

OBIORA F. IKE

*Director, Catholic Institute for Development Justice and Peace
Enugu, Nigeria*

HUMAN RIGHTS, CONFLICTS AND RECONCILIATION: A GLOBAL RECKONING WITH EMPHASIS ON FOUR AFRICAN WISDOM CALABASHES

1. RECKONING WITH THE 20TH CENTURY:

With the dawn of the 21st century and the exit of the 20th century, we owe ourselves a reckoning. It does seem that the 20th century was history's bloodiest. We also presume that it was the most ideological. No other age had witnessed so many wars with such improved weapons of mass destruction, deceit, crisis, brutality and death as our own. In the new millennium, history dictates that we take notes and records to survey where we started, where we stand and where we are going. The 21st century does not give grounds for joy with daily global events bordering on issues of the flagrant abuses of human rights and the multiplication of conflicts worldwide, many of them, teleguided.

This paper is a modest contribution and reflection to the ongoing and meaningful search for lasting peace and justice in the world. Much concern has been raised by people and institutions about what humanity could collectively do to guarantee a global culture that respects Human Rights and reconciles conflicts in a lasting and sustainable manner. Our modest contribution takes an insight into the continent of Africa, torn between joys and sorrows, and offers some concrete and affordable solutions to emerging and persistent problems through culturally rooted African Wisdom Thoughts, the type we have called in this paper "African Wisdom Calabashes".

With a focus on Africa, the 20th century assumes the dimensions of a holocaust. In spite of Africa's humanistic values and rich cultural heritage, history, resources in human and material wealth and ancient spirituality, the peoples of Africa have continued to suffer untold hardship caused by external and internal contradictions. One needs only think about the historical antecedents orchestrated through the slave trade, colonialism and ongoing imperialistic exploitation which today are euphemistically labeled "globalization". Some wonder where the African people receive their strength and energy. Why has Africa refused to die?

Whichever way one may like to look, there is plenty of bad news, besides a lot of good news, thanks to goodness, which emanate from the continent. One of the greatest difficulties is enhancing and entrenching Human rights as well as resolving and transforming conflicts on the African continent in an amicable manner. This remains a great challenge for the people of the world, more so, to African leaders themselves.

Wherever one looks, the stories are the same: Sierra Leone and Liberia have buried over 10 percent of their population in the past decade and another 30 percent are refugees, maimed or completely shattered for life. The tragedy of Rwanda and Burundi is still fresh in our memories with its psychological trauma on the immediate participants and on far away television viewers. The Polisario in Mauritania, the Algerian civil war, the crisis between Libya and Chad over a decade, the Biafran – Nigerian civil war of the late 1960,s and the famine and war situations in Eritrea, Somali, Sudan, Niger, Chad, Ethiopia and the entire Sahel region lasting well over two decades shatter every human imagination and sensitivity. Africa has seen the worst in what human brutality could ever offer.

Five hundred years of slave trade on black human beings who were exported in chains to Arabic countries, the Americas and to Europe left the continent depopulated and the African people in a diaspora of neither African nor alien. Closely followed by the era of the colonial conquest of nation after nation, seeds of discord, foreign domination, external values, truncation of cultural lifestyles and the displacement and replacement of traditional ideas and systems at all levels gave room for a vacuum. Things fell apart. This is the background for the present malaise facing the continent. With imposed rulers, the type with the tyranny exhibited in the image of the brutal British imposed Idi Amin Dada over Uganda; one sees what virtually all the parts of the continent have to contend with to this day.

Contrary to what the ancestors bequeathed to the African continent, elections when at all held are rigged and manipulated. Africa's rulers are appointed thousands of kilometers from far off coasts by powers who are not Africans, often by an international gang of those who "*call the shots of world global power*" at Paris, London, Spain, Washington, Saudi Arabia. An exception is South Africa. South Africa made an exit into freedom in 1994 with the world's greatest man of integrity, Nelson Mandela walking out of racist apartheid prisons after 27 years with dignity and integrity. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is Africa's true son, a sign of reconciliation and a symbol that the continent has still some glimmer of hope.

