

MY PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I, Rommel Roberts, have been blessed with a many varied set of experiences, connections and direct support of close friends and communities during the course of my personal struggles. I have, during the struggles against apartheid, like so many others, had my fair share of pain and suffering including spells of imprisonment and also shared with many the hopes and dreams of a new South Africa that promised much.

I have after 20 years since the release our leader Mandela, looked back and can recall the truth of what many modern prophets have said ' the most difficult time comes after a revolution has happened'.

It has been such a struggle to cope with poor people's disillusionment, frustration at the shattering of their dreams and hopes. witnessing to the corruption at every turn or corner plus the many challenges that seem to get more and increasingly difficult despite a wonderful constitution and so many wonderful and positive policies that indicate a heaven on earth for the nation. To an extent much has happened that makes it different to the years of apartheid if you are a poor person. Most villages have electricity, we have no fee schools, many houses have been built, social grants cover so many aspects of our poor, vast tracks of land has been handed into black hands with billions of Rands in support, Billions upon Billions of Rands have been allocated to alleviate poverty backed by programmes etc etc Like many I am puzzled by the results. Our schools are in a mess. Our health system a shambles. Many of our teachers have become completely demotivated and have turned to other interests as has many of our leadership some who believe it is their fundamental right to generate more personal wealth that the huge salaries they receive. The example given to our youth is that the path of development is to take the quickest possible route to self enrichment and in the process cast away all fundamental values that in any way becomes an obstacle. Personal wealth at any cost must be the new philosophy!!

Where are the youth who made such amazing sacrifices during my struggle days, confronting the apartheid state in my struggles against the pass laws and resettlement, the bus boycotts mass action campaigns (detailed in my book SEEDS OF PEACE) and who never asked for a single cent in return for their efforts. Where are the leadership who believed in absolute commitment and solid example and preparedness to die for their values.

It is thus against this background that I have come to the conclusion that I must accept blame for myself and my many weaknesses and inadequacies and take personal responsibility despite my obvious faults and failings and try and make some stand, if for nothing else but my own liberation from mass apathy and powerless to stand against the massive assault against fundamental values that we as South Africans once proudly displayed and became such a beacon of light to the world. I also came to the conclusion that I have to stop accepting and remaining silent about so many issues that I confront in my struggles to overcome poverty and deprivation in our rural communities through organisations like Masibambane, Hilltop Empowerment Centre, Isinamva and others.

As Part of Masibambane I find myself being confronted by the events that has led to the difficulties faced by Masibambane in its struggle with the Anglican church in Peddie and the Diocese of Grahamstown, in dealing with it painful eviction where it had no option but to leave with a trusting promise of compensation by the bishop appealing to us to deal with the matter like Christians but in reality faced very unchristian like behavior. I have come to the conclusion that maybe the time has come to begin the process of saying NO! practically much as we did during the apartheid years. In the whole Arab world people ARE SAYING NO! The example of the young man in

Egypt who burnt himself in protest and created a major evolution appears to herald the new winds of change that says the ETHICS OF PERSONAL GREED SHALL NO LONGER PPREVAIL AGAINST PEOPLE'S NEED! Personal wealth creation must be responsible and not at the expense of genuine service to people.

As we need to start at our home base before moving further afield it became clear to me that I need to deal with Masibambane's pain and hence decided to embark on a simple vigil that will include a limited fast due to my diabetic condition. It is my sincere wish not to be destructive in this but to encourage a wake up call to realities and values.

Many thanks and blessings to all of you who may in some way share these thoughts and concerns

Rommel Roberts