

Prepared and delivered by: Ustaaz, Ahmed Fazel Ebrahim

Graduate of : The Islamic University, Madressah Arabia Islamia, Azaadville, South Africa

Consultant: Islamic Law

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**THE TRANSFORMATION OF WELFARE IN SOUTH
AFRICA**

The building of partnerships between the state, civil society and the religious sector

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Introductory Address

The honourable and distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; I thank the conference organisers for extending an invitation to our organisation, Africa **Muslim Agency**, to address you.

A Relationship with the Government

People need to be governed in order to have political, economic and social order. People, however, have diverse cultures and values and follow diverse religious groups or cults. Governing without consideration of these differences would result in a major conflict that is unnecessary. It would also result in the violation of the legal system adopted by the government.

It is therefore most important for the religious sectors of any state to have an official platform for communication with the government. The purpose of such a platform would be to preserve religious identities and needs of each religious group and to ensure that each religious denomination does not violate the religious, cultural or other rights of any other group. Issues on abortion, pornography and homosexuality are only a few manifest examples in this regard. Such a platform would also be the meeting table for different religious groups to share concerns of mutual interest. Included among these concerns would be the structuring of welfare and development work.

Alliances with the government are an important form of approach to negotiate for aid from some foreign donors and international organisations like the U.N. (United Nations) and other such donors. These alliances must not be allowed to become the process through which

government departments transfer their total and major responsibility to community structures and CBO's.

Presently, the Muslim sector specifically needs to establish alternatives and possible solutions, through the government, for the many refugees and aliens that are in South Africa. Many of these are Muslims from Africa.

Inter-faith partnerships can thus also have a forum to lobby for mutual needs, like relief and other support that is required from the government.

I must stress that all policy drafting by the government for the welfare and development sector should also be done in consultation with NGO coalitions.

We also need to remind the government, that the high crime rate is draining the economic resources of the productive sector and the working class. These sectors are further burdened by taxation and high insurance. The neglect of the social & welfare needs of this class of people is also an injustice that needs to be addressed.

The government's role is also significant because it has the infrastructure. The new political structures and community representation forums would definitely make an invaluable input to clarify community needs. NGO affiliations to government will also assist the government to identify NGO services within the various geographic sectors.

We have a positive image of the government and view the establishment of the National Development Agency and other government institutes as positive steps towards welfare and development.

Most importantly, the government needs to present transparent and detailed financial reports to the public on the spending of its Welfare & Development budget.

Chapter 2 & 3 of the White Paper has already committed government to create partnerships with NGO's and CBO's (Community Based Organisations). All that now remains is to structure their partnership, especially for inter-faith coalitions.

I further recommend a referral to the Draft Position Paper on "Partnership between government and non-governmental organisations," that was drafted by the NWSSDF (National Welfare Social Service & Development Forum).

Welfare and Development Work

Our new political structure and community integration now demands inter-faith and government co-operation to face present and emergent problems in the field of welfare services. National welfare cannot be foreseen without involvement of the broad community spectrum and its social organisations.

Development

If we are not earnest enough to address economic disparities, we will live with a split-society. The one will be technologically advanced and the other will be primitive. Attention needs to be given to the quality of economic growth within under-developed sectors. Priority to skills training, human development, poverty reduction, employment and long-term sustainability of projects are the often and always repeated economic theories that are insignificant without active implementation. A recent South African newspaper reports that for the first time in almost 20 years, SOUTH AFRICA is in a positive growth cycle. However, the projected growth rate for the year is a mere 3%. Welfare work promotes development and development sustains welfare. Monetary resources should thus be evenly spread between these two sectors. Addressing past imbalances must neither blur us from the welfare needs of our new and post-apartheid generations.

Development needs proper education and training. It also demands that needs are fulfilled through negotiating, debating and appropriately requesting. The damage to public property, educational institutes and related services prevents people from wanting to assist people with destructive behavioural attitudes.

Mr James G. Speth, an administrator in the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) stated at the Launch of the 1996 Human Development Report, "Traditional thinking holds that an equitable distribution will undermine incentives and savings and thus lower everyone's income. Recent analytical and empirical evidence suggests that this conventional wisdom is wrong. A progressive redistribution of assets and income tends to boost growth because it has a broad, positive effect on people's incentives. If, for example, in 1960, the Republic of Korea had Brazil's inequality, its GDP in 1985 would have been 15% lower than what it was."

Educational needs and training

Most charitable organisations & religious groups are concerned with local or limited geographic areas. This prevents resources being channelled in the right areas. A central networking management team could provide research, training and education on welfare programs. Assistance can thus be directed towards unified economic and political goals. Without the necessary networking and planned visions for assistance programs, each NGO

organisation or religious group will continuously face a drain of limited financial resources and human personnel.

Non-specialist aid-workers & people helpers need a framework to view their helping functions, input and efforts in a systematic manner. Though we can never disregard trained specialist in diverse welfare areas, most human needs can be, and have been, met and fulfilled by non-specialist and ordinary aid-workers.

Networks are needed to educate the public on supportive and welfare services that are offered by the various institutions.

Thus, there is a general need to focus on networking and progress that will educate and equip the non-specialist aid and welfare workers in the diverse welfare services that are offered and in those services that are required.

