



**Report on the Ujamaa Centre's  
21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary and Consultation**

**“A luta continua: connecting prophetic voices”**

**Imperial Hotel, Pietermaritzburg**

**11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

## **Acknowledgements**

Ujamaa Centre came of age and marked her 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary with the Theologians' Forum as partners. This celebration was combined with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document in South Africa. Ujamaa Centre offered space and resources for the Theologians' Forum and the broader ecumenical movement to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document. Since the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document, the ecumenical movement has made very little effort to revisit the rich heritage of prophetic theology in South Africa. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document the Ujamaa Centre has made a number of attempts to rally the remnants of the prophetic movement in South Africa, and has recently hosted two Contextual Theology Consultations (in 2008 and 2009). This preparatory work has come to fruition in 2010. A former leader of Concerned Evangelicals had this affirming sentiment to pass onto the Ujamaa Centre: "Ujamaa is a child of the prophetic movements in South Africa in the 1980s, and has kept the torch of prophetic theology burning".

In KwaZulu-Natal, the people of the land have a traditional ceremony which is observed for a young woman who has led a clean life and is ready to enter her journey into womanhood. This ceremony is known as umemulo and the equivalent in western culture is the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. As a social site situated in the interface between the academy and the community it is fitting for the Ujamaa Centre to have marked her 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary among such a diverse company and at such a significant moment. For the Ujamaa Centre this is the time to focus and channel our energies into the future with careful consideration. This celebration and consultation offered us such a space and such an opportunity.

Eleven countries were represented in Pietermaritzburg. Participants came from India, Israel, Pakistan, the Netherlands, the USA, Brasil, Mozambique, Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Leading theologians strategically placed in the country and abroad attended these proceedings in a week that also saw the launch of former president Thabo Mbeki's Foundation. We appreciate their commitment, which signaled the importance and the need for this celebration and consultation.

We acknowledge the leadership of Gerald West over the past years as well as the foundational work of Gunther Wittenburg, the founding Director of the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) and thank them for their support throughout. The process was led by the local Ujamaa Centre based Planning Committee, under the leadership of Solomuzi Mabuza, in close collaboration with the Working Group, all of whom did a wonderful job to bring together the wonderful array of participants and provide a relevant programme. The core team of Moss Ntlha, Edwin Arrison, Malika Sibeko, Sithembiso Zwane, Comilla Laban, and Solomuzi Mabuza worked very hard to make this a memorable event. The advice of Albert Nolan and Stiaan van der Merwe was always at hand and was deeply appreciated. All the members of staff of the Ujamaa Centre played their part in the success of this event. The Church Land Programme and the KZNCC assisted Ujamaa Centre and the Theologians Forum at many levels. The active participation of Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural

Network was enabled through the work of CLP, and some documentation from the Kairos theological trajectory was supplied by the KZNCC CPA Officer.

Our young and talented student interns worked alongside us and learnt much throughout the planning process and the actual event about the significance of Kairos Theology in South Africa and beyond. This will keep the work of the Ujamaa Centre alive and moving forward.

When we set out to celebrate our 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary we felt that it was important to remember the larger theological history that we are part of, and so we planned to host a third Contextual Theological Consultation alongside our anniversary celebrations, focusing on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document. In consultation with those who had participated in our previous two Contextual Theology Consultations, we were encouraged to make the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document the focal point of this Contextual Theological Consultation and to invite a wide range of participants. The Theologians' Forum offered their resources and networks for this purpose. So we ended up with something much bigger than we had originally contemplated! And we were a little overwhelmed logistically! But the result, as this report will amply demonstrate, surpassed our expectations and exceeded what we had imagined.

Part of our preparation involved making sure that this event was adequately covered by the media. The Ujamaa Centre's Advisory Board has encouraged us to become more visible in the public realm, and so we worked hard to draw local and national media into the programme. Media was engaged and a lot of work went into drawing their interest. In terms of print coverage our event reached a total advertising value of R73 053.53 and the total public relations value was estimated at R365 267.65. On the broadcasting coverage side, the total value in advertisement terms was R19 786.00 and the total public relations value reached R98 930.00. This kind of coverage is unprecedented in the history of the Ujamaa Centre, and we thank Solomuzi Mabuza and the media team he assembled. Media and journalist professionals assisted and offered their skills at a minimum charge or for free. We express here a particular word of gratitude to Rev Julia Denny-Dimitriou and her colleagues at *The Natal Witness*, and a young media consultant Samukele Ngubane. There are examples of the media coverage on the Ujamaa Centre's website.

Without the support of various partners very little of this would have happened. The generous support of the Karibu Foundation (Norway), Evangelische Entwicklungsdienst (EED) (Germany), Mensen met een Missie (The Netherlands), and Norwegian Church Aid (Norway) have enabled us to cover the costs for a number of invited participants from the South, as well as participants from all over South Africa across a wide range of social sectors. We are grateful too for the support of our university, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who not only offered us the support of their Corporate Relations section, but who also supported us with their presence, in the person of Professor Cheryl Potgieter from the Research Office.

## **The Programme**

The Planning Committee worked hard to produce a coherent and logical programme, though there were some differences of opinion on what to prioritise and whom to include. The ‘flow’ of the programme was planned as follows: to begin with thanksgiving and worship, then to reflect on our socio-theological history, then to remember the demands of our present context, then to recognise the global context in general, then to analyse the various attempts in particular contexts to do prophetic theology, then to reflect on the role of religion in the public realm in South Africa, then to listen to prophetic theologians from other faiths from a number of different contexts, then to listen to the ‘new’ prophetic voices of current social movements in South Africa, then to remember the legacy of departed comrades and the challenges of economic transformation, then to listen to the voices of young theologians from all over the ‘third’ world, and finally to plan a way forward, together.

The programme was a mix of plenary presentations, small group socio-theological reflection, listening groups, panel discussions, and community-based learning.

