

NATIONAL INTER-RACIAL ASSEMBLY FOR MORAL RE-ARMAMENT
Cape Town, Easter 1956

"Such a thing has never before happened in South Africa," said one of the 500 delegates referring to the National Inter-racial Assembly for Moral Re-Armament held in Cape Town this Easter. Representatives of the African, Coloured, European and Indian communities from South Africa, South West Africa and the Rhodesias crowded into historic Hiddingh Hall to witness a new dimension of unity for Africa and the world. They left with the conviction that at this hour in history South Africa can demonstrate a pattern of unity for all mankind.

Among the messages received from Australia, England, Germany, the United States of America, France and Switzerland was a cable from Dr. Frank N. D. Buchman, initiator of MRA, who held his first meeting in South Africa in 1929 in this same Hiddingh Hall. Dr. Buchman cabled:

"May Easter-tide see the rebirth of the nation through hate-free, fear-free, greed-free men committed to live an ideology that will unite the world. The eyes of all are on South Africa. Will men take the way of the Cross to resurrection or of selfish ambition to destruction. South Africa has been the sounding board to nations. Now it will be the powerhouse for a new world."

The convictions which Dr. Buchman expressed in his cable became a reality through the demonstration of what took place in the lives of people of all races and classes. Human barriers melted as men found freedom from fear, bitterness, pride and indifference.

Dr. Herman Malan, Senior Lecturer at Stellenbosch University, told the Assembly:

"I am convinced that this conference is a growing point where a new order in South Africa is being born. As an Afrikaner I grew up accepting that we white people were better than brown or black. In this conference I have heard what pain that attitude has caused in the hearts and lives of people who did not have white skins. To all of them I want to apologise for this unthinking heartlessness. I also want to ask that you will forgive and help to put things right.

"It is quite clear to me," Malan continued, "that we are today living in the crumbling of the old order. MRA isn't interested in building up any one of the old orders. MRA is only interested in a new order in which everyone will have a share based on the guidance of God and the participation of each one of us therein. I am determined to dedicate my life to getting my people to accompany me on this road to a new South Africa."

Afterwards, a revolutionary student from Fort Hare, the only African university in South Africa, stated:

"I was a strong member of the African National Congress Youth League. Before I met MRA I believed that a bloody revolution was the answer to our problems. I professed to be a Christian, but I never put into practice the Christian principles. I used to hate right from the bottom of my heart anything about the white man. I was selfish and thought of myself only. I began to change starting with myself. In MRA I found an ideology greater than all ideologies and an answer to bloody revolution."

A spokesman for the Coloured people told of the new spirit in which the people of his race were facing the recent events which have so profoundly affected them. "I am convinced," he said, "that the MRA conference in Johannesburg in 1954, when white and black, Coloured and Indian met together in an inter-racial conference like this, saved the fate of South Africa. Since then we have found a new fight - a fight to make Africa an Africa for God."

Speaking from personal experience of how MRA can change the course of events, Picton Mbatha told of recent conferences with the Department of Bantu Education. Mbatha, as General Secretary of the African Teachers' Federation with a membership of 12,000, was part of a delegation who went to Pretoria to lay their case before the Government. Describing their first meeting he said:

"We prepared a general statement of principles for discussion. I remember going through it beforehand and crossing out words that might be misunderstood. Instead of 'request' I put 'demand'. Words such as 'we beg' I changed to 'we insist'. As a result of this attitude, when we started the meeting they were boiling on their side and we were boiling on our side. We couldn't get anything out of it."

Describing what happened a year later he said, "Through MRA there was a complete change of heart. We laughed, we discussed, and it wasn't a question of who was right or wrong, but what was right. It was a very friendly atmosphere with the same people we had found it impossible to carry on with the previous year. The

basic difference isn't of race or colour, wealth or education, civilized or uncivilized, but of changed or unchanged. Change through the four moral standards is an urgent necessity."

Speaking together on the same platform a student from Stellenbosch University and an Indian textile worker from Durban told of how they had found the answer to the superiority and bitterness which had divided them. The student remarked how one thing he must do is "to apologise to this man next to me and to all Indians. I thought they did not belong to South Africa and should go away. I am convinced that MRA has the solution to the world, and I want to commit myself to it." The Indian replied, "I am sorry to the Afrikaans people for the bitterness I had for what I considered was their attitude towards Indians. I must also apologise to all my African friends for my hatred which I had gained after the 1949 riots in Durban. As a Hindu Indian and a South African I am with you in this fight for world renaissance."

Harold Sneath, a businessman from Cape Town, told the Assembly:

"When I came to this country over thirty years ago I had one idea - to make as much money as I could for myself. I was also the kind of Englishman who years after they have been here still talk about England as 'home'. MRA showed me what this selfish attitude on my part has done in this country, and I wish to apologise for it."