Bob Marley, the Reggae King did sing: “*We Africans will fight if we find it necessary, and we are confident in the victory...*” He was right. There has been so many wars on the continent and these conflicts color AFRICA, the land known as the cradle of civilization and the origin of *Homo sapiens*. The wars of the 20th century with spill over into the 21st have ravaged virtually every part of the continent and only few families escaped being victims. Apartheid, White racism and Colonialism took over the reason for conflict in the southern parts of the continent, in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and the ongoing crisis in the two Congo’s involving the lake regions of central and east Africa and leading to what the London Financial times described recently in its November edition as “*The First World War in Africa*” with 8 countries involved. This phenomenon of inhumanity and conflicts leading to wars however has been worldwide, not just limited to Africa. The 20th century left on its trails, the first world war 1914 – 1917 which cost humanity over 20 million lives and the Communist Revolution in Russia stage-managed by Lenin and later Stalin claiming over 20 million lives. The Second World War 1939-1945 proved more atrocious by brutally claiming the lives of more than a hundred million persons in Europe and elsewhere, rendering over 120 million people refugees and handicapped, 66 million prisoners who perished in the Soviet labor camps and scores of millions who died in Asia, Africa and other continents. Of these other continents, Latin America can write off the 1970’s and part of the 1980’s as the decades of wars, dictatorships and ideological antinomy. Of Asia, the worst tragedies happened in Saigon, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan to mention but a few. History books are replete with the details of how conflicts could be resolved by wars. The Old Romans did summarize it thus: “*Si vis pacem cole bellum*” (*if you want peace, prepare for war*).

No other century knew about the bomb, whether Atom or Hydrogen or Neutron or even the Inter –continental ballistic Missiles, the SS 20’s and 21’s among all the most heinous arsenal of destructive weapons. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still fresh in our minds. The millions of massacred Jews and other minorities are daily recalled as a warning to those who care. And talking about children and women, many of these have been sent to early death through excruciating hunger, diseases, tyranny, political instability, ignorance and homelessness. The United Nations statistics contain the facts and give us the data that daily 40,000 children, the majority living in Africa die in our world due to situations of conflict, abuse of human rights, disease and hunger.

2. THE CENTURY OF IDEOLOGIES:

Lacking faith, our age seemed to flourish under competing ideologies of economic, racial, colonial, cultural and social dimensions. The belief in ideologies led to the banishment of God and therefore of the truth among humans. By giving in to ideology, we lost the truth and our original orientation. False Ideology blinds and becomes the atheist's substitute for faith. It was these false ideologies that misled humanity to believe and think that dictatorship is expedient. That freedom is a mirage. Ideologies made us believe that women are inferior to men. That black people are inferior to the white race. That all people may seemingly be equal but some are more equal than others. Ideology told us that lying is the rule. Ideologies sang the song of Might is Right: and that power is authority at the same time. That what you have is higher than what you are, in other words, having is more important than being.

False ideologies gave us the idea that money is a world formula. That Capital is more important than the human being who produces it and that the absolute in creation is Money, Power and Control. Many believed! Ideologies still persist today that teach us that war is the route to peace. That peace is possible without justice. That private property supersedes the common good and communal ownership in some form. In fact those other alternative theories like the "*social market economy*" or the idea the "*universal destination of created goods*" destined for all is illusory. We have been told by ideologies that color is more important than the human being who wears it. That racism is a new religion.

These ideologies taught us that majority carries the vote and that minorities had no chance but to submit to the majority. Ideologies were falsified to say that tradition is absolute and therefore that castes and so called slaves had no equality with the free born, even if God created all. That people of other religions shall go to hell because they are not of our own denomination. Ideologies told us that intelligence is a racial property and the rest are idiots who do not belong. Ideology taught us the class system. With these ideologiess, humanity allowed the emergence of such historical characters as Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Idi Amin, Pinochet, Pop Pot, Papa Doc, Vorster, Ian Smith and the many African dictators all of who, to mention but a few "*neither feared God nor respected man*". History today shows that their philosophical foundations were faulty. They failed and lied as we can now attest with the benefit of hindsight. Warring factions increased. This is my assessed background to the reality of conflicts worldwide and in Africa as we reckon with history and look into the twentieth century with a view to avoiding its mistakes in the emergent new millennium.

3. THE FOUR AFRICAN WISDOM CALABASHES:

In view of the problems caused by contending ideologies imbibed and internalized by people of all ages and places, ideologies often based on false premises, which have led to the human predicament as we currently experience it in many places, one is forced to ask and we venture to ask some questions and search for answers. Must this continue? What can we do? This is the scope of this paper. What should be our attitude to the conflicts around us? Should we take sides or must we always remain neutral? How do we show it? What chances of success do we have? Our questions and inquiry search for help and it does seem that local wisdom prevails, based on traditional reasoning and the natural law. On the continent of Africa and among the Igbo of Nigeria, these answers are given in *Four African Wisdom Calabashes* as a seemingly necessary response.