### **Day 1**

The opening worship and thanksgiving service was led by Bishop M.D. Biyela, who assisted us at short notice when the person we had invited to lead the worship was unable to be with us. In his sermon he made very telling remarks, which set the direction for others during the week. He argued that “economic apartheid” continues unabated in South Africa after 1994. “Apartheid is under new management”, he said. A number of speakers and panelists connected with this refrain, returning to Biyela’s input throughout the week.

A female participant noted with concern at the outset that the worship and consultation in general seemed to have a strong bias towards male presenters. This is worth noting for the present and the future work that remains to be done. Notwithstanding this genuine and fair critique, the Planning Committee and the Working Group did make every effort to include and to invite female speakers and facilitators, but without much success.

After the opening service conducted by the Lutheran Theological Institute’s Director of Studies and some LTI students, the Director of the Ujamaa Centre, Gerald West, welcomed participants. He reminded participants that the Ujamaa Centre was born in consultation, with many of those consulted in the 1980s being now present at this consultation 21 years later! He also reminded participants that the Ujamaa Centre was the product of many hands, and invited those present to add their hands to those who had gone before in shaping the Ujamaa Centre.

We were also welcomed by Moss Ntlha, on behalf of the Theologian’s Forum, and by the Head of the School of Religion and Theology, Simanga Kumalo, who began the process of remembering the history and contribution of the Ujamaa Centre. After these welcomes the

programme began in earnest with an accomplished panel of speakers who both embodied and reminded us of our history.

The opening panel discussion was facilitated by Tinyiko Maluleke (immediate past president of the South African Council of Churches), and the panelists were Albert Nolan, Miranda Pillay and Itumeleng Mosala. The task of these prophetic theologians was to remind us of where we had come from, and to recover some of our prophetic theological legacy. Tinyiko Maluleke made the telling comment that the ecumenical movement had not, until this moment, convened such a consultation/conference post 1994.

Albert Nolan did not mince his words, arguing that South African society was infected with the “worship of Mammon”, but that there was no “middle way” between Mammon and God. He challenged us to address the “structural sin” and “idolatry” which dominates public life in South Africa. He challenged the Church to denounce the worship of Mammon, and to advocate for justice for the poor and marginalized, showing solidarity with the oppressed. He argued that the “multiple marginalisations” in our context needed careful analysis and a new initiative in theology. What we needed, he said, was a new people’s theology, just as the Kairos Document had been a people’s theology. In order to develop a people’s theology, he continued, there needed to be facilitators and technicians. The role of theologians was not to come with a ready made theology from their books and studies; instead, theologians were called to serve local grassroots communities as facilitators and technicians, with the raw data of theology coming from the people themselves. Theologians needed to participate in the struggles with the people, and to do theology with them from within these new struggles. We need to move towards a people’s theology.

The discussion which followed this presentation probed the role of organic intellectuals in the construction of people’s theology.

Miranda Pillay spoke powerfully of the “hierarchies of power” that captivate us and through which various forms of theological hegemony take hold of us. She moved beyond the Kairos Document in recognizing that the Bible was part of the problem, in that it often advocated for hierarchies of power like patriarchy, and in that it was often used to maintain hierarchies of power. We needed to recognise and engage with the complicity of our theological sources and institutions with hierarchies of power. The task that lay ahead of us, she said, involved reconceptualising our theological categories, including categories like ‘forgiveness’ and ‘suffering’, so that they did not participate in hierarchies of power.

The discussion which followed this presentation lamented the way in which the Church had lost the capacity to recognise the systemic dimensions of life, focusing instead on the individual.

Itumeleng Mosala brought a telling critique of the present times and appraised yester-year theologians for the value of their contribution. He referred, provocatively to the “death of Black Theology” and the disappearance of “Black theologians”. He also commented on the relative silence of even African woman/feminist theologians after apartheid, particularly on

political issues. He challenged us not to bemoan the “death of Kairos theology” in South Africa, because we needed to recognise, he said, the true contribution of the Kairos Document was not what it said but the process that produced it and what it did. He wondered where the new Black theologians were, reminding us how active and full the churches were in the days of the struggle against apartheid. People filled the churches and theologians and students contributed a body of knowledge into the academy which could never be found in the ivory towers of academia and seminaries. Where was this groundswell of theological debate today, he asked. Who was doing theology today, he asked. And was theology being done by true or false prophets? Who are we, he asked us, true or false prophets?

The discussion which followed this presentation returned to the question of who the ‘real’ theologians were, and whether organic-intellectual-academics could not also do people’s theology. The question was raised, referring back to Albert Nolan’s presentation, of whether gender was not the ‘root’ struggle, rather than economics, as Albert Nolan had argued. Someone added that perhaps poverty was the root struggle. Was there a new form of ‘State theology’, a participant asked. Another asked whether prophetic theology or liberation theology was even possible in the Church. In replying to a question about the death of Black theologians, Itumeleng Mosala clarified his argument, saying that while there may still be a few Black theologians, they were certainly not a “nuisance” to the state; indeed, he went on to say, it was the state that was a nuisance, not theologians and not the Church! He went even further, arguing that theologians of the struggle had no *theological* rationale for having become state-sponsored agents of power. The discussion then shifted to what the contribution of the Kairos Document had been, with there being general agreement that it was the ‘spirit’ of the moment, and the ‘modality’ of the process, and the people as the source of its theology that was significant. There was recognition that the Church as institution had managed to survive the anger of the masses in the 1980s without being transformed much at all, and that the challenge for us was not to ‘recreate’ Kairos theology, but instead to ‘create’ kairos theologians.

For all participants this was a good start inspite of the many logistical problems encountered on the first day. Discussions continued after this session and an apt tone was set for the rest of the week.

## **Day 2**

Prophetic worship was a key concern, as our regular experience in working with Christian communities has been that worship is often the last aspect to be transformed, even in quite ‘progressive’ groups and churches. The programme was structured in such a way that each day devotions were led by a number of participants representing different contexts. Edwin Arrison prepared the framework for the week’s reflections, and these were a key resource each day. We heard reflections from South Africa, India, Pakistan and the USA.

