decision to my staff at breakfast time.

The initial reaction of the staff, as I expected, was hostile to the decision. I had to battle further with them. In the end they consented, a most welcome relief that gave me the peace of mind I needed. I had risked becoming unpopular when I felt my decision was right under the circumstance. And it paid off

soon afterwards. The lesson I learned from that crisis is what I wish to share with you at this conference. It is rewarding to do what you believe to be right before God, as the silent voice tells you. Never give in to the wishes of other people contrary to that. Respond to the silent call within you, especially when you are the one accountable for a decision. Stand firm, even if at a price.

We released those survivors. As I envisaged, they became our ambassadors on arrival at their homes in Northern Sudan. They spoke well of the conduct of our men and the cause for which we were fighting, and their stories were widely publicised. This caused embarrassment to the Government who came under public pressure to start serious negotiations with our Movement, which resulted in the Addis Ababa Agreement that ended 17 years of conflict between the South and the North. We signed the accord before the late Ethiopian Emperor in Addis Ababa, March 1972. I then led my guerrilla army of about 18,000 men back into South Sudan, where they were integrated into the national army, the police, and the other areas of civil life. For a decade the South enjoyed regional autonomy.

In conclusion, I have to remind you that another civil war broke out in the Sudan in May 1983. Sadly this has brought my country into a turmoil far greater than ever before. There are now widespread ethnic conflicts within the South, in addition to the main South-North conflict. The North too is in a very unsettled state. Our people have become so divided. 'What caused this set back?' one may ask. My answer is that we the leaders on either side in the conflict lacked honesty at the peace settlement in March 1972. We were not really prepared for a complete metamorphosis like from a caterpillar to a butterfly. We pretended, and only shed old skins as snakes do, while our personalities remained the same. Each group hoped to cheat the other in the course of time. That type of change is temporary, just as the new skin of a snake is smooth and shines only briefly, and shortly becomes coarse again. That is what is true of our situation in the Sudan. In the next settlement there has got to be sincerity. We need the type of change discussed at MRA conferences and meetings. We need to look inside ourselves, not throw blame at others when some bad issue is at hand. In all this, we need the help of others to get us out of the situation. We need your prayers you people of this land, as you look honestly at your own problems. Please think of us and help us bring the harmony we need.

Yes, we need a struggle for justice, but we need it with mercy, with forgiveness, and without hatred. We need a vision from God of the destiny of all His peoples, not just our own. We need democracy for our people in the Sudan so that they choose their own Government. In the South, I wish for our people the right to self determination, presently their popular call, so that they may freely choose to remain in some form of union with the North; or freely decide to form a separate state of their own.

We need to join hands with the democratic forces currently sweeping the world. We cannot remain indifferent in the Sudan. That is my commitment today, a world commitment, that I proclaim before you. I pray that the love of God which passes all understandings, shall reach politicians and peoples everywhere, and guide them to work for peace and democracy. I stand for peace and democracy, and I long to see the end of the savage conflicts currently taking place in my country Sudan, Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, and a few other countries on our continent. I long to see those replaced by harmony and fraternity among our peoples throughout Africa.

I praise God Almighty for the peace in your country, which made it possible for us to gather and meet here in Yaounde. May your leaders and people be blessed for preserving the peace. May the Almighty turn the wind of change that passed over Southern Africa, and other parts of the world, to blow over my country, and bring to an end our conflicts, so that our people, with their multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural diversities may once more enjoy the benefits of peace. May the same be true for other peoples in similar circumstances elsewhere in our world.

I long to see the day when we Africans of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups reach understanding among ourselves and learn to live in peace, observing good neighbourliness, tolerance and respect. With that in our minds, and as our hope, Africa may change from a conflict-torn continent to a peaceful and a progressive one. We may then have a brighter future in our own countries. May God the author of peace, the giver and preserver of life, preserve you and give you peace.

Thank you for listening.

**Joseph Lagu**

Lt Gen Retd, Hon D Litt

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