

NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS' CONSULTATION (NCLC)

NCLC and IF20 Colloquium: Thursday, 12 & Friday 13 June 2025

Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity

In South Africa and beyond

In partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

As senior church leaders of different denominations, we have met on 12 & 13 June 2025 at Bishops court, Head-office of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, 20 Bishops court Drive, Bishops court, Claremont, Cape Town to reflect on the challenges and opportunities to strengthen Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond. In this regard, the following:

NCLC Statement

1. Background on NCLC consultations: 2009-2025
2. Human Dignity and Constitutional Democracy
3. National challenges threatening our democracy and human dignity
4. Human Dignity and Food Security, self-realization versus dependency
5. Empowerment and partnerships - active faith communities
6. IF20 Interfaith Forum in South Africa, August 2025
7. A call to action

Addendum of shared contributions

Consulted participants

NCLC resolution: church - business working group

We, as church leaders, gathered with our academic and research partners, at Bishops court to reflect on our role in strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa and beyond.

In order to tackle the challenges and obstacles of economic growth, to foster the creation of employment, to fight poverty and food insecurity in an active and responsible way, whilst caring for the environment, we have decided to establish a special church – business working group to facilitate closer cooperation in our continued national dialogue.

"I have come that they may have life to the full" (Jn 10:10), leaving no one behind, and a future for the next generations.

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)

Catholic Bishop of Mthatha; Chairperson: NCLC and CDDC Trust

and

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town

Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust (CDDC)

Chairperson: Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka (Catholic Bishop of Mthatha) | Prof Leopoldt van Huyssteen | Dr Andre van Niekerk

Executive Secretary: Dr Renier Koegelenberg (EFSa Institute) | NCLC Secretariat: Website: <https://www.cddc.co.za>

| www.nrasd.org.za | www.efs-a-institute.org.za



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1. Background of NCLC consultations: 2009-2025:

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba summarized the dialogue that began in 2009 under the auspices of the National Church Leaders' Consultation (NCLC) as a joint venture between the EFSA Institute and leaders of the SACC, when Bishop Ivan Abrahams was President of the SACC. It has continued to be led by SACC presidents (including Makgoba), and today by Bishop Dr Sithembele as the current President.

"Our dialogues have always started with a reflection on our failures and weaknesses as a young democracy. They have then sought to address the challenges we face in our churches, and in our work in the broader society.

As we have reflected on our hope, the dangers and challenges faced by our constitutional democracy, we have repeatedly highlighted the following:¹

2. Human Dignity and Constitutional Democracy

Democracy is more than just an electoral process. Democracy is the expression of an image of the human being...it is based on the conviction that every human being has the same inviolable human dignity. Every human being is created equally in the image of God. This conviction, expressed in the Bible (Genesis 1:27), is inextricably linked to the commitment to democracy. ...How people are treated is no longer based primarily on power, but on a right that protects all people equally.² That is why churches must defend democracy!

In our colloquiums of public theology seminars over the last decade, we have examined burning national issues and challenges facing South Africa and the world, focusing on the core values of ethical leadership in all sectors with the aim of creating a just, peaceful and inclusive societies in which no one is left behind. These seminars reflect our longing that everyone will have abundant life, which should be enjoyed not only by the rich, or those who are politically connected and have access to power; we want it to be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of race, culture or social status.³

The prominent place of the option for the poor in the Bible, is the exact consequence of the affirmation of human beings as created in God's image.⁴

Social justice is a key element of a biblical vision of democracy: Overcoming of hunger and poverty is a priority, and the growing gap between huge amounts being spent on arms, whilst resources lacks for the fight against hunger, is a moral scandal.⁵

Bishop Sipuka's challenge to prioritize food security during South Africa's G20 Presidency – a call for "Empowerment and Partnership" emphasizes: "As we come together today under South Africa's G20 presidency, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment filled with both great potential and pressing moral obligations. I stand here not just as a fellow church leader, but as someone who has first-hand experience in the Eastern Cape of the portion of the reported 15 million South Africans facing food insecurity. It's heartbreaking to learn that over 1,000 children lose their lives each year due to malnutrition in our beloved country. We can no longer accept the way things are."⁶

¹ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, "Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity", 12 June 2025, Bishops court, Cape Town

² Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World – a global ecumenical perspective

³ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note

⁴ Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025

In his reflection on the Lord's Prayer, "Bread for All", Bishop Ivan Abrahams highlighted the following: "the petition for "daily bread" comes before the petitions for forgiveness and protection from temptation

BREAD has great symbolic power!

