

Transcript of an interview with Dr. h.c. Denis Goldberg, 20th July 2019, Hout Bay, by Klaus Brueckner

(Transcript based on an electronic semi-transcription of the original audio record of the interview -finally authorized by Denis Goldberg)

Denis, you have been awarded a few days ago an honorary doctorate by your Alma Mater, the University of Cape Town. It is the latest but hopefully not the last reward in a long row of orders, medals and decorations you have received from states like Great Britain and Germany, by the ANC and various others. What do all these rewards mean for you as a person but also as a, if I may say so, a hero of the fight for freedom in South Africa?

I would have to say it pleases me a lot because it's a recognition of a role that I played together with others in helping to change our country. To change it from country where there was racism by law in our constitution and in every piece of legislation affecting where people could live, where they could work, whether they could go to school, whether they could have sex together / all this, only based on race. And in a formal sense, we put an end to that and I had a role in it together with great leaders like Mandela and Sisulu, Mbeki and others.

And it pleases me that it is being recognized in South Africa and internationally, that such struggles are about justice and equality or an egalitarian society and that white people have to play a role and can play a role. You know, the narrative is black people alone made freedom in South Africa and Nelson Mandela alone brought freedom to South Africa

And that's not the way it works. Politics is about masses of people and we are a country of many cultures and many languages and many races, and people from all of these groups were involved in the struggle. Not just people like me and Mandela and others who were prepared to put their lives on the line for freedom.

And I then have to enlarge on this to say that for me, during World War Two, the heroes were not the only soldiers fighting Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. It was the citizens, the guerrilla fighters who said that freedom is more important than their own lives. Freedom for our people is what's important. Now we know that Bishop Tutu calls this *Ubuntu* / "I am who I am only through others". I didn't know that we were living Ubuntu then - but we were.

And the recognition of that indirectly by these awards to me is very gratifying. And I hope it serves as an inspiration for new generations. The struggle for freedom is never ending. It's never ending. And we have to go on in South Africa because, the task is not finished. And in the rest of the world, there's a rise of nationalism and racism and religious identity used to make the other the enemy and dividing people. And I have to stand up to it, and people are standing up with me in this way.

Today in this meeting in the house of friends here in Hout Bay we talked a lot about the current developments and the perspectives in and for South Africa that may arise from the changes after Cyril Ramaphosa has been elected as President first by Parliament but even more after he now has received his legitimacy also by the people's vote in the general elections for parliament. From your personal point of view - what moves you most today with regards to achievements since the first free elections 25 years ago, and even more interesting, what is still missing, what is unfinished business and as a freedom fighter and activist in the struggle, is there disappointment with what has changed or not changed yet?

I'm impressed by how far we have come in only 25 years, and 25 years in the life of a nation is like a wink of an eyelash. And we have come a long way. The economy is three times bigger by GDP than it was in 94. That's what the statistics tell us. And millions of children go to school Who never went to school. Many of the schools are very poor schools in the countryside. Many children still go to school in an old farm building or under a tree. There isn't the infrastructure, electricity or even proper floors in the buildings. And I know everybody thinks that Africa has a warm climate, but in the winter it's very cold. In the summer it's very hot and children sit on the floor on the sand without books to learn, to read and write and study. And yet even in some of these most poor schools where the community wants children to learn and there are inspirational teachers, a lot of children do very well all the way through to matriculation, grade 12 of school.

And that's a remarkable achievement. It doesn't mean I'm satisfied with the education system that we have extended to replace the inherited one but you cannot change it overnight. Where do you get the teachers? Teachers who in the past weren't trained as teachers. They had perhaps 10 years at school and became teachers. But teachers today in modern society with our technology and our computer skills and Internet need real training on their subjects but also in pedagogics and didactics. And, you know, becoming a teacher is not a well-paid job. Government pays better in other places and so does the private sector, if you can get a job there. So again, we did something we felt we had to do and that was to close the teacher training colleges because they were teaching apartheid schooling. The way you teach mathematics, the way you teach language and whatever you can teach included apartheid as well. And to go on teaching apartheid would have been absurd.

