



## WELCOME ADDRESS: PAX CHRISTI

I stand before you to welcome you to this beautiful country of ours. The long awaited week has arrived. I am here to welcome all of you to South Africa in general and to Johannesburg in particular. Welcome to our City of Gold. To the country of the legendary Nelson Mandela. The country that housed Mahmta Gandhi for many years and still today appreciate his philosophy of nonviolence. We welcome all of you who have come from near and far. Those who came from as near as Pretoria and to those coming from Kenya, DRC, Uganda etc. We welcome also those who came from across the seas and oceans as far as United States of America, Belgium and other places. Please feel welcome.

We gather to discuss Non – violence in Africa – Creating a future of Hope. What a fitting topic in the midst of the challenges and wars and the armed conflicts that continue to ravage our world and some of our African countries in particular. There are many threats to peace in the African Continent such as wars that are going on South Sudan, in the Darfur region in Sudan. Central African Republic, Eastern part of DRC, Burundi, Somalia, The Boko Haram threat, the extremist’s threats in Mali and many other countries. Many people have died in our different African countries. When are we going to silence the guns in South Sudan, Darfur, Eastern DRC, Somalia and other countries? Someone from South Sudan recently said, “I was born in war, I grew up in war, got married in war, now have children who are also growing up in war. I do not want to die in war.”

Conflicts, especially armed conflicts have become synonymous with some of our African states. Yesterday, we might have fought a just war of liberation but today, the violent conflict is creating untold suffering, death, displacement, harm to the body and mind.

Nelson Mandela once said that “if we are to have peace on earth, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation, and this means we must develop a world perspective. Peace is more than the absence of war. If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then s/he becomes your partner.

The Dalai Lama XIV, speaking about peace once commented, “Peace does not mean an absence of conflicts, and difference will always be there. Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means: through dialogue, education, knowledge,

and through humane ways.” Peace still evades many in great or small conflicts. We are good at pointing the so called big conflicts, and forget about the violence that takes place in our homes, the domestic violence and the gender based violence.

From El Salvador, Archbishop Romero, from the perspective of his context, analysed violence in our world thus: “The Church does not approve or justify bloody revolution and cries of hatred. But neither can it condemn them while it sees no attempt to remove the causes that produce that ailment in our society....”<sup>1</sup>.... “I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally”.<sup>2</sup>

Is this the Africa we want? Or, what is the Africa we want? For me, I want Africa that is free from violent conflict. Africa that is at peace with itself and its neighbours. Africa free from poverty and disease. What kind of leadership do we need to have this vision of Africa to be actualised? We need a critical self-assessment as Africans. Quoting Shakespeare, “The fault is in us dear Brutus, not in our stars.”

To all of you Welcome, Let’s talk and debate about non – violence and let’s take strides to work towards peace. As Martin Luther King Jr, once said, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” May we find our voices during this conference? Welcome to you all. Feel and be at home.

Mr. Danisa Khumalo  
Denis Hurley Peace Institute  
Khanya House  
399 Paul Kruger Street  
PO Box 4000  
Pretoria  
0001  
+27 12 323 6458 Reception  
+27 12 321 2600 Direct  
+ 27 12 326 6218 Fax  
+27 82 269 4482 Cell  
[dkhumalo@sacbc.org.za](mailto:dkhumalo@sacbc.org.za)  
[dhpi@sacbc.org.za](mailto:dhpi@sacbc.org.za)

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<sup>1</sup> Romero, *Homilias*, 12 February, 1978, “Romero, The Violence of Love”, pg. 36-37. The Plough Publishing House, Farmington PA.

<sup>2</sup> Romero, *Homilias*, 23 September, 1979, “Romero, The Violence of Love”, pg. 166. The Plough Publishing House, Farmington PA.