It is the marker of poverty – the bread line

It speaks of friendship, hospitality, covenants and community – breaking bread together

It is the symbol of hope and opportunity – cast your bread upon the waters

It captures security and responsibility – the breadwinner

It signifies basic needs – bread and butter issues

It is the symbol of God's gift of life – Jesus the Bread of life.

It is both important and significant to note that the collective pronouns, "us" and "our" are used in the petition for daily bread. There is no room for individualism and selfishness ... We ask God for bread not as individuals but as a community"....

A theology of Bread means working for a world without hunger. Hunger in a world that produces more food than can be consumed is a scandal and blight on the witness of the Church.....

Bread is what we need to sustain life. The Church is called to ensure the just distribution of the earth's resources.

Whenever we pray for our daily bread may God fill us with prophetic zeal, fire in our bellies and the marrow of our bones to work for a more just use of the earth's resources.⁷

Likewise, the quest for justice is inseparably linked with human dignity as a core value of democracy – for example, the global fight for climate justice. The impact of pollution and climate change affects the poorest nations the most, although their contribution is the least. The same applies to intergenerational justice – what will be the consequences of our lifestyle for our children?⁸

Faith is never (only) private, but always public – always called to engage the world. The church or faith communities is not the servant of the state, but neither is it its adversary. It is the conscience of the nation, holding state, market and society accountable to the demands of the Kingdom of God.⁹

Democracy thrives when it has a strong civil society—allowing for free discourse, for constant dialogue between representatives of politics, business and civil society – a lesson learnt from the dictatorship under National Socialism in Germany¹⁰ Church Academies have institutionalised dialogue: "Through discourse, we promote the search for solutions in civil society. Our work is interdisciplinary, intercultural and international. Our work is characterized by the idea of developing compromises and finding consensus. And we are committed to combating nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia."¹¹

Reflecting on twenty years into our democracy, former Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron concluded: "We now know the limits and the evils of power, including

⁷ Bishop Ivan Abrahams, Bread for all – a theological reflection, Bishops court colloquium, 12 June 2025

⁸ Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Public Theology for the One World.

⁹ Dr Gustav Claassen, Faithful Witness in troubled times: strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa through Faith -Based Engagement with the State, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁰ Rev U. Hahn, A German Church Academy Perspective, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹¹ Ibid.

insidious looting of public assets for private gain.. but we have a practical structure to create our future.. The constitution affords a pathway to healing and integration...It offers us a framework within which to repair our country, to restore, to redress and reconcile. It is up to us to claim the opportunities it offers...it is one that has a claim to our fierce commitment.”¹²

3. National challenges threatening our democracy and human dignity

3.1 A new vision and hope urgently needed: in a country with diverse cultures, religions, and a political history of many conflicts, restoring hope through creating an inclusive national vision for a new society in South Africa – a home for all, as envisaged by Chief Albert Luthuli, a nation in which the human dignity of everybody counts;¹³

3.2 Violent crime is out of control: in a country in which too many people are attacked, robbed and murdered every day - with more people dying than in many countries at war;¹⁴

3.3 The inefficiency of our judicial system: in a country in which most of those implicated in corruption, fraud and mismanagement – especially highlighted by the Zondo commission's report on State capture - have not successfully been prosecuted. This weakens trust in democracy;¹⁵

3.4 Our democracy weakened by economic stagnation: there is a failure to transform the economy, for real transformation: democracy has largely transferred political power from property owners to non-property owners - mainly the African middle-class professionals. Non-property owners who control the state use their political power to transfer the economic surplus from potential investment in the production sector to consumption by the ruling political elite using the tax system and awarding themselves inflated public sector salaries.¹⁶

We need to build an economy which creates jobs: and income for all of our citizens. Our population growth is consistently higher than the economic growth rate, South Africans are getting poorer every year. Our failure to transform the South African economy destroys social cohesion, alienates minorities and majorities alike, and drives our young talent out of South Africa to other countries that appreciate their skills.¹⁷

3.5 Democracy threatened by voter disengagement: a combination of different factors resulted in voters disengaging – lack of economic growth, high salaries in public sector, Black Economic Empowerment in the private sector, lack of services at municipal level, unaccountable electoral law, state control expanded in many sectors – marginalizing investors.

Thus, In 1999 the Eligible Voting-Age Population (EVAP) turn-out was 72%, twenty five years later, in 2024, the EVAP turn-out was 41%.