Further more, as said by Dr. Edwin Kaseke in one of his papers, skills are also required in such areas as lobbying, negotiating, advocacy, community development, social action and social planning, and project planning and management.

Donors and Funding

SOUTH AFRICA is in a fortunate position to have international donors. National donors from the business sectors are putting some profits back into the very economy from where the profits were generated. Government aid comes from the tax system. Taxation structuring is thus also supportive to the welfare system.

Unfortunately some financial aid received and promised is governed by conditions. Sometimes finance is acquired over periodic terms. This restricts the avenues and projects into which resources can be channelled.

The large number of tenders who wish to receive available finance to fund their schemes and private plans have also curbed the general population from receiving economic & social benefits.

A system needs to be structured that enables equitable distribution of aid among the provinces. Such a distribution must also be equal towards the racial groups. The reality of our situation is that we are a Rainbow Nation comprising of diverse racial groups. We are not a Zebra Nation that only contains a pure black or a pure white identity.

Religious groups extending aid are needed but this must not be the instrument and weapon to control the religious beliefs of those provided with assistance. Joint ventures through inter-faith participation will limit such missionary objectives to some extent.

“Donor-funding” of our needs is not a permanent or regular avenue of income. Schemes to promote self-sufficient economic units must be given emphasis. An environment of public

acceptance to co-operate in inter-faith ventures requires to be created to help acquire volunteer workers and to ensure the success of fund raising campaigns.

It should be noted that communities, which require welfare & development, are communities that have fractional or zero economic savings. Thus, all financial input into these areas, immediately begins to flow back into the economy since they are forced to spend to fulfil their requirements. Disregard of this aspect is a violation of rational economic thought.

The Muslim Community

The Muslim community has always been involved in welfare operations. These were conducted within its own circles and also benefited other communities in and outside South Africa. The Islamic Medical Association operates mobile clinics, skills' training is provided by the IDB (Islamic Development Bank), and other organisations have provided schools, educational centres, bursaries, scholarships, etc.

The Muslim community, like any other religious community, also has many organisations. Some of these mutually co-operate and others have their independent approaches. A national body or Council of Muslim theologians has been formed to represent Muslim needs to the government.

Nationally, no official and structured body has as yet been established by Muslims for inter-faith partnerships. There are local Muslim groups that are currently inter-acting with forums such as NSSWA, the WCRP and other welfare structures. Dr. Dawie Theron, a member in the Steering Committee of this conference, in fact represents the Muslim community as part of a religious coalition on the NSSWA.

Islamic Law promotes the concept of co-operation for all forms of goodness. Thus, the establishment of joint ventures with other religious groups would definitely be possible in welfare and development.

The Muslim community would not necessarily involve itself with every venture due to economic reasons and other specific religious requirements. However, mutually acceptable and clear conditions of partnership can be formulated in relation to each joint venture that is to be undertaken. Our organisation, Africa Muslim Agency, had successfully undertaken such a venture during the Rwanda Crises when we undertook a joint operation in co-operation with the Rhema Church, other Christian Churches and other religious groups.

Islamic teachings promote the concept of minimum individual consumption, provision of basic needs to those in want and abstention from luxuries. These are the preferred ideals that differ from the imposition strategy of the Communistic and Marxist theories.

An Inter-faith Coalition

Sometimes, even religious groups lose the heavenly spirit of Divine thought. Thus, we panic when the Vaal dam is below 9% of capacity. We then only think of economic and weather forecasting. We then stupidly conclude that the dam needs six years of rain to be filled. Allah (or God) then filled the dam in two weeks. Even the sluice gates had to be opened to prevent the overflow of water.

Similarly, when we learn to truly support and assist, when we unite Divine assistance with sincerity, then we can be hopeful of progress. I neither refute the planning of resource acquisition since even the prophet, Yusuf (or Joseph - May God All-Mighty's mercy be upon him) had to structure grain consumption to protect people from drought. Welfare work is thus a prophetic and religious function since the earliest of times.

Diverse political allegiances and ideological differences must, like religious differences, not be the instrument for division, protest, contest and opposition in order to fulfil the mutual interest of those in need (within the society).

Communities are not only centred around political, racial or geographic groups. They are also strongly centred around religions. Thus inter-faith associations and joint-voicing of issues would have an impact on policy formulation.

Fortunately, our organisation is already on the National Welfare Forum. The essential nature of a religious coalition has already been emphasised. The permanence of this coalition would depend upon dedication to serve humanity and keeping the spirit of tolerance to allow individuals their own religious practises. Working with trust, honesty and transparency will happily bond such a union. We are human and would have differences. However, solving these in harmony will benefit those providing support and would best serve the interests of those requiring our assistance.

Commitment from religious groups, their leaders and religious NGO's to serve on this panel will encourage the participation of their communities. Then only can this vast reservoir of human skills & potentiality be given the desire to be helpful in a deeply human manner. We can then tap their services to ensure the progress of welfare. Constant working together, inter-action and co-operation will foster and solidify our partnership and National Coalition.

We have just emerged from a history of opposition & division or racial groups. We will thus have to initiate the process of mutual understanding and learning of each others cultures and religious and social values in order to tolerate and respect these differences.

Thank you