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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

by Archbishop-elect Desmond M. Tutu

TO: HUNTER COLLEGE

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## BLACKS WILL SUFFER

### Preamble

It is a very great honour and privilege to be here to share this wonderful moment with you and your families. May I congratulate all of you who are graduating today. It is a moment of well deserved pride, joy and achievement. This day which seemed so long in coming has actually arrived. You all deserve a very warm clap. It is a tremendous achievement, but I think your moment of triumph must surely be shared with your families, your mom and dad, your brothers and sisters and all your relatives who are rightly basking in your considerable reflected glory. I think it is only right and proper for your families now to take a bow and receive a warm clap too.

I don't think we usually believe that the faculty deserve some vredit. But they do. They have had to put up with you for at least four years and hoped to have enabled you to think for yourself and to place you on the threshold of an exciting career. It is written in the language of the liturgy of the church, meet and right for us to clap the faculty.

I have never known why graduates should be made to run the gauntlet of a commencement address when everybody knows that the most important item today is surely to get your degree and

commence living as a responsible citizen of the world. I am sorry to have to put you through the hoop, but since the college has paid my fare from South Africa, I'm afraid I have to give them value for their money, even if it is only in quantity not quality. Sorry about that.

It does; however, give me the opportunity to thank Hunter College for having provided a venue in 1984 for exiled South Africans and others to celebrate with my family and me the Nobel Peace Prize, which I won in that year for all South Africans, especially the victims of apartheid, the treason trialists, the political prisoners, such as Nelson Mandela, the banned, the detained, the exiles and all those committed to the struggle for justice, peace and reconciliation. May I also thank Hunter College and its remarkable President, Donna Shalala for honouring some remarkable South Africans such as Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. By actions such as these, your college has shown its own tenacious commitment to the cause of freedom, dignity and humanity. Can you give Donna a big hand. Thank you.

I also have the opportunity of thanking, on behalf of the victims of apartheid, all of you for what you have done and continue to do to help bring an end to that horrible scourge, apartheid. Many persons and organizations have worked hard to raise the consciousness of Americans about the evils of apartheid and urging them to do something about it. But we

would admit that it has been young people, college and university students particularly, who have been quite remarkable in this regard. One had heard about how American students were concerned really for themselves, introspective and uninterested in the outside world. They wanted to show how they would take on the rat race. But a comprehensive lie was given to this assertion by what I myself saw in 1984.

Young people like yourselves were demonstrating a passion about the South Africa issue. They were doing so by staging protests and sit-ins on campuses to urge the college and university authorities to divest, and they were doing this at a time when they should normally have been concerned about their examinations. I said then that they were giving us a new faith in humanity. They were saying that there are some things which are more important than good grades and good degrees. I would hardly be willing to receive an honorary degree if I thought these things did not matter. Young people, I salute you. You are quite something. You're neat. Thank you on behalf of all of us in South Africa who want to see the birth of a new society in that land.

### Sanctions

We have seen the madness and horror of apartheid unfolding before our very eyes in recent days.

There have been the nightmarish raids on South African neighbouring countries -- when South Africa has behaved like a bullyboy carrying out the actions of an international terrorist -- declaring it would punish anyone, no matter who, as long as it did strike out at somebody; it did not matter much that it wounded or killed innocent civilians or the nationals of sovereign lands.

And then there was the ghastly violence at Crossroads near Cape Town. So-called black on black violence when vigilante groups with at least the connivance of the police, if not their active support and encouragement, have turned on others hacking people to death and burning shacks. Crossroads was spawned by apartheid when black men were denied the right to bring their families to live with them near their workplace, as would happen in a normal society. And the women folks, bless them, defied all kinds of odds to be with their men folk and put up these shacks.

We have seen the brutality of the police in reaction to the protests of blacks and there has been the violence in the black townships when different factions have turned on one another, activists necklacing those they deemed to be collaborators with the evil masters dousing them with petrol and then placing petrol filled tyres around their necks and setting them alight. A horribly gruesome way to die.

And last week after months of racists gloating about black on black violence, we saw white on white violence when the Afrikaans Resistance Movement with its swastika-like emblem and neo-Nazi terror made it impossible for the South African Foreign Minister to address a party meeting in the Northern Transvaal. Mr. P. W. Botha has to be commended, as I always do, though I am not sure he does want praise from Tutu. He probably regards it as the kiss of death. Be that as it may, he must be commended for courageously declaring that South Africa had to move away from Apartheid. Sadly, he moved only sufficiently to annoy his right wing and not far enough to satisfy black aspirations and so has been caught in a crossfire of his own making. He will certainly make use of the so-called right wing backlash because his friends in the West will say, "You see, we can't push him too hard." If he moves any more quickly, he will erode his political power base and the right wing will overwhelm him. And internally he can say to whites, "Do you see what you would be letting yourselves in for if you abandoned me."