Can there be peace without justice? How did humanity come so low? What happened to our era in spite of the many avenues for peace building and scientific possibilities available to humanity when compared to other epochs? How come that peaceful means were tried and exhausted before large portions of the people arrived at the painful conclusion that there was no avenue open for the peace and dignity of people than war, violence, confusion and anarchy? Why has it been difficult to achieve social justice, political participation, economic equality, cultural dignity and national liberation for the people? Why is it that our intellectuals and the elite praise and prefer models of political or economic experiments which do not have roots in the context of their own people and history?

Why do we eulogize and accept systems that have continued to undermine the developmental prospects of our countries in Africa and elsewhere, be it the so called wild fluctuation of the world market where unequal exchange takes place in comparison to industrial products of technologically advanced countries? Why do we accept the unbearable burden of external debts and even encourage further debt? How do we explain that until today in the echelons and citadels of our academic and political processes, intelligent economists still believe that debt reduction and cancellation is not expedient and that the poor must die so that the rich might be richer? Why do we tolerate a philosophy that teaches the economy as a deity, a religion, the maximization of profit through money, power, monetarism and compound interest?

Finally, how come that despite the progress in humanity's technical and information machinery, with a new wealth of resources, both educational and industrial, humanity has not arrived at the new societal foundation with the four African wisdom Calabashes? It is the belief of this author that the wisdom in these calabashes carries a genuine guarantee for the foundations of a new humanity in Africa.

These four Calabashes for the rebirth and renaissance of Africa are summarized thus:

- a) ***A free and mixed enterprise economy Calabash***, in a liberal but socially responsible “market economy” within an environment where people matter, where self help is best help; where subsidiarity is complemented by solidarity and the common good; and finally where sustainable development is based on available resources that think cyclical to include the past, the present and the future.
- b) ***A Participatory democracy and political pluralism Calabash*** with consensus building and self-determination based on African wisdom of “*onye anwuna ma ibe ya efuna*” (Live and let live) which is guaranteed by sustainable cultural values and the role of the elders, traditional institutions, social groups particularly those of women and youth.
- c) ***A Good Governance Calabash*** based on principles of Freedom, Justice, Peace, Truth and international co-existence in a world where people have the ability to be original and authentic, yet linked to others without any external definition, manipulation or teleguidance.
- d) ***A Cultural identity and integrity Calabash*** which recognizes the dialogue of civilizations and cultures in a mutually enriching atmosphere, where respect for the Sacred in creation is assured, respect for life guaranteed, traditions of people which do not oppose life is protected and equality of all persons in a just and non gender category promoted..

4. MANAGING CONFLICTS AND PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND RECONCILIATION- THE CHALLENGES AHEAD:

“No human right is safe if we fail to commit ourselves to safeguarding all of them. When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them. Only when a culture of human rights which respects different traditions becomes an integral part of humanity’s moral patrimony, shall we be able to look to the future with serene confidence. How could there be war if every human right were respected? The culture of human rights cannot fail to be a culture of peace. Every violation of human rights carries within it the seeds of possible conflict... If one people is crushed to death by force, who will dare promise the rest of the world of security in a lasting peace?”(Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1999 World day of Peace on 1st January 1999)

In this very powerful message titled “*RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: THE SECRET OF TRUE PEACE*”, this Pope of Peace reflects in a profound manner on what the Church’s role is and must be as a sign to the nations. He points both to a prophetic model and a practice method which lead the way of realizing a world without conflicts. In his reflection, the pontiff outlines the role and competence of the Church to teach the world and to witness this in her own life. We summarize the foundations and meanings inherent in some of these Human Rights hereunder and they apply particularly to Africa, but not necessarily exclusive to her.