From the opening devotion Madipoane Masenya set the tone. It was fitting for someone of Madipoane's calibre to lead the devotion since the Ujamaa Centre's world renowned Tamar Campaign was also marking its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010. A decade after it was launched by Phumzile Zondi, this campaign now has a life of its own beyond the imagination of the Ujamaa Centre. Madipoane Masenya used the devotion to explore the biblical creation stories as a resource for gender inclusion.

On this day Ujamaa Centre showcased its work over the past 21 years by focusing on two of its programmes, the Women and Gender Programme, co-ordinated by Maria Makgamathe, and the Solidarity Programme for People Living with HIV, co-ordinated by Bongzi Zengele. Participants were also given an opportunity to visit nearby communities where actual work occurs. Given the Centre's location at the University of KwaZulu-Natal we were able to incorporate students and staff from the University's Drama Department on the programme.

Poetry, drama, true life story sharing/telling was introduced as a shift from the methodology of the previous day. The main conference room was invaded by an elephant with the theme "There is an elephant in a room". Behind this visual projection is the story of Dolores – a story of a young middle class woman seeking affirmation and acceptance in a city where all people are busy with their lives. City life and its impersonal rushedness presented HIV to this young woman. The image of an elephant is a tool which reminded participants of the seriousness of this situation, one which everyone knows is there but avoids dealing with. HIV and AIDS is everybody's business and no prophetic theology can afford to avoid this reality.

Past and present members of these programmes, shared their true life stories of gender-based violence and living positively with HIV. Real people shared their stories and participants were confronted again with the impact of current societal challenges head on. While some of the struggles we engaged with when the Ujamaa Centre was born remain, there are many new struggles. Participants were also reminded of the key tool with which the Ujamaa Centre works, Contextual Bible Study methodology, and its heritage in Liberation Theology.

A debate ensued in plenary about the issues prevalent in our context which call for theologians to address. The challenge was to speak with and for those who suffer from neglect; to speak against forces which inhibit life; and to bring hope to those who are affected and infected by HIV and AIDS in particular. A prominent theologian who has moved onto other responsibilities had this to say, "Maybe we are still stuck. People are ignoring that people are having sex. The church is in denial in terms of sexual activity and HIV". There was agreement that there is massive denial in South Africa in all our churches, and even in progressive organizations like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the VCT approach. There was a call for us to connect contextual realities and to offer a theological lens from which to construct relevant theologies. The context of HIV needed biblical stories to "tell us where to go and not only where we are"; the context of gender-based violence had the story of Tamar, but where were the stories for those struggling to live positively with HIV? Some participants raised the issue of pornography, arguing that the increased access to pornography in South Africa was part of the problem in dealing with the issue of sexuality.

It was clear from the morning sessions led by these two programmes that they have worked tirelessly to expose and capitalise on the connections between gender and HIV/AIDS. After this emotionally moving session participants were split into a number of groups. Two groups went to the nearby communities where they visited local families and heard firsthand from those living positively, amidst massive obstacles, with HIV. This component of the programme was important, for the work of the Ujamaa Centre is located among the actual struggles of local communities. Other participants carried forward with the work of the opening panelists. Some participants had the privilege to listen to Ali Zbeidat from Sakhnin, Israel, and learnt a lot about life in Palestine and Israel. A number of participants had never heard from a Palestinian trapped in 'Israel', let alone meet a Palestinian whose people were conquered and occupied by Israel, and who lived in that country with less civil rights than an Israeli Jew.

What emerged from this session is the importance of support structures such as the Ujamaa Center and campaigns such as the Tamar Campaign. The central role of the Bible and prophetic interpretation became a focal point again as a way of uniting our efforts. Palestine became another challenge which links us to the global struggle against empire. Palestine provided a lens in which to see the empire for what it was, and not as it is represented. Palestine revealed the 'underside' of empire, rejecting the common pseudo-innocent image of empire as the only alternative. We recognized that we have not arrived at a place of clearly affirming solidarity with the Palestinian people. We also recognized the importance of making connections with the different ways in which women across the world are being marginalised – what we are experiencing in South Africa is not unique. We also recognized that HIV and AIDS posed a new 'kairos'.

Our listeners picked up some important discussion around the notion of 'kairos'. There was a worry that we were too easily labeling almost everything as a 'kairos' moment. The Kairos Document had emerged from a series of related social movements among the masses, and it was felt by some that we should not too easily use this term. A question was raised as to how we ensure that the notion of 'kairos', this special time of visitation, opportunity and challenge, is identified correctly. There was a strong sentiment cautioning the conference not to be under pressure to declare a 'kairos'. More important perhaps was the need to recognise, acknowledge, and define our complicity in the kind of South Africa we had 25 years after the Kairos Document; perhaps the need was for confession rather than a new 'kairos'.

Following this dynamic day of listening to the voices of the margins, of meeting with local communities, and of intense small group discussion, the conference prepared to listen to one of the celebrated theologians and public figures of our times, Allan Boesak, who addressed the question of empire. As Allan Boesak's work on prophetic interpretation had been a key resource in the formation of the Ujamaa Centre, we were eager to hear this theologian speak 'back to empire'.

In an excellent overview with notions of 'empire', Allan Boesak offered us a range of theological resources with which to "face" the empire. He gave a comprehensive analysis of



America's role as the centre of a "borderless" economic, political and military empire. This form of empire was a confluence of economic, military, cultural, and political power, colonizing both contexts and consciousness, and consuming humanity as well as natural resources.

He reminded us of the "Accra Confession", which called people of faith to "discern the signs of the times". We must, Allan Boesak argued, challenge the imperial logic, much as Paul in his writings in the New Testament had challenged the logic of imperial Rome. The fundamental challenge, he said, is for Christian theology to challenge the fallacy that there is no alternative to economic globalisation. As Albert Nolan regularly reminds us 'we' have to reject 'Thina', "There is no alternative". Allan Boesak concluded that we should think globally and act locally.