So that right wing backlash he is going to squeeze for all it is worth to produce the advantages he wants. And yet a very recent survey shows that 70% of the whites believe he is doing a splendid job and after all, he has had the right wing with him for a very long while. This isn't to say it will not grow in strength, but at the moment it is perhaps more of an asset to him than a hindrance. It can help him do what he likes, as

all politicians want most of all, to hold onto power for as long as possible.

All this violence which I deplore, as I have always said since I am opposed to all forms of violence, all this violence has been spawned by apartheid. It would not be there if apartheid was not there. In the wake of all of this, including over 1500 black people killed since 1984 and most killed by the South African security forces, killed as if you were swatting flies, we have called for sanctions. I have said we are on the brink of a catastrophe, a whisker away from full scale civil war, but that we could be pulled back from the edge of the precipice.

If the international community were to act decisively, to apply sanctions on the South African government to get them to release all political prisoners including Nelson Mandela and others; allow exiles to return home without any reprisals; to stop all treason trials; to unban all political organisations, to dismantle apartheid and sit down with the authentic representatives and leaders of every section of society to work out together a new constitution for the new South Africa that would emerge.

I have said that it is our last chance for a reasonably peaceful resolution of the near intractable problem of South Africa. If sanctions are not applied, if the international

community doesn't intervene decisively in South Africa immediately, then we have had it. Armageddon would be upon us. No one likes to make such predictions about a land and its people he loves and loves passionately.

Now the world community seemed to realise the seriousness and urgency of the South African situation because the Security Council met and passed a resolution to apply comprehensive mandatory sanctions on South Africa. And having heard all the harsh condemnations that everyone uttered against the South African government for its acts of international terrorism, we believed that the international community would show a united front against a government that was responsible for such an outrage. You must be joking.

Mr. P. W. Botha has calculated correctly as usual. He knew he would be protected from the consequences of its actions by his very staunch friends in the West. The USA and Britain again did not fail him. He knew he could cock a snoot at the world. His friends would provide their ritual rhetoric declaring their abhorrence of apartheid, but they would never desert their friend by translating their rhetoric into action.

After all, the victims were black. He was white and they were white. We were being told in the most eloquent way that blacks are expendable. I have asked before and I ask again, "Would President Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher have the same



equanimity if the casualties were white?" I am not saying that these leaders of western democratic countries are racists, but they will have to provide us with considerable evidence that they were not acting to protect racism in its most vicious, or worse, lethal form.

I speak as a black person obviously. What must blacks in South Africa do which they have not done? What must they say which they have not said for the world to listen for once to the victims of apartheid, rather than to its perpetrators? When will you hear our cri de coer? All I want is to be recognized for what we are -- human beings.

I know there are wonderful arguments that are put forward to show why sanctions should not be applied. Can we examine some of these very briefly: the most favoured one is that blacks will suffer most if sanctions are applied.

Now my dear friends, you must please pardon me if I am somewhat cynical of this newfound altruism on the part of people most of whom have made huge profits in South Arica. The profits were largely due to cheap production costs. These came from cheap labour. It has been blacks who have provided that cheap labour mainly as migrant workers, married workers leading unnatural lives in single sex hostels separated from their families for 11 months of the year. I may have been deaf, but I must confess I heard not so much as a squeak about this real

present suffering of blacks from our new breed of philanthropists.

Why, when the South African government destroyed stable black communities, unrooted black men, women and children and dumped them as rubbish is dumped, in poverty stricken barren bantustan homeland resettlement camps, over 3 million people being so uprooted and dumped to satisfy a vicious racist ideology? I did not hear too many people protesting a suffering deliberately visited on a people by their own government just because they were black. I find it exceedingly galling that the spokesperson of the South African government and its supporters should be able to speak about their concern that blacks would suffer when that has been the consequence, if not the purpose, of their deliberate policies.

Who has forced black children to receive an inferior education deliberately setting out to stunt their emotional and intellectual development? Has it not been this same government? Who made it a crime for a man to sleep with his wife if he was a migrant worker and she tried to join him without permission at the workplace? Was it not this self same government with its evil pass laws which they are saying they have abolished in 1986? What happened until then? Must we just wipe that slate clean and forget that every year over 100,000 blacks have been jailed because their passes were not in order? Who made it a crime for a person to look for work in

the land of his/her birth if not this government? Let me spare you a litany of woes.

My friends, when the economy of South Africa has been strong as a matter of deliberate government policy, there has been high black unemployment, structural unemployment, perhaps as high as 25% - 30%. That is how you ensured cheap labour -- to have inexhaustible reservoirs of it. It is important to know too, that most foreign companies have made capital intensive investments in high-tech operations. It has been mainly whites who were employed in these areas. In fact, it would not be blacks who would be the first to be hit. It would be whites. Is it any wonder that it is they who have responded with the whelps of scalded cats at the sanctions call.

Is it not interesting that no credible black organisation or person has repudiated the call I have made? Surely, although they are not too bright, they must know when something is likely to cause them unnecessary suffering and they would oppose someone who wanted to bring on them additional suffering. Apart from the predictable ones, Bishop Tutu continues with this matter to have the support of most black organisations, AZAPO, UDF, COSATU, etc.