- Respect for Human Rights – the Heritage of Humanity;*
- The Universality and Indivisibility of Human Rights as a cross cultural truth*
- The Right to Life, foundation for all other rights;*
- Religious Freedom, the Heart of Human Rights*
- The Right to participate, a condition for the exercise of freedom*
- The Right of Minorities and other discriminated ethnic Groups as sign of progress*
- The Right to Self Fulfillment as a guide to true freedom and happiness*
- Global progress in Solidarity the guarantee for lasting peace*
- Responsibility for the Environment, a basis for sustainable future*
- The Right to Peace, founded on the practice of justice*
- A Culture of Human Rights- The Responsibility of All*

All documents available in ancient cultures, in literature and art, in civilizations and values point to the nobility of Peace as a basis for progress. Human rights is that moment where People are Human and authentically mysterious in “the image of their creator”. People must be enabled to manage, transform and reconcile conflicts and conflicting parties. Among the various reasons hindering the process

of Human rights and conflict management, ignorance and dishonesty stand eloquent. This remains our challenge in Africa and worldwide. In the Old Testament, the New Testament, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, magisterial pronouncements, there is insistence on building bridges across ethnic, religious, gender, language, racial, class or otherwise distinctions. This insistence corresponds to the signs of the times.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 10. December 1948 is a document that posits the same tenets as a basis of peace and reconciliation for mankind. The African Church teaches that conversion implies conflict resolution and the building of communities of peace and justice as the essence of human *Koinonia*. The entire philosophy of Basic Christian Communities and the *Ujamaa* experience are practical examples.

A resource pack for conflict transformation, International Alert recently published in 1996 and edited by Ian Doucet gives us some data on these matters.

Violent conflicts seem to be an endemic feature of human history. According to one estimate, there have been 14,500 wars during the last 5,600 years of human history. Another study argues that there have been only 286 years of peace during the last 3,400 years of history. According to analysts, since 1945, there have been over 165 wars. In 1994 alone, there were 31 wars waged in 27 locations. If smaller armed conflicts are taken into account the total is much higher.

Attempting a more detailed record of the incidence of armed conflict, the PIOOM Foundation, a non-partisan Dutch based human rights research centre, listed a total of 160 violent and potentially violent conflicts in the single year of 1992, consisting of 32 wars, 69 low intensity armed conflicts in which the violence is more sporadic and less intense, and 59 serious disputes in which one of the parties has threatened the use of violence or has deployed military troops or made a show of force. Many of these are frequently characterized as internal or civil wars. Whether the Bauchi and Katsina riots and the Zango-kataf clashes IN Nigeria are included in these statistics would be an interesting further research. And as the UN Human Development Report 1994 (UNDP) makes clear, the majority of these armed conflicts occur in the global South and East. More disturbing is the human and social cost of such violent conflicts.

Conservative estimates claim that between 1945 and 1989 there have been 21.8 million war deaths. Today, the vast majority of these are civilian rather than military – approximately 85 %, up from about 50% in the 1950's. One report holds that:

“Deaths are only a fraction of the human losses; many more people are injured and material losses further increase the loss of health or life in indirect, delayed ways. Just five wars of the 1980’s (in Uganda, Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan and Iraq/Iran) uprooted 17 million people, over seven million of them driven or fleeing to foreign countries. Some countries have virtually disintegrated as functioning societies... Others are on the verge of disintegration.

These statistics should make uncomfortable reading. They should also lead us to ask whether such levels of human suffering are necessary, whether there are better ways of managing and resolving the seemingly intractable differences which lie at the heart of many of these violent conflicts. Our attempt is to see beyond the complexity of human exigencies and the complex nature of conflict as a multi-dimensional social phenomenon (which is an integral feature of human existence) and to assert that though essential to the ongoing processes of history and social change, conflict can be overcome since humanity desires and yearns for transformation and for peace. *“Our hearts are not at rest and shall not rest until they rest and find peace in thee O Lord”* (St. Augustine). Even though a common day experience, conflicts can be resolved and transformed for humanity to arrive at the world of our dream, the *adumbratio* preached by the prophets of old, *the already but not yet* understanding of the Kingdom of God.

5. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS GENUINE CONFLICT RECONCILIATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION:

The Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) has in the last two decades spent considerable time and resources on Human rights and conflict management, settlement and resolution. The impact on the lives of the peoples and the institutions within and without the territory of the diocese of Enugu has been enormous. What CIDJAP is doing in Enugu, others can do elsewhere. CIDJAP’S method is the theory of practice which is the basis of contextual theology. It is also incarnated in the Igbo worldview which believes in – *Ekwu Eme-* (saying and doing). Two methods are applied but they do not solve all the problems each time. These criteria are extremely demanding and few conflicts may be said to have been resolved

- ***Conflict settlement*** means reaching an agreement on a particular aspect of the conflict rather than the conflict as a whole. It frequently addresses the interests of the parties without really addressing the underlying needs. It is most often characterized as a compromise solution involving

surrendering “a piece of the cake”. A successful compromise is when the “cake” is divided so as to leave each party thinking it has the largest piece. Direct violence may end but the parties still remain dissatisfied because all their interests and needs were not fully addressed.

