



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Humanities



U.S. Mission to South Africa

Summary Report of the Lecture by the Reverend Jesse Jackson

29th April, University of Pretoria

Introduction



The Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson

On the 29th of April the Institute for Strategic and Political Affairs (ISPA), the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) and the Embassy of the United States of America (Pretoria) hosted the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson for a public lecture on 'Building an Inclusive Economy'. This was aimed at considering South Africa's continued democratisation as the country heads towards celebrating twenty years of freedom.

The Reverend Jackson was visiting Pretoria on the occasion of the Freedom Day celebrations which saw him awarded the Order of the Companions of OR Tambo for his role in the struggle against apartheid. Reverend Jackson is President and Founder of the Rainbow/Push Coalition, and is one of America's foremost political figures. Over the past thirty years he has played a pivotal role in virtually every movement for empowerment, peace, civil rights, gender equality, and economic and social justice.

Lecture

In opening his presentation the Reverend Jesse Jackson made reference to his visit to South Africa in 1979, where he met with prominent South Africans such as O.R. Tambo, to conduct his observation work. During the course of his visit he re-counted how he was questioned on numerous occasions about the purpose of the visit by the former regime, but indicated that he was visiting South Africa to see the Churches, the people, the country and that he believed in human rights for all human beings.



Virginia Palmer (Charge de affairs, US Embassy Pretoria), Reverend Jesse Jackson, Prof Sandy Africa (Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria)

The Reverend Jackson noted the similarities between apartheid South Africa and the oppressive rules in South Carolina (his home state) and the suppression of one race by another. He went on to commend South Africa on the nineteen years of freedom, but gave stark warnings that a key challenge remains in that people still have to unlearn divisions, unlearn living apart, across numerous areas and disciplines. He went on to note that the struggle against apartheid and the 'weapons' used included sanctions, the important role played by civil society and the churches, boycotts and the marches which took place within the US in support of liberation. Reverend Jackson noted that fifty years ago the US was still in its early struggle to enact its own transformation and that there has only been democracy within the US for the past forty eight years. This, however, often overlooks that fact that white women were only allowed to sit on a jury some years later.

The process of democratisation takes time and continued will by the people. It was pointed out that there have been changes within the US, where the system went from a 'winner takes all' approach to proportionality in the 1980s – here the focus was on democratizing democracy. This is still evolving in the US, as it is in South Africa.

Reverend Jackson highlighted that apartheid was focused on skin colour, but it should be remembered that apartheid went 'layers deep', with a need to address these deeper layers. Past generations have knocked down the walls, but it is up to the current generation to build the bridges from the rocks of the walls. This should include looking at all the difficult challenges including land distribution, banking, media ownership, healthcare, judicial ownership, agribusiness. He also noted that it is important not to celebrate prematurely but to continue the struggle – to go beyond. This is another challenge facing South Africa, in rebuilding a society based on a just and equal order, for which there needs to be education across all sectors in an effort to build these bridges. Business is conducted with those you know, trust and like, which underscores the need for greater reconciliation and harmony among the different (racial) groups in South Africa.

Reverend Jackson went on to highlight the successes of transformation in South Africa where there are new possibilities, making the sky the limit. Yet it remains important for all sides to understand each other. People need to find what they have in common and work towards that rather than fight among themselves. This will allow everyone to move forward, demonstrating that South Africa is a country that is worth investing in. The problem is that if a country is inward looking, the world will move on without it. The 2010 World Cup Football, hosted by South Africa, was used as a prime example of what can be achieved if everyone is working towards a clear goal, shaped by rules that are public, and a referee that is fair. Off the field things are more complicated as the field of play is not even. For this to be addressed there needs to be rules of justice, freedom, equality and globalisation. Reverend Jackson concluded by noting that a spirit needs to be sustained in South Africa, to learn to go beyond the odds, to have the will and the determination to move forward.

Discussion session

In the discussion session that followed the presentation a number of questions were raised. In the first instance the role of the youth was highlighted in making South Africa great, but that there was an on-going struggle with social distance between class, race, gender, hindering interaction and relations. Against this context it was queried how bridge building could be facilitated. In response it was indicated that democracy does not have a timetable, and that it was a continuous struggle even as it matures, but that at the same time democracy gives people the right to protest and take action against inequalities and injustices. Furthermore, it was indicated that tensions are not innate but, are the product of the environment we find ourselves or have been socialised in.

The questions then turned to the problem of building an inclusive economy where it was highlighted that access and inheritance continue to have an impact in shaping roles, even internationally. If this trumps work ethic, however, then this becomes a serious challenge to development. There is a choice to become more – as Mandela did during his imprisonment where he studied to become a lawyer. Mandela out thought them, he out studied them, and he out worked them. Learning as a weapon matters, as does faith as a weapon.

Solidarity too is important, the linkages between communities across the ocean. Cultural communities often lead the way and political connections follow. The US and South Africa have strong links in the fight against apartheid and there is a need to continue to 'meet' internationally and to form alliances. This is important given the unfinished business in skills equity. Too few people continue to earn too much with a real need to focus on democratising the economy, education, healthcare and other areas.

It is the responsibility of the current generation to build the bridges and it was raised whether there is anything South Africa could learn from the US. The Reverend noted that in fact the US was continuing to learn from South Africa, but that it was important not to 'celebrate before the game is over'. Although there are now laws to prevent people from being 'locked out', there needs to be a will from the people to build the bridges, with strong minds breaking strong chains. Getting equal is just as much of a struggle as getting free. South Africa has found freedom, but now the struggle is to become equal. He indicated that this generation must be determined to



Members of the audience

be free and equal and they will be better off for it. There needs to be plans to address the underlying challenges facing society in moving forward. Here it was noted by members of the audience that South Africa has been addressing the question of land through a social compact between farm workers, owners and government.

Concern was expressed by an audience member on the will of learners to advance in their education in South Africa, with classes being underproductive as the new generation is disinterested in their education. Here the Reverend Jackson indicated the need for good examples in teaching, for teachers that are impressive. Teachers need to go above and beyond what is merely set out as they have the ability to inspire, encourage and play a big role in building belief.

Session Concludes