



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

25<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## TO THE UPCSА FAMILY

### UPCSА MESSAGE ON AFRICA DAY 2020

*Jerusalem, wake up! Stand up and be strong. Holy city of Zion, dress in your best clothes. Those foreigners who ruined your sacred city won't bother you again.* (Isaiah 52:1 Contemporary English Version)

*But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* (Ephesians 5: 14-14 New International Version)

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, a denomination of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, existing and operating in Africa joins millions of Africans in observing the Africa Day. On 22–25 May 1963, African leaders came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to establish the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which later became African Union (AU). The aims of the OAU<sup>1</sup> included the following:

- To co-ordinate and intensify the co-operation of African states in order to achieve a better life for the people of Africa.
- Eradication of all forms of colonialism and white minority rule.
- Ensure that all Africans enjoyed human rights.
- Raise the living standards of all Africans.

In his acceptance speech as the first Chairperson of OAU, Emperor Haile Selassie I said<sup>2</sup>:

...Even as we stand here, we move from the past into the future. The task on which we have embarked, the making of Africa, will not wait. We must act, to shape and mould the future and leave our imprint on events as they slip past into history....An awareness of our past is essential to the establishment of our personality and our identity as Africans. This world was not created piecemeal. Africa was born no later and no earlier than any other geographical area on this globe. Africans, no more and no less than other men, possess all human attributes, talents and deficiencies, virtues and faults...

As we mark the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the African organisation, we reminisce about the slogans, statements and philosophies that have been shared by many. Few of them are captured here below.

Honourable Marcus Garvey: “Africa is for those at home and those abroad.”<sup>3</sup>

Dr Edward Wilmot Blyden, one of the founders of Pan Africanism, is said to have coined this slogan: “Africa for Africans, Africans for humanity and humanity for God and God for all.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation\\_of\\_African\\_Unity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_African_Unity) visited on 25 May 2020

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1963-haile-selassie-towards-african-unity/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostris-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/africa-for-africans-at-home-and-abroad-hon-marcus-garvey/>

Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe: “The future of Africa will be what Africans make it.”<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu, the founder of the Back to God Crusade<sup>6</sup> in the 1950s: “Africa back to God”.

Enoch Sontonga: “Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika. Maluphakanyis' uphondo lwayo. Yiva imithandazo yethu. Nkosi sikelela thina lusapho lwayo” (Lord, bless Africa. May her horn be lifted high. Hear our prayers and bless us.

Rev Prof Vuyani Vellem, in his last years, founded a group: VukaniBanuTsohangBatho (Awake people).

Sadly, this year’s Africa Day is marked under a dark cloud of the novel coronavirus. It has been said, repeatedly, that COVID-19 has laid bare the idiosyncrasies of contemporary humanity. The divisions within the “human race”<sup>7</sup> and the gap between the rich and the impoverished have been placed on the surface. The UPCSA is equally affected by the challenges of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns that have been imposed by the different governments.

- a. The international travel bans by the countries meant that it was not possible for the UPCSA leadership to do the visits to all the countries and to hold normal meetings that would bring together people from the different countries. The question of the borders that were determined at the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference to divide Africans remains an issue that needs to be addressed towards the integration, unity and development of Africa. The aspirations of the founders of the OAU for integrated/united Africa need to be revived.
- b. The lockdown made it impossible to continue with the programmes that were set in place at all the levels of the denomination. The Moderator of the General Assembly, the moderators of Presbyteries and the ministers cannot perform their pastoral duties effectively. The significant development is that the UPCSA General Assembly that was due to be held in June/July 2020 cannot take place. A formal decision is yet to be taken.
- c. The experiences of not holding services to observe Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, Ascension Day and the coming Pentecost Day, and other important observable services, will go down the history as a distinguished mark of this novel coronavirus.
- d. The livelihood of the congregations is severely impacted and that impact is escalated to the presbyteries and the denominational level.
- e. The congregants are not served well, especially regarding the dispensation of communion and pastoral visits to the sick and those in need for counselling.
- f. While some of the congregants have access to social media, some do not even know about the existence of such, let alone not having access thereto. Others would want to access such, but they have no means to do so. They do not enjoy the privilege of hearing the voices of their pastors.

Our minds and actions have been captivated by the attempts to combat the spread of COVID-19. We are down and cannot plan and think out of COVID-19. It is time to wake up. “VukaniBantuTsohangBatho” (Awake people). While we slumber, others are awake. COVID-19 came to a continent that has weak and ailing economies; to people who are striving for the recognition of their human rights; to countries that experience poor/bad governance in many levels; to poor leadership in different facets of our societies; to situations of corruption and greed; to churches that are struggling with their true identities in terms of vision and mission; to churches that have not yet mastered their missional calling and responsibilities; to

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/opinion/farewell-and-thank-you-mama-sobukwe-16650312>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/robert-sobukwe-inaugural-speech-april-1959>

<sup>6</sup> <https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/86>

<sup>7</sup> Sobukwe said there is only one race – human race. As in footnote 5 above.

churches that have become a microcosm of the struggling societies; to churches that have become more of this world; to Christians who are struggling to become reconciled; to congregants and congregations who are not equal; and to the marginalised and the effaced people – the non-persons.

Isaiah calls on Jerusalem to wake up, to stand up and put its strength. We need to wake up, stand up and be strong against COVID-19 and address the challenges that it has found and that it has brought to humanity. Let us put our strength as Africans and stand together as a reconciled community. The UPCSA has to consolidate its position as a denomination of the Church existing in Africa and be a blessing to the people of Africa. We have our strengths that we need to capitalise on and contribute to better the lives of the people. We only need to wake up, to stand up and be strong. Emperor Haile Selassie I said it forty-seven years ago that we, Africans “possess all human attributes, talents and deficiencies, virtues and faults” like all other people. We should, therefore, use those attributes to plan our lives during and beyond COVID-19. As Sobukwe said, the future of Africa will be what we make of it.

Paul, in agreement with Isaiah, calls us to wake from slumber and rise from the dead, then Christ will shine on us. Christ may not shine on us while we are in our slumber and while we are among the “dead”. We are incredibly grateful to many Christians and congregations of the UPCSA who have embarked on life-affirming programmes and projects to change the lives of many people through poverty relief schemes and pastoral support to those infected and affected by the sting of COVID-19. Those who are in self isolation and quarantine need our support. Testimonies of those who have been in those situations reveal that it is depressing to be alone in that manner. Let us be available to them in every way possible. Let us continue to show support to those who are in the front line in the fight against COVID-19, particularly the health workers. Their families need our support and encouragement. In the African spirit of Ubuntu, umntu ngumntu ngabantu (I am because you are. I belong therefore I am). Keep up the good work.

Our role is to be church, whether in the buildings (sanctuaries) or in the society. Over the past few weeks, it has been proven that we are a strong church when we serve the people of God out of our beautiful sanctuaries. This is not to play down our quest to be allowed to go back to places of worship. I miss that too. As it has been shared with all in the UPCSA, we as part of the SACC make appeals for this to be done soon. The President of the Republic of South Africa acknowledged such engagements in his address last night (24 May 2020). This is to restate the fact that we are called to go and make disciples and to touch the lives of the people. On this Africa Day, we should in our prayers claim Africa back to God”. Let us join in Sontonga’s prayer:

“Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika. Maluphakanyis' uphondo lwayo. Yiva imithandazo yethu. Nkosi sikelela thina lusapho lwayo” (Lord, bless Africa. May her horn be lifted high. Hear Thou our prayers and bless us.

Let us wake up, stand up and be strong for the good of i-Afrika.

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**