- **Conflict resolution**, by contrast, is a comprehensive outcome, in which the underlying causes of the conflict are removed so that there are no latent, residual elements which may trigger a return to violence. Resolution entails an integration of the parties’ objectives so that neither side has had to compromise. Its aim is a non-hierarchical, non-coercive solution that focuses on the underlying causes of the conflict and the establishment of legitimate relationships between the parties.

International Alert has identified seven dimensions of genuine conflict resolution which is the best guarantee for permanent solutions. Upon the realization and practice of these principles could we once again start the new world of our dreams, namely to renew the face of the earth. These principles are:

1. **-completeness-** the issues in the conflict have disappeared or cease to be important
2. **-acceptability-** the outcome is acceptable to all parties, not just to one or to their elites
3. **-self-supporting-** there is no necessity for third party sanctions to maintain the agreement
4. **-satisfactory-** all parties perceive the outcome as just according to their value system
5. **-uncompromising-** no goals have been sacrificed in the form of compromise solutions
6. **-innovative –** the solution establishes new, positive and legitimate relations for parties
7. **-uncoerced -**the agreement was arrived at without imposition by an outside force

In implementing agreement towards a resolution of conflicts, two stages appear very important, namely, *reconciliation and reconstruction*. The long term and structural nature of conflict resolution and transformation including settlement become clear when reconciliation and reconstruction in the aftermath of violent conflicts are considered. These two processes are mutually supportive and interconnected. The process leads to justice, to harmony, to order and therefore to human fulfillment and peace which is the *summum bonum* of the philosophers.

If people would be taught the truth that human beings are fundamentally equal, if people would agree to the basic guidelines of justice which insists on “to each his or her due”, if humanity would learn to respect one another on the basis of the ontology of the “*imago dei*”, if all sorts of bias (whether cultural or historical) were given up or at least reduced to a minimally tolerable level allowable for mutual co-existence and the guarantee of basic rights, if fundamental respect for

the dignity of each being would be re-echoed and made an educational foundation for every child in this world, conflicts may reduce. But above all truth must prevail. Most conflicts take place because truth has been ejected and lies have taken over. Jesus once told his followers: *“Only the Truth shall set you free”*. As Michael Novak, the 24th recipient of the Templeton Prize for progress in Religion has written in his Templeton Address of 1994 delivered in the London Abbey:

“to obey the truth is to be free, and in certain extremities nothing is more clear to the tormented mind, nothing more vital to the survival of self-respect, nothing so important to one’s sense of remaining a worthy human being – of being no one’s cog, part of no one’s machine, and resister to death against the kingdom of lies - nothing is so dear as to hold to truth. In fidelity to truth lies human dignity”.

We conclude our reflection by looking at our point of entry. We set out to share our thoughts on the need to initiate a dialogue where Human Rights, Conflicts and Reconciliation are reckoned with in global community and to set emphasis from African Wisdom Calabsashes for some form of solution. We are still far from reaching that goal. But we are able to see that the search is not isolated to Africans alone. Human Rights concern all. Conflicts engulf all societies in more or less dimensions. It behoves humanity therefore in the new millennium to seek for new forms of solidarity and action. This is where Pope John Paul II, looking towards year 2000, states in his Apostolic Letter *“Tertio Millenio Adveniente”* and in the 1999 World message of Peace, that:

“The new millennium has filled the hearts of many with hope for a more just and fraternal world. This is an aspiration which can, and indeed, must become a reality. All are invited to walk the path of authentic conversion, which involves rejecting evil and making a positive choice for good. On the threshold of the year 2000, it is our duty to renew our commitment to safeguarding the dignity of the poor and the marginalised, and to recognize in a practical way the rights of those who have no rights. Let us raise our voices on their behalf, by living in its fullness the mission which Christ entrusted to his disciples! This is the spirit of the now imminent Jubilee”.