Faith and church leaders should encourage citizens to participate in elections, to vote, to get involved in national dialogues - as active participants on all levels of society.¹⁸

¹² E. Cameron Justice. A personal account, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2014, p. 284

¹³ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁴ Ibid,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Moeletsi Mbeki, Democracy in South Africa: Government of National Unity Challenges considering geopolitical changes, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁷ Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba, Welcome note, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

¹⁸ Moeletsi Mbeki, Democracy in South Africa: Government of National Unity Challenges considering geopolitical changes, Bishops court Colloquium, 12 June 2025

4. Human dignity and food security, self-realization versus dependency

Bishop Sipuka highlighted: “the path forward requires us to shift from dependency to dignity. Food security is not just about calories; it’s about *ubuntu*, our interconnected humanity. When children die of malnutrition while food rots in warehouses, when fertile land lies barren while people queue for grants, and when communities that once fed themselves now depend on handouts, our *ubuntu* is broken.

Today, I urge our government to prioritize food security on the G20 agenda. More importantly, I challenge all of us to rethink how we can work together to restore dignity to our people. This is not just about feeding the hungry; it’s about reclaiming our sense of *ubuntu* and transforming our communities from being mere recipients of aid to becoming active producers.¹⁹

Therefore the following:

- 4.1 We see the erosion of human dignity through dependency on grants. Grants are necessary, but they should be a temporary solution. No nation can rely solely on grants; it is neither sustainable nor dignified. People will regain their dignity when they can actively participate in the economy rather than relying on handouts.
- 4.2 In the Eastern Cape, as an example, the transformation of once-productive landscapes into fallow land. Fields that once flourished with maize now lie barren, and grazing lands that sustained cattle are now littered with waste. Meanwhile, queues at government offices grow longer each day, filled with young people seeking grants instead of opportunities to contribute to their communities.
- 4.3 Addressing the mentality of dependency – a troubling shift towards dependency, over the chance for self-realisation, growth and self-sufficiency. It is this mentality that poses a significant challenge to our community's future even amongst our young people. Refusing opportunities because they feared losing the R350 government grant for the unemployed.
- 4.4 This issue extends far beyond food security; it strikes at the core of our identity as African communities, which have historically been producers rather than mere consumers. We are the descendants of those who cultivated their own sustenance and generously shared with others.

5. Empowerment through partnerships & active faith communities

The solution to food insecurity and poverty requires a four-pillar approach: government leadership, business partnership, faith-based communities' involvement, and citizen empowerment.

- 5.1 **Government leadership:** Our appeal to the government must include both immediate and systemic actions. The Government must lead through effective policy, adequate resources, and efficient coordination. The Global Alliance Against Hunger provides a framework, but implementation requires political will and adequate funding.
- 5.2 **Business sector partnerships:** to move beyond corporate social responsibility to genuine partnership. We must not see businesses around Christmas time and during natural disasters dishing out handouts and posing for cameras, but we must see businesses supporting smallholder farmers, investing in rural infrastructure, creating jobs in agricultural value chains, and collaborating with faith communities on food security initiatives

¹⁹. Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishopcourt colloquium, 12 June 2025

- 5.3 ***Faith-based communities' involvement:*** When the disciples wanted to wash their hands of the responsibility, telling Jesus to send the hungry crowd away, Jesus responded: "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Like those disciples, we cannot send our people away hungry—we must take direct responsibility for feeding them with their cooperation of five loaves and two fishes

Historically, missions and parishes served as vital oases within their communities where people gathered not only to pray but also to be educated and learn the skills necessary for self-sustenance. We must demonstrate productive partnerships between faith and life and mobilise our communities for agricultural production, provide training and support for food security initiatives, advocate for policies that promote dignity and empowerment, and address the spiritual aspects of dependency and empowerment. Every church and traditional authority should have a food security project. Faith-based organisations should collaborate with the government on nutrition education. Religious institutions can provide land for community gardens, land which we have in abundance and use it for farmer training and support programs.

- 5.4 ***Citizen empowerment*** poses a significant challenge: We need to shift people's perspective from viewing themselves as objects of delivery to recognising themselves as active agents of economic growth. Just as Jesus needed the young boy's willing participation in Jn 6:9 —his offering of five loaves and two fish—to perform the miracle of feeding the multitude, so too does sustainable development require the active participation of our people. This means reviving subsistence farming through training and support, establishing home and community gardens, and providing agricultural inputs.