In responding to Allan Boesak's paper Stiaan van der Merwe suggested that we think of the prophetic voice as "an early warning system". We must relentlessly read the signs of the times, see in ways that others do not see, see God at work, see God weeping. He urged us "to feel" the kairos moment we were experiencing. He also reminded us of Bishop Biyela's sermon, saying that 'we' were the new managers of apartheid! We must be careful not to point at 'them' as the problem; we were part of the problem. He outlined a series of "acts" that he thought we should take up, including: standing and resisting, forming a prophetic network or movement in South Africa, forming networks across Africa, and forming networks across the world. He also outlined the tasks he thought we should take up, including: creating space for discerning and meeting, speaking the unspeakable, praying the unprayable, thinking the unthinkable, dreaming the future (as Allan Boesak had challenged us), supporting each other in solidarity, moving from analyzing to action, and working for an alternative.

In the discussion that followed we were reminded of the words of our late colleague and comrade Wolfram Kistner who often commented that activists who had not been broken by torture in the struggle against apartheid were now being 'broken' by money. A delegate from Abahlali baseMjondolo stated that in terms of service delivery we had "not yet entered the promised land". Another participant asked whether our anger was not being subverted with calls to 'love your enemy'. How, they asked, can we love the empire? Perhaps, they said, we needed to find the anger (in love) to act. Someone else made the comment that the government was encouraging and even resourcing the Church to feed the poor, so much so that we did not have the time as the Church to ask why the poor are poor. Another participant reminded us that empires eventually fall, and so the American empire would fall. As Allan Boesak had said, in challenging empire we must not use her tools; the empire has no compassion for human life, it is merely a consumable resource; we must stand instead with the God of life against the forces of death.

### Day 3

The focus of our third day was reflection on the South African Kairos Document (1985) and its legacy across the world. Gerald West provided an overview of the long line of 'kairos' documents that had begun with the South African Kairos Document. These included: Challenge to the Church: The Kairos Document (1985 and 1986 second edition), Evangelical Witness in South Africa (1986), A Relevant Pentecostal Witness (1988), Kairós Centroamericano (1988), The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion (1989), Violence: The New Kairos (1990), A Kairos for Kenya (1991), European Kairos Document (1998), Zimbabwean Kairos Document (1998), Kairos India (2000), American Kairos Document (2007), A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering (2009).

What became clear in this analysis is that though there is continuity across these 'documents', there is also a great deal of difference. A clear difference is that the South African document finds 'orthodox' theology lacking in its capacity to deal with the South African context of struggle. However, some of the other 'kairos documents' have less of a problem with orthodox 'Church theology', applying very traditional forms of theology to contexts of struggle.

This session concluded with group analysis of the following key questions: What contextual conditions generate a kairos moment? What theological conditions generate a kairos document? What is 'the shape' of a kairos process? What is the shape of a kairos theology? What 'new' categories are generated by the kairos moment? How is the Bible used in a kairos theology? What are the limits of a kairos theology?

After this general introduction to and analysis of the 'kairos' trajectory since 1985, from South Africa to Palestine, there were a number of specific inputs on the 'kairos' process in particular contexts. Jephtah Kiara gave a firsthand account of the Kairos for Kenya (1991) and Solomon Zwana did the same for the Zimbabwean Kairos Document (1998). A common feature in their presentations was how these kairos documents were used as galvanising support for socio-economic and political justice.

For Ujamaa it was poetic justice to be a part of this session. On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kairos Document in South Africa Gerald West wrote to the *Mail & Guardian* national newspaper, lamenting the silence of South African theologians in not remembering this milestone. The editor of the newspaper responded by saying this was "too historical", and so not newsworthy, and so the article was not published in the media. The recent Palestine Kairos Document is a sign of the relevance of such a theological response and intervention in the struggle of the oppressed.

The session was facilitated by Sarojini Nadar from the School of Religion and Theology, with the aim to involve as many participants as possible. Buzz groups were used. It was noted that in some sense the Kairos Document was part of the legacy of the Freedom Charter. The question was raised about how these various 'kairos documents' were taken up and put into

practice on the ground in South Africa and other contexts. There was some discussion also about how our meeting together on this historic occasion might be part of a prophetic movement, capitalising on the people in social movements who have already taken to the streets. Others pointed out that though these documents were powerful, some things were not said due to their limited Christian orientation.

The group also grappled with the question of whether we needed a new 'kairos' document? Albert Nolan had warned us that we could not 'repeat' the contextual process that had led to the Kairos Document. That process had been organic and had arisen from the real struggles of ordinary South Africans. He had urged us to 'read the signs of the times' and to discern what 'new thing' God was doing in the present time. If we did have something like a 'kairos document', there was agreement that it would include issues like: unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, etc. But it was also recognized that our new 'kairos' required more than listing of 'issues'; it must, like the original Kairos Document, produce theology 'from below'.

After lunch on we turned once again to listen to a theologian from the past. Rev Mvume Dandala was invited to deliver the annual John Langalibalele Dube lecture. Mvume Dandala is well known and fondly remembered as a Methodist bishop, rather than as the General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi, Kenya, or as the parliamentary leader of the Congress of the People (Cope) in South Africa. When he joined opposition politics many of his followers and members of his church were taken aback. So there was plenty of excitement in anticipation of his lecture.

The John Langalibalele Dube is hosted by the Religion and Governance Programme of the Ujamaa Centre, a programme which collaborates with various local councils of churches, particularly the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council, to enable people of faith to be citizens of their country and which holds the government accountable to its citizens.

Mvume Dandala began by underscoring two key values among people of faith, namely, self-reliance and justice. He then went on to explain why he had entered opposition politics, which was in order to work towards overcoming poverty, restoring education, and redistributing land. He argued that opposition politics was necessary to promote this work and that some form of alliance politics was needed in South African politics.

