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Archbishop Thabo's message of hope for a water sensitive and inclusive Cape Town

In 2020, the water strategy "Our Shared Water Future" was launched by the City of Cape Town, marking a new phase in the field of water and sanitation. In this strategy, the city reaches out to all relevant parties for collaboration, co-responsibility and co-design. This is a conversation with Archbishop Thabo, in which he shares his vision, inspiration and message of hope on improving water resilience and the quality of life for all of Cape Town's citizens.



Thabo Cecil Makgoba

born 15 December 1960, has been the Southern African Anglican archbishop of Cape Town since 2007, occupying the position once held by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He is the youngest person ever to be elected to this position. He speaks out about water inequality in South Africa and the poor situation of water and sanitation for many citizens of Cape Town. He initiated several interreligious initiatives, like the 'Walk of Witness' through Khayelitsha to advocate for better sanitation services in the informal settlements, which gave him the nickname 'the toilet Archbishop'.¹

"Let us end the indifference"

In 2019, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew organized the symposium 'Water in Times of Climate Change', as part of the Amsterdam International Water Week. The symposium aimed to deepen the often technocratic responses to water issues by initiating a values-driven dialogue. Cape Town with its recent droughts ('Day Zero') was one of the points of departure. Archbishop Thabo gave an interreligious and inspirational speech with a clear message to the participants, in which he referred to the role religion played during Day Zero. It was an invitation to end indifference and become agents of hope:

"We have lived our lives by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We were wrong. We must change our lives so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption, that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and learn what is good for it. It means living for the good of the community, for all of us, not living for my own personal ends. It means living the we and not the me."



Water and sanitation services, BM Section Cape Town, 2015.

To sum up, let us end the indifference.

Let us end our indifference to the importance of water and its centrality in our faith and our lives.

The opposite of love is not hate - it is indifference.

The opposite of faith is not heresy - it is indifference.

The opposite of life is not death - it is indifference.

The opposite of hope is not despair, but indifference.

*May we become agents of hope."*²

¹ Makgoba, Thabo (2019). *Faith and Courage: Praying with Mandela*. SPCK Publishing, p. 164.

² Hasselaar, Jan Jorrit & Elisabeth Ijmer (2021). *Water in Times of Climate Change: A Values-driven Dialogue*. Amsterdam University Press, p. 117.

“Where lies my hope?” – Invitation to a Water & Toilet Indaba

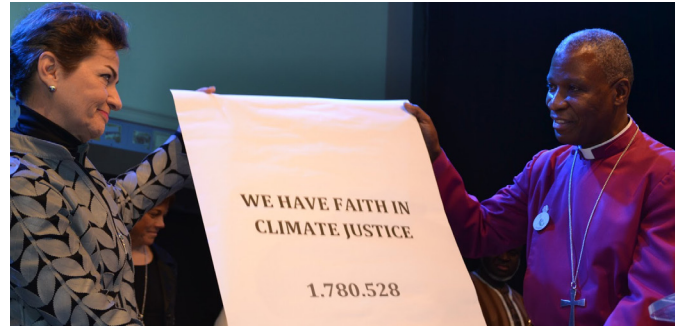
As part of the partnership between the City of Cape Town and Amsterdam, we spoke with Archbishop Thabo, to hear his view and inspiration on improving water resilience and improving the quality of life for all of Cape Town's citizens. Where lies his hope?

“In 2018 we were told that Day Zero would arrive when water in dams supplying Cape Town reached less than 15 percent. All citizens and parties in Cape Town operated together as never before. Together we were able to reduce our water demands by a massive 50 percent and realized that Day Zero never came. That is where my hope lies: that the people of God work together.

So in this moment, we've got rains, and our dams are full of water. However, our fellow citizens in the informal settlements are still experiencing Day Zero every day, not to speak about the lack of basic sanitation services in the settlements. So as long as Day Zero is not over for them, it is not over for all of us. This is what I call Ubuntu: “I am because we are”. And I wanted to turn it around and say: “we are because they are”. I'm glad about the ambition of the Cape Town Water Strategy, that seeks to improve the quality of life of all citizens in Cape Town and especially the ones living in the informal settlement. But colleagues hear my passionate plea that this should not just be a political speak. This Godly strategy should not disappear in a drawer. It should be tangible, it needs concrete steps.

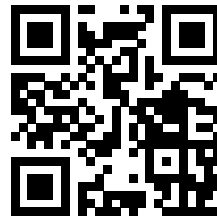
We need to look at what we learned from Day Zero and work together to make it work. Therefore, I propose to my colleagues at the City of Cape Town and the University of Western Cape to sit together and creatively design a Water and Toilet Indaba with the City and the people living in the informal settlements. This Indaba, consisting of strong frameworks and several pilot areas, can serve as a model that can be used to build trust between the City and the informal settlements all over the city and beyond.

A lot of women and girls are impacted by a lack of water and sanitation and the proposed strategies. So it is important to listen to the voices of women, very important. Also, we can't ignore the youth. The number of youth that is unemployed is quite scary. If we ignore this, we are creating a hopeless situation. Therefore, I propose that in whatever you do in the Indaba, please include the voices of the young people in all our work on water and sanitation. Deal with their joblessness and their unemployment, listen to their ideas. They are the future.

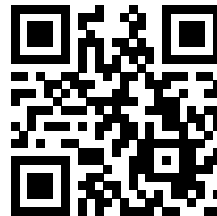


Archbishop Thabo and Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, during the COP21 that culminated in the Paris Agreement of 2015. Indaba was used as a key element of the negotiations in Paris.³

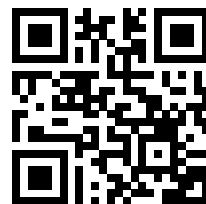
We don't need to start from scratch. The 'walks of witness' and the janitorial compact with the City show that we have walked this road before. These roads serve as an important source of my hope.”



Listen to the podcast 'Archbishop Thabo's inclusive message of hope for a water sensitive and inclusive Cape Town' (2021)



Watch Thabo's video message during the symposium 'Water in Times of Climate Change' Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (2019)



Read the Cape Town Water Strategy 'Our Shared Water Future' (2020)

³ Zimmer, Ben (18 December 2015). The African Discussion Style 'Indaba' Thrived at Climate Talks. In: The Wall Street Journal.

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