6. IF20 Interfaith Forum in South Africa

Ubuntu in Action - Focus on Vulnerable Communities, leaving no-one behind
(Cape Town, August 10-14, 2025)

As we take on the G20 presidency, we have inherited Brazil's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty declaration. This is a unique opportunity for us to lead by example. The Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development is committed to supporting this alliance. As religious leaders, we must ensure our government translates this international commitment into concrete policies and programs that address the food insecurity crisis facing 15 million South Africans and beyond our borders.²⁰

The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) annual platform involves a network of religiously linked institutions and initiatives that engage on global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). IF20's work with business and civil society actors and other key stakeholders contributes to the agenda for each Annual IF20 Forum, inspired each year by successive host governments.

The context of South Africa's priority themes of Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability guides the IF20's 2025 work. The present crises facing global agendas (SDGs, humanitarian, conflict, environment) and critical financial challenges (debt, resource mobilization, poor resource use) provide context. For faith communities, the absolute priority is to give practical meaning to "Leaving No One Behind." Priority areas of focus are as follows:²¹

²⁰ Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishopcourt colloquium, 12 June 2025,

²¹ Katherine Marshall, "G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025, Bishopcourt colloquium, 12 June 2025,

- 6.1 **Food security and poverty.** Food security, with its strong links to addressing poverty and inequality, is a leading issue, driving the Global Alliance launched by the G20 in Brazil and inspiring both South Africa and the African Union. The topic extends from the very local to the very global. IF20 builds on global faith inspired efforts to address hunger; examples include the World Council of Churches, the Caritas organizations, PaRD (International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development), World Vision, and countless others.
- 6.2 **Economic and Financial Action.** Fiscal and debt crises confront many countries, particularly in Africa, and hinder poverty alleviation and climate action, as well as government capacities to provide basic services like education, health care, water supply, disaster response, and job creation. Religious communities link the economic and financial issues to equity and thriving, notably through their focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year.
- 6.3 **Addressing interreligious tensions** through education and enhancing understanding of religious matters. The foundational Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) program and Arigatou International's Ethics Education and Learning to Live Together programs offer potential to strengthen regional and global approaches and address issues of violence and conflict linked to religious actors.. Many religious groups work to address gender-based violence and action to support women, children, and families—for example, their physical and mental health, inequalities, and fair, equitable treatment.
- 6.4 **Migration and refugee movements,** human trafficking, and modern slavery present major challenges to leaders and to communities, with distinctive relevance for Africa. IF20's continuing work highlights extensive religious teaching and practices supporting policies and action to support those on the move, especially those who are most vulnerable. Fear of migrants and refugees affects politics in many settings and calls for religious advocacy for compassion and care. IF20's longstanding focus on the urgent need for multinational action on human trafficking will underpin 2025 advocacy.
- 6.5 . **Disaster prevention, response, recovery.** Active religious involvement, as first responders, at regional and global levels and through policy and programmatic analysis, play vital roles. Disaster relief is closely tied to widely varied environmental challenges, including rainforest destruction and climate movements/migration, underlining the needed focus on prevention, building resilience, and meaningful capacities to respond

7. A call to action

Ubuntu also offers a solution. When government, business, faith communities, and citizens work together with mutual respect and shared responsibility, when we treat people as agents rather than objects, and when we build systems that empower rather than create dependency, then we restore not just food security, but human dignity.²²

To our government: Use the G20 platform to champion not just emergency relief, but sustainable food systems that empower people. Learn from Brazil's success but adapt solutions to our African context. Part of this must include providing enough budget for agriculture in the national budget.

Address the critical issue of partnership that undermines the effectiveness of social development programs, including food security initiatives. Too often, the government

²² See contribution by Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka, Addressing food security in South Africa: a call for Empowerment and Partnership, Bishopcourt colloquium, 12 June 2025

adopts an approach of wanting to "do it alone," systematically excluding churches and faith communities from program implementation, opting for isolation over collaboration

This approach fails to recognise that churches have the organisational structure and unwavering commitment for social service and development that the government desperately needs. We are present in every corner of our country—in cities and in the most remote rural areas where government services barely reach. More importantly, we have deep personal connections with communities that government officials cannot replicate. Instead of viewing faith communities as competitors or obstacles, the government should provide funding and support to leverage our existing infrastructure and community trust.

To Business Leaders: It's time to go beyond just making donations; let's focus on making real investments. Partner with our communities to help build local capacity and create sustainable livelihoods.

To Faith Communities: We have a vital role to play in shifting from dependency to empowerment. Our moral authority comes with a practical responsibility to lead this change.