In addition to these, two recent surveys have shown that over 70% of blacks support sanctions of some sort or other. It is as if blacks are saying, "We are suffering as it is. To end

this suffering we will do so, even if it means taking on additional suffering."

After all, our people have shown that they do mean business by their use of consumer boycotts and stayaways. In addition to this, the SACC representing about 12 million South Africans, last year already called for sanctions. More recently the SACBC has asked for economic pressure. These are not insignificant or irresponsible bodies or individuals. To whom is the international community willing to listen? To the victims and the spokespersons or to the perpetrators of apartheid and those who benefit from apartheid!

You know I would be more impressed with those who made no bones about it and said honestly, "We are concerned for our profits," and not give us the horrible baloney that they are there for our benefit. We don't want you there for our benefit. Please do us a favour, get out and come back when we have a democratic and just dispensation in South Africa. I would have respect for someone who said he was concerned about making money, that surely is the purpose of the free enterprise system.

I do want to say that many foreign corporations in South Africa have introduced many improvements for their black staff. They have now a better chance of promotion. They do get better salaries, etc. But these have come about largely through the

pressures of the disinvestment campaign. These corporations are actually doing no more than applying to their black employees conditions they have made available to their white employees for donkey's years, so that, we are really saying that at last they are behaving as good employers ought to have behaved a long time ago as far as blacks are concerned. And I have to say that especially American companies have begun to speak out a lot more forthrightly against apartheid than has been their wont and they would be the first to admit that they got a considerable jog to their consciences from the disinvestment campaign.

But I must enter my caveat against all this and it is that we do not want apartheid ameliorated, improved. We do not want apartheid made comfortable. We want it dismantled. As Mrs. Motlana once put it, "We don't want our chains made more comfortable. We want them removed."

You hear people say sanctions don't work. That may be so. But if they don't work, then why oppose them so vehemently? If they don't work why did Mrs. Thatcher apply them to Argentina during the Falkland Islands War? Why did President Reagan apply them at the drop of a hat to Poland and more recently to Nicaragua and even more recently, he has been annoyed that his European allies did not want to join the USA in applying them to Libya? By the way, if they are so ineffective, why does the USA still maintain a blockade of Cuba? By the way, why have we

heard little about sanctions hurting those you want to help in the cases of Poland and Nicaragua; and yet we have all this wonderful sophistry when it comes to South Africa?

I need to point out that when Chase Manhattan refused to roll over a South African loan there was run on the South African currency, the Rand, to such an extent that the private sector discovered it did have a tongue and spoke up more forthrightly and many suddenly discovered that the air around Lusaka was quite salubrious. They were all going there to see the ANC. They had been hit where it hurt them most, albeit nonviolently, in their pocketbooks.

I am myself unaware of anything that has changed in South Africa without pressure of some sort. The changes in the sports policy were due to the pressure of the sports boycott and not because there had been a change of heart on the part of white sports administrators.

We hear some say that sanctions will destroy the South African economy irreparably and leave us with a financial morass. My response is that the ball is surely in the South African government's court. They are the ones who must decide and their decisions about the future of the country will determine whether sanctions should be invoked or not. I certainly do not want to destroy a land I love passionately.

If the South African government remains as intransigent and obstinate as now, then of course, sanctions or no sanctions, the economy will be destroyed with everything else in the wake of the violence, bloodshed and chaos which will ensue if a full scale civil war breaks out. There is no absolute guarantee that sanctions will topple apartheid, but it is our last nonviolent option left and it is a risk with a chance. Constructive engagement, and all similar efforts to persuade white South Africans supporting apartheid to change, have failed dismally. Let us try another strategy.

There are those who are not ashamed to use the argument that if they pull out others will come in to exploit black South Africa. Now, I must say that the moral turpitude of that argument is quite breathtaking. They are saying we will not do what we know is right because these people will do the wrong, and so let us continue to do wrong. My wife does not like this analogy, but I think it is eloquent. They are like someone saying, "If we don't rape you, others will. So we will rape you."

I want to end by saying we are not asking people to make economic or political decisions. We are asking you to make a moral decision. There is no room for neutrality. When you say you are neutral in a situation of injustice and oppression, you have decided to support the unjust status quo. Are you on the side of justice or injustice? Are you on the side of

oppression or liberation? Are on the side of death or of life?  
Are you on the side of goodness or of evil?

"If a racial war breaks out in South Africa", so said the late Senator Frank Church, "then it would have the most horrendous consequences for race relations in this country." Apartheid could also very well cause World War III. What would happen if the frontline states were to ask the Russians to come to their aid and they did by attacking South Africa? What would the west do? It is in your own interests if for nothing else, that you should help to destroy the scourge of apartheid.

We have a tremendous country. With some truly splendid people, black and white. We shall be free. This is God's glorious enterprise. - Join God in this wonderful endeavour to bring freedom to all South Africans, black and white, so that we will live black and white as God intends us to do, harmoniously and happily together as members of one family, the human family, God's family.