

A statement on fraud and corruption by South Africa's President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki (edited)



Thabo Mbeki

All philosophy recognises the fact that what distinguishes us, human beings, from other forms of animal existence is that we have both material and spiritual needs.

Thus the normal human beings we would like to see and to be are people who succeed to maintain the necessary balance between these needs, between what is materially necessary and what is morally good. This is to say that the exclusive pursuit of one of these, ignoring the other, is to invite disaster.

And yet it would seem to me that many in our society are inspired by a system of values which begins and ends with the pursuit of what is materially beneficial to themselves, with no sense of what is morally correct.

In many instances, our society itself describes as successful and people to be emulated those who are like the resident of Jerusalem described in Ecclesiastes, who have accumulated more wealth than any other who ever lived in that city.

No questions are asked about the ethical behavior of any of us, as part of determining whether we should indeed be emulated or not. Success is defined as success in having addressed effectively the material needs of the human being.

And so our youth grow up knowing that to be deemed a success in our society, one must possess the luxury cars whose brand names are familiar to all of us. One must have a big and expensive house and dress in the finest garments available in the market. The issue of how these worldly goods are acquired is immaterial. Indeed, to have acquired them without having worked for them is itself applauded as demonstrating ingenuity and a fleetness of foot and mind. To steal public resources is merely to do the done thing by taking advantage of the position you find yourself in, of access to these resources by virtue of the fact that you happen to be employed in the public service.

What I am trying to suggest is that our society evolved in a manner which gave birth to a situation in which a disastrous collapse of social values occurred, to be replaced by the notion that what is good is what serves my individual material interests and pleasures.

Only the mentally blind would fail to see that the things that happen in our country everyday point precisely to this that among many of our fellow citizens there is no ethical barrier which blocks them from actions that are wrong.

If I am correct in what I have said, then we must strive to find the answer to the question - what must we all do to rebuild a system of morality in our country, a generally accepted value system that is inimical to actions that are ethically wrong! Fundamentally to create a climate in our country hostile to crime, including crimes of corrupt practice within both the public and private sectors, we surely must do whatever is necessary to effect that RDP of the soul.

Clearly, whatever it is that we have to do to address the issue of the RDP of the soul, we must, at the same time, ensure that we have a law enforcement system which gives no quarter to corrupt practice,

whoever might be involved in such practice.

I believe that if we are able correctly to answer the question - what went wrong - we will be halfway to finding the solutions which will make it possible for all of us to realise the common dream of creating a decent, humane and caring society of which all our people would be proud.

The above is an extract from statements made by President Thabo Mbeki at the National Anti-Corruption Summit, Cape Town, 14 April 1999. SAIGA is grateful to the President's Office for the permission given to include the President's statements in this survey report.

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