To Our People: It's time to reclaim your dignity as producers, not just consumers. The land that once sustained our ancestors can nourish us again.

As we participate in the G20 process and work on our national development agenda, let's remember that our success will not be measured by the size of our grants or how efficiently we deliver services. Instead, it will be about whether our children can hold their heads high, knowing they live in communities that produce, create, and sustain themselves.

The choice is in our hands. We can either continue the cycle of dependency or choose the more challenging but dignifying path of empowerment. I believe our people are ready for this change.

The real question is: Are we, as Church and faith leaders, prepared to lead them there?

Please direct questions to the Secretariat, Dr Renier Koegelenberg (EFSA Institute) (renier@cddc.co.za)



Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka

Catholic Bishop of Mthatha

President of Southern African Council of Churches

Chair of NCLC

13 June 2025

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8. Addendum of shared contributions

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Anglican Archbishop of Cape town

“Welcome note and background of NCLC consultations”

Mr Moeletsi Mbeki

Chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs

“Democracy in South Africa: economic and political challenges

Bishop Dr Sithembele Sipuka -

Catholic Bishop of Mthatha

President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)

“Addressing Food Security in South Africa: A Call for Empowerment and Partnership”

Bishop Prof Heinrich Bedford Strohm

Moderator of the World Council of Churches

“Public Theology for the One World a global ecumenical perspective”

Prof Katherine Marshall

Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Washington DC; Executive Director, World Faiths Development Dialogue Vice- President of the G20 Interfaith Association

“G20 Interfaith Association meeting in Cape Town: Ubuntu in Action: Focus on Vulnerable Communities, August 10-14, 2025”

Bishop Ivan Abrahams

Former President of the World Methodist Council

“Bread for all - a theological reflection”

Rev Udo Hahn

Director of the Protestant Academy of Tutzing, Bavaria, Germany

“A German Church Academy Perspective”

Dr Gustav Claassen

Dutch Reformed Church, Ecumenical Consultant

“Faithful Witness in Troubled Times: Strengthening Democracy and Human Dignity in South Africa through Faith-Based Engagement with the State”

Dr Marlene Mahokoto

Senior Programme Manager, CDDC Trust

“Gamagara Cares Initiative - A partnership between the Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen Mine, Faith Communities in the Northern Cape and the CDDC Trust”

Mr Charl Fredericks

Senior Programme Manager, CDDC Trust

“Gamagara Cares Initiative - A partnership between the Kumba Iron Ore’s Sishen Mine, Faith Communities in the Northern Cape and the CDDC Trust”

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9. Consulted participants

Abrahams, Bishop Ivan, General Secretary (retired), World Methodist Council
 Bedford-Strohm, Bishop Prof. Heinrich, Moderator - World Council of Churches (WCC)
 Claassen, Dr Gustav, DRC, Ecumenical Advisor, Pretoria
 Conradie, Prof Ernst University of the Western Cape (UWC)
 Endres, Mr Christiaan, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)
 Endres, Dr John, Director, Institute of Race Relations [IRR]
 Fredericks, Mr Charl, CDDC Trust, Senior Project Manager
 Hopley, Rev Abigail, Pastor, Bishops court
 Hahn, Rev Udo, Director Protestant Academy of Tutzing, Tutzing, Bavaria
 Jaecke, Mr Gregor, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), Resident Representative
 Janse van Rensburg, Rev Nelis, DRC Albertinia
 Koegelenberg, Dr Renier, Director CDDC Trust
 Louw, Dr Lionel, Western Cape Council of Churches
 Mahokoto, Dr Marlene, CDDC Trust, Senior Project Manager
 Mahokoto, Dr Siphosiphuthi, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University
 Makgoba, Dr Thabo, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town
 Marshall, Prof Katharine, Georgetown University, G20 Interfaith Vice-President, Washington
 Mbeki, Mr Moeletsi, Chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA).
 Meisel, Ms Carlotta, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)
 Pinyana, Rev Mcebisi, Pastor, Bishops court
 Sipuka, Bishop Dr Sithembele, President of South African Council of Churches (SACC), Catholic
 Bishop of Mthatha
 Van der Merwe, Dr Johan, DRC Moedergemeente, Stellenbosch
 Van Huyssteen, Prof Leopoldt, CDDC Trustee; Director: Academy for Environmental Leadership (AEL)
 Van Niekerk, Dr Andre, CDDC Trustee
 Walters, Rev Grant, Pastor, Bishops court
 Zondi, Dr Siphosiphuthi, Langa Baptist Church

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