But most of his lecture was focused on the role of the Church in the South African context. The Church must remember the legacy of what it has achieved in the struggle, he said, and must build on this platform. He also argued that the Church should remain non-aligned to any particular political party, but that it should stand for particular values. He argued that the Church had a priestly as well as a prophetic role in the country, so the Church must journey with the victims of injustice, must be the announcer of hope, must critique the life of the nation, must provide formation for the youth, and must work for the transformation of society without everyone necessarily becoming Christian. But this 'priestly' role did not mean, he continued, that the Church must surrender the political realm; the Church as prophet must

have a vision of and programmes for what might be politically; the Church as priest must be the custodian of the values of the people.

Mvume Dandala also gave a good account of the challenges faced by our young democracy from his firsthand experience in parliament. He told us how he received plenty of support from 'the pews' when he raised contentious issues in the public realm. But he also spoke of the difficulties of being stereotyped as a clergyperson whenever he spoke in parliament.

This was a rare opportunity for Mvume Dandala to address a gathering that is close to his heart as a former ecumenical and church leader. Participants had an opportunity to engage him about the role of Christians, especially clergy, in politics. It was noted by participants that a number of examples of those who had been effective as Church leaders, who then went into politics, did not end up as a success. Mvume Dandala responded by saying that there is a place for this kind of 'ministry' in politics, but that there was a need for theological training to identify student pastors with a talent in this ministry, who could then be seconded into politics as part of the ministry. From his own experience, he shared, the Church did not prepare clergy for such a role.

A host of other questions were raised in relation to this stimulating discussion. In what ways are we part of what we fought against? Are there alternatives to empire, and what role can the Church play? What was the difference between a 'prophetic' movement and 'the Jesus movement'? There was also discussion about to what extent the support of churches for a prophetic movement might be lost if we advocate for a prophetic movement which includes other faiths and civil society. This led to a discussion of how a prophetic movement might work with social movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo.

The challenge, some argued, was that we should call on all people of faith, whatever their religion, to be prophetic. But the particular challenge for those within their own faith tradition was to call their own faith community to be prophetic.

There was also discussion about how we linked the local and the international. Some felt that it was important to focus and be true to local initiatives, and to use this as the motivation for a prophetic movement. Some also felt that a prophetic movement should 'connect' different prophetic initiatives (like the World Social Forum), and not try to harness them under one institutional umbrella. We did not need another 'new' organization, some argued. While we agreed that the prophetic movement must be a resourceful movement, it was not clear what kind of identity the prophetic movement should have. What was clear was that there had been a loss of connection between prophetic agents after liberation, and that part of the task that lay before us was to 'reconnect prophetic voices'.

The presentation by Mvume Dandala was clearly a provocative event, allowing many to engage with a whole range of issues and emotions. So Day 3 ended with deep engagement and wide-ranging discussion that extended into the evening meal and beyond.

## Day 4

This celebration was graced by the presence of two eminent scholars and liberation theologians, one from the Jewish tradition and one from the Muslim tradition. The Ujamaa Centre is deeply committed to interfaith prophetic witness and work. In many ways these theologians are marginalised theologians within their own traditions, and so solidarity with them is a vital feature of ‘connecting’ prophetic voices.

Marc Ellis was accompanied by his son Aaron Ellis from Waco, Texas. Farid Esack is a well known Muslim liberation theologian and a scholar who shared the podium with Marc and Aaron. The presentations of these world-renowned theologians, and a young ‘Jew of conscience’, enriched the agenda we set out at the inception of the conference – connecting prophetic voices.

Marc Ellis began provocatively, challenging us to hear ourselves. As someone from the Jewish tradition, he heard us using Jesus against his own (Jewish) people! He continued, arguing that the prophetic Jesus was more important than the messianic Jesus. He wondered whether the Bible was not sometimes “a vast prison from which there is no escape”, in that we were endlessly trapped in a certain kind of discourse/theology. He also reminded us that ‘the other’ was not “other only”. He also spoke of his own sense of alienation as “a Jew of conscience”, as a “Jewish dissenter”, within his own faith tradition.

Marc Ellis also spoke passionately about the situation in Israel and Palestine. He impressed upon the consultation that the root cause of the whole problem in Israel and Palestine is the issue of empire and patriotism.

Farid Esack began, as he often does, with a story. The story is of the person of faith who faithfully saves babies from the river, but without asking why there are babies floating down the river. So we must ask the ‘why’ question, the systemic question. This is sometimes difficult, he acknowledged, because religion is often predicated on care and compassion for babies! We are seen to be religious when we are saving babies from the river. But what about when we ask the hard questions about why babies are being dumped in the river? What about when we ask our faith tradition this difficult question? Religious institutions and religious donors often have vested interests in maintaining systems, preferring to focus on holding abandoned babies.

But until we ask the hard systemic questions we will never confront our own complicity with systems of injustice. Liberation theology, he said, had the difficult task of journey up the mountain to explore where and why the babies are being put into the river.

Farid Esack turned from this narrative beginning to an analysis of our post-liberation vision for South Africa. To what extent, he asked, shifting metaphors, might we be confronting ourselves when we confronted Pharaoh? We needed, he argued, to be every attentive to the ever-shifting margins of our societies. No prophet ever asked, ‘Do I fit in’.

He too addressed the situation in Palestine, and made the comment that though Islamic fundamentalism is problematic, it is not the problem, occupation is!

The discussion that followed was animated. Someone asked whether there was a parallel between contemporary Jews situating themselves within the context of the Holocaust, while in fact being in power, and contemporary South Africans situating themselves within the context of apartheid, while in fact being in power. A related question was about how we ought to use the memory of suffering. There was a worry, voiced by some, that we could become paralysed by analysis and too much complexity, instead of taking sides. Claims of complexity, such as those made by Frank Chikane with respect to the government's neo-liberal macro-economic policy and Zimbabwe, could be ploys to maintain power and the status quo. Claims of complexity could be co-opted by power.