And so these teacher colleges were closed, but now we're left with teachers who are not well trained. Now we're having to open colleges again. I hope there will be better curricula, better understanding of our history and so on. We have stressed the need for mathematics and science education or technology for our industrial country, because black people under apartheid were denied this education. Dr Verwoerd (*editor - former Prime Minister of the Apartheid South Africa*) said if people are going to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, why do they need mathematics? And so they weren't taught mathematics, but now we find there's a problem.

We also need to teach history. People don't know how we achieved our liberation. And they say we still have Apartheid and Nelson Mandela sold us out (laughing), but they forget that people were dying every day in the last years of apartheid, and in fact, in the last years after Nelson Mandela was released, the apartheid state killed between 10,000 and 12,000 people.

Many of the young people now seem to have not such a clear idea of what really happened during these challenging and also quite dangerous times between Nelson Mandel's release and the first free elections in 1994, right?

Not only do they not know, they seem not to care. They'll say we should've killed all the whites and then we could have it all - yeah. But our history of our struggle was for a non-racial South Africa. What about coloured people? What about Indian people? What about women of all races who were oppressed as women are in so many societies- are you going to kill them all? How does a society live with itself and how do you bring that bloodletting to an end? And so, when Nelson Mandela said what we needed after the assassination of Chris Hani, one of the great younger leaders, he said, "what we need is elections, which we can win. and build from there."

And we've built from there. But, again, I think that over the last 25 years we've done a lot but we should have done more. And one of the reasons why we haven't done more is the corruption of some of our own leaders who saw holding office as a means to personal enrichment and empowerment through government contracts to access the state resources.

And so we have the classic example of supporters of former President Zuma who say "if you say he stole ZAR8 billion Rands - think of what Oppenheimer stole or Rupert." They justify it by saying "That 8 billion is nothing". Well, ZAR8 billion Rand is a lot of money: 8 billion would pay for free education for 20,000 students a year for 20 years doing seven year degree courses like for medicine. Well that's a great theft. We are short of doctors, we're short of nurses, we're short of all these skills and that money was stolen from our people. So what do I feel now? We've come a very long way and we've got a long way to go and a lot of backlog to overcome in housing, in education, in health care and so on.

The last point you made with regard to state capture and corruption, Denis, would that for a long time affect the acceptance and the recognition of the ANC as the people's party and, if so, how will the ANC come out of this situation and may develop as a political party in the understanding of political competition rather continuing as a kind of political resistance movement which came into power and has determined 25 years of transformation but now needs to move on and to accept opposition or even to engage in coalitions with other parties?

Well, all I can do is look at what's happened politically. In 2016 we had regional provincial elections and municipal elections. And we lost 3,3 million votes from supporters of the ANC. The ANC claimed to have a million members. So we lost 3,3 million, most of the lost votes from general supporters. Out of those 3,3 million, 300,000 voted for the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters. And it was said, that 300,000 direct voters for the ANC didn't vote. When it came to the 2018 elections for parliament, the ANC dropped to just under 60%. And Gauteng Province, the most powerful Province, economically and in terms of population, the vote for the ANC turned out to be just over 50%, which means that people are very angry with the ANC. They're not only withholding their votes, they're voting against the ANC.

And so will the ANC come out of its decline? I'm not sure. I sincerely hope so because I don't see any other party which has the emotional and historical support of our people, both in cities and in the rural areas that the ANC has. And when I look at the other parties, they don't have their own policies. Their policies are the same as the ANC's is, but they claim that they will do it better. The EFF, led by Malema, tends to go in for personal attacks against leaders with their own leader who was found to have not paid his taxes. A person whose EFF members of parliament are compelled to pay money to buy up his taxes. And when it comes to the Democratic Alliance they are trying very hard to be acceptable to all races and not just be seen historically as a white political party.

They really are struggling to maintain that image because they tend to treat black leaders as people that they can order what to do. That's the public perception. Whether it's true or not. But in politics, perception is very important. Mr Maimane, leader of the Democratic Alliance now has continued fights with the national executive or governing body of the Democratic Alliance. In the City of Cape Town there was Patricia de Lille who, I believe, is a quite headstrong person. But she was treated badly by her own Democratic Alliance. It was a shameful story of the way they got rid of her. And so, they're struggling. I think the ANC will hang on. I think that Cyril Ramaphosa has a lot of political capital and capability, straight speaking and with a vision of what the future should be. We've seen that it can take just a few years to corrupt a government and the society but I think it will take many generations to overcome it.