L. Ncwana, member of the Advisory Board of Moroka Township, Johannesburg, told of his commitment to bring this superior ideology to his people:

"I have been a man who has been very close to Communism. Today I am glad I have found this ideology of MRA. Now I have restitution to make. Let us go to the masses with this message. I will go back to Moroka and tell them about this ideology. I thank God it is never too late to repent and change."

Mrs. Bremer Hofmeyr, daughter of a Kenya settler, whose father was recently murdered by the Mau Mau, spoke of her conversation with a Mau Mau detainee who had been changed through MRA:

"He told me that one of the causes of Mau Mau is land hunger, but that the greatest cause is the superiority of the white man. He said it without bitterness or hatred, and it went to my heart. I decided I would live from that moment on to restore for the superiority of my race."

Mrs. Hofmeyr continued with her own convictions of the price of bringing world renaissance. "The thing I have decided this Easter is that I live for nothing except what God tells me to do whatever it costs. To face the Cross daily in my own life - to hide, fear or prove nothing, but only be a servant of God in this greatest revolution of all time."

Among the others who gave evidence of the effect of a uniting ideology at this Assembly were:

Mr. J. Mbata	Foundation Secretary of the African National Congress Youth League
Miss G. Mdledle	President of the National Council of African Women
Chief Nyangilizwe Ndamase	Son of the Paramount Chief of Pondoland
Mr. Harsant Opperman	Represented Southern Rhodesia throughout Europe with MRA World Statesmen's Mission
Mr. George Golding	President of the Coloured Peoples National Union
Mr. Cyril Pearce	Director, John Dickinson & Co. (Africa) Ltd.
Mr. E. Raubenheimer	Member, Executive of Coloured Peoples National Union
Mr. Pat Sonn	Member, Executive of the Coloured Peoples National Union
Reverend Samuel Tema	Deputy Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of the Transvaal
Mr. John Trengove	Advocate, Pretoria.

The plenary sessions were chaired by George Molefe, leading African educationalist from Port Elizabeth, and George Daneel, internationally known Afrikaans Springbok Rugby player.

Messages to the Assembly poured in from many countries emphasising the focus of world attention on South Africa at this time.

From Germany came a message from the Minister-President of Lower Saxony, three Members of the Federal Parliament, the Director of the largest coal mine in Europe, and one of his employees, a miner, who had been a former Communist and had found a superior ideology in MRA. The message said in part:

"We are with you in this global fight of Moral Re-Armament which breaks down the barriers between nations, races and classes and unites men in the supreme task of remaking the world."

A joint cable was received from Members of the United States Congress from the Southern States and American Negro educational leaders.

"Africa will speak to the world with the miracle of a God-led unity. MRA with its truth for all men everywhere is opening men's hearts and minds. The road to renaissance and a new world is becoming clear."

A message was read from a national force of 900 gathered in Birmingham to plan how, in view of recent events, Great Britain can demonstrate an

idea which unites East and West. It was signed by John McGovern, for 25 years Labour M.P. from Shettleston, Scotland; A.R.K. Mackenzie, British diplomat; Air Vice Marshal T. C. Traill, formerly Air Commander, Central Atlantic, under NATO till 1954; Arthur Baker, formerly Chief of Parliamentary Staff of "The Times"; John Craig, Secretary of Colvilles Steel Company; and Stanley Hoar, Managing Director of the Commonwealth Development Finance Company.

Madame Eugenie Eboue, Councillor of the French Union, former Senator and Member of Parliament, cabled, "As a French woman of the coloured race I hope many people will join you to bring unity throughout the world."

From Caux, the MRA World Training Centre in Switzerland, came a message from the World Ideological Statesmen's Mission which has been invited to the capitals of Europe this winter:

"We have seen MRA speak across barriers of class, race and conflicting political systems. MRA is a world network of hate-free, fear-free, greed-free people. It is a national necessity. Your Assembly in Cape Town will be the prelude to renaissance for a continent. Men free of fear, men free of bitterness, men free of pride will together free the world. Nothing less than this must be Africa's aim."

- Signatories included representatives from Southern Rhodesia, Algeria, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa.

At the close of the conference, the Assembly led by an African chorus rose and sang the Bantu National Anthem. Immediately as the Anthem ended an African voice rang out from among the chorus singing in Afrikaans "Die Stem", South Africa's National Anthem. The Assembly joined in. It was a moving moment. No-one in the hall had ever heard an African initiate that Anthem.

At the conclusion of the Assembly, a Coloured man said, "I would never have believed it was possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes." An African stated, "This has been the most wonderful experience of my life. This is something different from what I have ever seen before. At last I have found God's answer."

For many, the weekend had been the experience of a lifetime as a result of which they would never be the same again. It demonstrated what could happen when men move from patronising a movement to becoming selfless revolutionaries whose lives are given to answer the needs of men and nations. It was a living demonstration of Frank Buchman's conviction of what this Easter could mean for the world:

"At this darkest hour Easter re-directs ambitious men to become selfless patriots. May maturity, unity and faith be ours for the saving of nations."