In responding to some of these questions, both Marc Ellis and Farid Esack encouraged us to sustained work in connecting the prophetic voices within the 'Abrahamic' faiths.

After tea, during which the above conversations continued, we shifted our focus to voices 'from below'. These are the 'prophetic voices' that lie at the heart of the Ujamaa Centre's partnerships and work, and so in many ways this was one of the highlights of the consultation. Representatives from Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Rural People's Network, and the Job-seekers project of the Ujamaa Centre had been among us all week, and now took the platform to speak. The presence of Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural People's Network was largely due to the 'accompaniment' work of the Church Land Programme, with whom the Ujamaa Centre has worked for many years, primarily around land issues.

Abahlali baseMjondolo, an organization among the shack-dwellers and informal settlements, spoke powerfully of the failure of the Freedom Charter. Adequate housing was not "a favour", it was a right, guaranteed by the Freedom Charter, the Constitution, and government policy. Furthermore, the provision of housing was not a gift from the government but an appropriate use of tax-payers money! And yet Abahlali baseMjondolo was now public enemy number one for insisting on their rights!

Abahlali baseMjondolo questioned the refusal of government to build homes in the city, close to utilities and services and within range of reasonable transport costs. Many of those struggling for houses were now city people, not rural people! So there was a three-phase struggle taking place. Phase one was making clear that there was a preference for housing "where we are". Phase two was a role for Abahlali baseMjondolo in identifying suitable land nearby. And phase three was the "reluctant" removal to 'green pastures'.

Abahlali baseMjondolo then turned from its critique of the state to a critique of the churches. "The Bible says churches should be on our side, but only individuals, not churches, stand with us". "Is the Bible lying", they asked? The Church must move "from powerpoint presentations to practical support!" The Church must become "really involved".

Next, Abahlali baseMjondolo wondered why there was so little support from black academics in their struggles. The implication here was that black academics had more of a stake in the new 'system' than white academics, and so were afraid to identify with 'public enemy number one'.

Abahlali baseMjondolo stated that their primary victory was "to claim their own space and to speak with their own voices"; they did not need others 'to speak for them'; what they wanted was others, including the Church to stand alongside them. They had their own website and used other media as well as a key tool. They challenged us to engage with them directly!

The Rural People's Network raised their own concerns, focusing on carefully documented case-studies of evictions by farmers, municipalities, companies, and game reserves. They were doubtful that the justice system worked for them, for their experience was that the 'independent' judiciary could be manipulated by those with power and resources. They thanked the Ujamaa Centre and the Church Land Programme for working with them to produce a series of Contextual Bible Studies on land issues. This process, they said, had enabled them to become "real theologians".

The Rural People's Network also shared with us that there was an emerging alliance between Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Rural People's Network, and the Landless People's Movement, known provisionally as 'the poor people's alliance'.

Clearly this formation would be an important place to do theological work!

The Job-seekers project also thanked the Ujamaa Centre for "considering us as people". The woman who represented the project spoke profoundly of her own struggle to survive on casual work. She shared with us how "God strengthens me; my Bible strengthens me; when I read it I feel well". This was no 'cop-out', but a very real recognition of the power of theological resources to sustain those who are struggling to survive, moving from on casual job to another.

The young man who represented this project told his story as well. He had no parents, but had many siblings. Although he had a matric, he had had no job since 1999. There were limited resources for job seeking where he lives, he said. "Where do you go to get work experience and skills", he asked. What his work with the Ujamaa Centre had helped him to understand was why it was so difficult to find work. The Theology and Economic Justice Programme of the Ujamaa Centre had helped him to understand the economic system in which he struggled to find work.

He spoke about how self-employment was an impossible dream, and how potential opportunities like the football World Cup had failed to deliver jobs. He also gave us an insight into the structures of nepotism that operated in certain areas. In the Edendale area of Pietermaritzburg, he said, one could not take up a construction job unless one had a letter from a local councilor. These jobs were "only for locals".

His final comment was that "those who are not employed in South Africa are not yet free".

This session was a haunting session, reminding us of the daily struggles of millions of South Africans (and other African visitors). The panelists were superb in engaging this ecumenical space – a rare space for social movements in South Africa. As we entered a time of discussion there was singing led by Reverend Mavuso, with the unemployed singing a song which spoke of the yearning of the unemployed to be listened to by their local councilors. Some of the issues which emerged clearly during this session were the need for a deeper critique of our practise after the first democratic elections in South Africa. It was noted that these three perspectives echoed the same message, namely, that change has not come to everyone in South Africa.

The discussion that followed was full of energy and animation, and singing! A question was raised about how we established a vision of the future which included the dreams of both the urban and rural. Could we imagine ‘the kingdom of God on earth’ in both rural and urban terms? Another question was whether Cosatu (the Confederation of South African Trade Unions) should be challenged to open space in the formal economy. When the panel was asked what kinds of support they wanted from the Church, they replied that they would value support in court, in mass actions, and in other sites of struggle. “Join us so that you will feel that we are not free”, they said! A participant made the insightful comment that “These people and their stories are our ‘text’; they are the ‘Christ-text’ for us”. Another participant made a similar related comment: “these ‘people’s theologies’ are a gift to the Church”. We noted that there was no need ‘to organize resistance’; there was already an organized resistance!

In response to the discussion the panelists made the hard-to-hear point that it was not so much that the government did not deliver; they did deliver, but mainly to the middle-class! Middle-class Christians are in fact the enemy, for the government hides behind you, they said. We do have because you do have! They told too of the change in lyrics to the popular song; instead of singing, “My mother was a kitchen girl and my father was a garden boy, and that is why I am a communist”, there were those who now sung, “My mother was a communist and my father was a socialist, and that is why I will be a millionaire”! Having said this, there was recognition that it was not useful to romanticise the periphery nor to stereotype elites. We agreed that much more work was needed in these areas; what we had learned from these social movements was the basis for doing a more engaged ‘people’s theology’, a term which many preferred to ‘kairos theology’.