But it's the trend that matters and putting people on trial and to see what happens to them now and how they will be held to account, that's going to be the real test of President Ramaphosa's government.

Does the loss of trust in political parties lead to or at least foster civic movements or an increased civil society engagement? How will an increasing unrest in particular amongst the youth be addressed?

There's a lot of anger amongst our people and in some communities, especially in poorer communities where the population is essentially black African. Government officials seem not to listen, the people say, about schools, about access roads to get deliveries or an ambulance and so on. But then people keep their children out of school. We fought so hard to build the schools and to get the children into school because I think it's right to say education is an essential requirement for economic development. I don't think it's sufficient, but it's necessary. So, to keep your children out of school is to punish your own children and your own family for a generation to come. To burn down the school, which is what has also happened, or to burn school libraries and school books is the most frustrating thing for any political activist to see. What worries me is the absence of the ANC regional activists and committees to intervene and to try to stop this. They seem to be helpless in dealing with it. And that's a very worrying thing.

But then the activism of younger people and particularly university students and high school students, I think is a very good thing because they believe in the right to demand jobs, the right to an education that will open jobs up to them. But no, I don't want to see them destroying schools or universities. And so, again, there's the need for real leadership from civil society from community members. My line, whenever I get a chance on public media, television, radio, newsprint is that Cyril Ramaphosa has a mandate electorally. He needs that mandate reinforced by civil society. If you see corruption, report it; if you see the police being corrupt, deal with it. It might cause you trouble and pain but we didn't end apartheid by not sacrificing. And if we just sit by and say, well, somebody else will do it, then we will all suffer.

Well, regarding civil society and the awareness of citizens, I would like to come to your dream or may I say to the symbol of your Legacy: You are driving an ambitious project: The building of the House of Hope in Hout Bay. You have already managed to find a plot for a building and some space around it and you have found a lot of supporters not only here in your city and in the Western Cape, but also nationwide in South Africa and also abroad. Would you like to give our readers in Germany an idea what this House of Hope is about, how far you are and what you need more to make it a living place of hope?

Well, I think political freedom is important, but to have a vision of what you want to achieve and be a person in our society is also important. And so many of our people still live in the most terrible conditions, not only in Hout Bay, which is just a microcosm of South Africa as a whole,. Yes. their kids go to school. Yes, people flood into towns to have access to schools and clinics but live in poor conditions. My wish is that the kids even under such circumstances get and have a sense of "I am somebody". And I've seen the way through the activities I've been involved in the last 10 or 12 years in Hout Bay is that art and culture, painting, drawing, dancing, using computers, becoming computer literate, being together, kids of different ethnicities, race, social background is an important way to develop individual personality but even more to unity and to overcome the divisions of the past.

And so my House of Hope in Hout Bay is essentially the name we've given to an art and culture education project, which has been running for four or five years now. We run programs during school holidays where kids paint, draw, sing together, dance together, play football together. We have support from

some of the businesses of Hout Bay and lots of volunteer workers bring kids together so that they see that they can paint and draw and dance and sing "happy birthday" in all our three languages of the Western Cape, but also say to themselves "I am somebody, I am a worthy person. People are taking trouble over me, and if I have the discipline, I can achieve things." It's to give people a chance if you like. And I've seen the way children flourish and flourish.