It was agreed that what we had listened to in this session was of Africa-wide and indeed global relevance.

Without this session from people on the margins the consultation would have missed an important dimension in its quest to connect prophetic voices – linked to real struggles on the ground for human rights, equality before the law, right to work, and access to basic needs. As Albert Nolan had reminded us, repeatedly, these are the ‘voices’ that prophetic religion must be connected to!



As we prepared to move into socio-theological reflection regional groups in the afternoon a draft 'statement' was presented to participants. There was immediate concern, for this 'statement' had not emerged from the consultation. Indeed, we were later to learn that this 'statement' had been drafted beforehand by only a small group and brought to the consultation. But the participants graciously agreed to discuss this statement in their regional groups, along with other matters arising from the day's discussions.

The Gauteng regional group reported that the draft 'statement' was not a product of the listening process and so was not organic to the consultation. They suggested that the consultation not produce a statement, but that a detailed report of what actually happened be produced. They also suggested that 'kairos groups' be formed in regions within the next six months.

The KwaZulu-Natal regional group suggested that we reject or ignore the 'statement' as it had not emerged from our consultation process. It represented the agenda and theology of a few, but not the agenda and theology of the consultation. This region suggested that we identify in a report what we had heard from the consultation.

The Western Cape regional group asked the Ujamaa Centre to produce a report of the consultation. They asked whether the consultation should produce a resolution to be presented to the churches. They suggested that some kind of 'statement' might be useful, but agreed not to push the 'statement' that had been circulated.

The International 'regional' group were disturbed by the 'statement', which was so clearly unrelated to the process and products of consultation itself. They suggested that instead of a statement that there be a report that could be widely shared. They did not think that a 'statement' could capture the rich diversity and detail of the consultation.

Following these reportbacks from the regional groups there was some preliminary discussion of a way forward, in preparation for the session on the last day. There was agreement that there be something like local and regional 'kairos' groups; that there be a common website; that the Ujamaa Centre coordinate the ongoing process by providing an institutional home; and that the Working Group play an ongoing role in taking the process forward. There was discussion concerning a role for regional representatives and the planned visit of a Palestinian delegation in 2011, but no final decisions on these matters were made.

Day 4 concluded with the annual Mzwandile R. Nunes lecture. This lecture is in honour of our late comrade, friend, and co-worker in the Ujamaa Centre, and celebrates the House of Studies for Worker Ministry, which joined forces with the Institute for the Study of the Bible to form the Ujamaa Centre. The session was facilitated by Beverley Haddad from the School of Religion and Theology, and the lecture was presented by Clint Le Bruyns from the University of Stellenbosch, a young dynamic theologian with a passion for social justice and public theology.

Clint Le Bruyns began with a reflection on the life of Mzwandile Nunes, an activist and organic intellectual, and continued to link Mzwandile Nunes' life to aspects of his presentation. His paper consisted of three sections: first, the insights of Mzwandile himself as he talked about faith, work and economy; second, ways in which the South African kairós documents intersect with economic dimensions of our life together; and third, with a proposal for an ethic of prophetic solidarity and its practical implications for the churches in the globalising world of work today. Mzwandile Nunes was remembered for the 'integrity' he saw between the spiritual and the economic, while the 'kairós' tradition tended "to highlight the problem of theological dualism, separating economic matters from spirituality matters". His conclusion is that "labour needs the churches, the churches need labour – if we are going to take prophetic solidarity seriously".

This carefully argued and insightful lecture was greeted with enthusiasm at the end of a long day, and there was plenty of discussion. Participants argued that the prophetic tradition was participating in the renewal of society in a range of ways, including economic renewal. The question was asked as to whether 'public theology', as used by Clint Le Bruyns, could be considered as a form of liberation for a democratic society. A related question was to what extent theologies of reconstruction, such as those put forward by Charles Villa-Vicencio and Jesse Mugambi, were adequate for the prophetic task. Could such theologies make a contribution along with other paradigms? Someone suggested that what we needed was a theology of responsibility, both self-responsibility and social-responsibility. There was also discussion of the lack of capacity of 'evangelical' theology to address our various struggles. This was because an evangelical theology of work, for example, tended to be limited to personal values but had little to say about economic systems and the values of social structures. This having been said, it was also agreed that it was important to speak about "a spirituality of work".

Again, the importance of social movements was emphasized, as was the role of the Church, provided the Church built networks of solidarity and collaboration. It was also argued that anger at what was going on economically was a key motivational force for prophetic work.

## **Day 5**

Day 5 was given over to 'the next generation'. As with the representatives of the social movements, these young people had been with us for the whole week.

Students from theological centres across the country (University of the Western Cape; Stellenbosch University, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Lutheran Theological Institute, St. Joseph's Theological Institute) and an activist Jewish student from Baylor University, Aaron Ellis, shared space on the first panel. They represent the future coming from different faith perspectives, although dominated by Christians. A bright black female student, Minenhle Khumalo, from the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, facilitated this session. It is worth noting that there was a young Muslim woman student also

on the panel. Nafeesa Chafeker, UWC psychology honours student, with a Bachelors Degree in Theology, had this to say to this august conference: “Burn the bridges of religious opinions where it comes to matters of positive social transformation”. She went on further to say that we all face the challenges of the world together, with no religious group being exempt, so it only makes sense to combine our resources and various strengths towards one goal of complete peace the world over. When each of us pulls in our own direction, she said, this not only causes dissention but foolishly we fail to see the larger picture and potential of working as a whole.

A Brazilian PhD student at Stellenbosch University cited Bob Dylan in his closing remarks.

Using the words of Dylan, he urged us to:

*Please heed the call*

*Don't stand in the doorway*

*Don't block up the hall*

*For he that gets hurt*

*Will be he who has stalled*

*There's a battle outside*

*And it is ragin'.*

*It'll soon shake your windows*

*And rattle your walls*

*For the times they are a-changin'.*

*Come mothers and fathers*

*Throughout the land*

*And don't criticize*

*What you can't understand*

*Your sons and your daughters*

*Are beyond your command*

*Your old road is*

*Rapidly agin'.*

*Please get out of the new one*

*If you can't lend your hand*

*For the times they are a-changin'.*

Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli chose this song as a contribution towards the pluralistic agenda he argued we must adopt in the public liberation theologies from all faiths. For Felipe both Brasil and South Africa boast about progressive constitutions. But the challenge that remains for our present generation is to build step by step and day by day the democracy the older generation has fought for. The time to ensure that all the enshrined rights in our respective constitutions are attained by everyone is now.

Listening to the wisdom and critique of the younger generation gives hope for the future. Aaron Ellis did not mince his words when he asserted that the older generation has failed young Jews. Now it is their turn to actively change direction and the discourse.

Josiney Morais, who is also from Brasil and is working with the Ujamaa Centre, made it clear to all that she did not think that liberation theology in either Brasil or South Africa had died. She spoke passionately about the rich legacy that these theological traditions offered to the next generation.

The discussion which these young people generated was intense. Participants were energized by these young people. Participants called for us to engage in prophetic strategies and actions and not only prophetic talk! Others raised the issue of ‘indecent’ struggles, such as the struggle of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, saying that it was surprising how reluctant our ‘prophetic’ theologians were to stand in solidarity with this struggle. The issue of interfaith and intercultural liberation theology was also raised, with some arguing for us each to explore the potential in our own faith traditions for this kind of collaboration.

Another concern was that perhaps some of us had become too preoccupied with ‘remembering’ the past; we needed, in the words of Bob Dylan, to get out of the way and make way for others who would now take up the prophetic task. But, some wondered, did we not need the kind of hermeneutical and methodological ‘scaffolding’ provided in Latin America by people like Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff? In other words, what was the role of ‘the fathers’? Some felt that they still had a role to play, particularly from a hermeneutical and methodological perspective; but others argued that we were in danger of “becoming addicted to the fathers”. There was tendency, as we had seen at the consultation, for the fathers to speak and then leave, not staying to learn and listen.

We agreed that to move forward is to risk, but that not to move forward is dangerous. There was general agreement that the consultation had been a very important catalyst; it demonstrated, particularly through the work of the Ujamaa Centre, that the prophetic movement and liberation theology had not failed and was not dead.

In closing, Gerald West and Stiaan van der Merwe, representing the hosting organizations (the Ujamaa Centre and the Theologians’ Forum), gave their concluding remarks. Gerald West identified six ‘Rs’ that characterized the consultation. First, the consultation had been a rallying point for the prophetic movement. Second, the consultation had been a moment of renewal for the prophetic movement. Third, the consultation had been a journey of remembering where we had come from, both for the prophetic movement as a whole and for

the Ujamaa Centre. Fourth, the consultation had been a time to repent of our own complicity with various forms of empire and hierarchies of power. Fifth, the consultation had been an opportunity to reconsider and reconstruct our prophetic theological resources. And sixth, the consultation had provided us with the call to recommit ourselves to the margins and to collaborative action.

Stiaan van der Merwe invited us to consider the ways in which we had become that which we oppose. He invited us also to move forward, refusing to accept that there were no alternatives to empire.

### **Recommendations for a way forward**

The final session had to be cut short because people began to leave. Fortunately we had had an opportunity on Day 4 to do some preliminary planning.

The consultation did not reach a point where a set of resolutions and recommendations were adopted and agreed upon. We did not feel that this was the ‘spirit’ or purpose of the consultation. The consultation had been an occasion “to connect prophetic voices” and to discern the way forward. It was a beginning, not an end.

However, a few suggestions arose from a number of groups which were aired in plenary:

Noting that there was a call for a prophetic movement it was mooted that:

1. A prophetic movement rather than a Jesus movement be the agreed upon framework
2. We recognise that prophetic voices are there already, but that they need to be connected
3. This movement should be ecumenical and inter-faith
4. The movement should be local, national, and international

Therefore it was agreed that the following kinds of tasks were important:

1. A clear base and identity must be established from which the movement could focus on simple clear issues
2. Existing inter-faith prophetic movements, like the WCRP, need reinforcing and strengthening
3. A Christian prophetic movement needs something like the old Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) or the Ujamaa Centre to coordinate the networking, to enable Christian theological reflection, and to channel organic connections

4. An analysis of the existence of many Councils of Churches must be done, and some clarity achieved about their purpose and potential for the prophetic movement

For the above to be realised it was agreed that:

1. Three small coordinating offices could be established, in Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, and Cape Town
2. The Ujamaa Centre could make some of its resources available for the work of connecting prophetic voices
3. The Working Group could be assigned the task of exploring these issues, particularly in the light of the pending South African launch of the Palestine kairos document

## **Conclusion**

This report is drafted by the Ujamaa Centre, based on the minutes provided by the ‘listening’ group, the written summaries of the daily socio-theological groups, the written summaries of the regional working groups (Day 4), and the formal presentations (which are on the Ujamaa website: <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za>; some of which will be published in the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa).

Since the consultation a number of initiatives have been taken up. First, authentic and organic connections between particular prophetic voices have been established and are being developed, locally, continentally, and internationally. Second, the Theologians’ Forum has launched the Kairos Southern Africa project. Third, the Ujamaa Centre has accepted the call of the consultation and has made some of its resources available in the ongoing work of connecting prophetic voices in a project we have called “People’s Theology/Kairos Theology”.

We, the Ujamaa Centre, take this task seriously, having received a mandate for this work from the consultation. We have heard the cry of the social movements, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Rural People’s Network, and will be working with them to do prophetic theology together. We have heard the call too of many of those at the consultation, and many more who were unable to attend, to focus our work on providing prophetic theological resources for social transformation. In order to do this to our best ability we have engaged on a process of restructuring, placing this task at the centre of our work.

A luta continua! Viva people’s theology, viva! Long live kairos theology, long live!