I not only support art and culture in the fine arts sense, but there is also a football team which we sponsor. There were the Hangberg Horizon Stars football team from the coloured area. They are now the *Hout Bay Horizon Stars* because Hout Bay is what we want, not a racial distinction or identification. And they're supported by the *Denis Goldberg Legacy Foundation Trust*, that's on their shirts now. Kids need to be able to come out and be together and know that others care about them. And we have a businessman who runs a fish and chip shop and ice cream parlor and he will fund a tournament for young kids and provide fish and sandwiches and ice cream for 300 kids to make a day for them to make them feel good about themselves. And so, we mobilize business people. We have another supporter, Italian restaurant, selling muffins, which if you buy provides money for my foundation. It's a nice thing since you can make a contribution or not as you wish. So, we have support from the local community, the business community, more and more adults and more and more volunteers and companies like Daimler Chrysler contributed heavily, Anglo Gold contributed as well. I'm sure other businesses are going to join them. We've had contributions from big foundations in South Africa as well. Our architect will provide the plans as his gift to the community. That will be worth 3 million Rands, if he would charge us with his fees. A builder who will work at his cost price only. All of this for the children of Hout Bay. I think that's marvellous and for me a fulfilment of a life's work. I've never been one for sitting in parliaments. I've never wanted to. What it's about is how do we make our South Africa fruitful for future generations. That's what the House of Hope is.

Is the House of Hope project replacing your Community Heart project or is that still going on as well?

Community Heart still goes on. It was shipping books for children to South Africa, about 3 million children's books, but now they're raising money to produce books in South Africa in the various African languages cause there are not enough books of that kind, but also English language books. My little foundation is still doing that. We are slowly collecting musical instruments again and we will provide music education as well. Plus football plus plus plus.

My last question is twofold. If you would use this opportunity to put a requests to the members and friends of our newly founded German South African Forum with regard to your projects what would such a request be about? And secondly if you would like to communicate a message to Germany, Government, Private Sector, Civil Society what message would you like me to transfer or to spread when I'm back in Berlin?

I can tell you we've built our organization slowly and until I became ill with lung cancer, I did everything myself. We now have a manager, a consultant manager, and she has a personal assistant. And they have office space and office expenditures, which cost us a 50,000 Rands a month in basic overheads or let's say about 4,000 € (*laughing after intervention that it might be only 3,200 €*). But we need to be sustainable and not live off the interest on the money we've collected for the building which is our priority of our project. For the running costs we need that kind of money. And it would help us tremendously if we could have a contribution to it. But you see what the building will do when we have it built - I hope within the next six to eight months - depending on plans being passed, what it will do is

make place where the children can come, and we have volunteer workers who can come to work with children and that'll be a tremendous help as well.

And there are people who want to help with the administration. Currently we all have computers at home and work from there, that's what we do. Many people volunteer time and effort and we're getting there. So, what can you do to help? In the end, you know, nothing happens without funding. That's the reality. And I would say, you know, yes, I want millionaires to contribute. I really do. But also know that a family can say, well, we won't go out to dinner tonight and would contribute what we had spent for dinner. We have facilities in Germany and Britain and, of course, in South Africa, where everybody can transfer his donation; transferring money is very easy these days.

Would you allow to put your link in our newsletter for the project?

I would beg you to do that!

And with regards to the official cooperation between Germany and South Africa, which was quite lively after the first free elections in 1994 but nowadays seem to be a bit 'contained' or restricted to very few focused approaches but not on a rather high political level any more, what is your personal perspective or what would you even suggest in that respect?

The attitude in Europe seems to be that South Africa, judged by GDP is a middle-income country, but it ignores, what is well-known, that the gap between rich and poor is very great. One of the greatest in the world and so there is still tremendous poverty and, in particular, I think we need projects, which encourage people in civil society to organize themselves, to undertake campaigns against corruption, against just pouring the refuse of houses on the street instead of making their home decent for their own children. I know when people are poor, it's difficult, but to encourage people in such programs and not say, well, we did those in the 1970s and 80s and 90s so therefore we've done it. No, the need goes on, and on, and on and will go on for a long time to come and it's wrong to think we did a program and that we've done it all according to the plans.

Programs need continued support and even the most inspired community leaders need a sense of backup of people who can guide from experience from around the world. We don't have to reinvent the wheel all the time. We need to pass on best practice, put it that way, and therefore we need that kind of continuous cooperation. Of course, there's a lot of capacity in South Africa, and where a community is doing well we need to be able to encourage them to pass on their knowledge to others, which does not necessarily have to be supported by foreign advisors but they can help with their experiences and knowledge. I'm saying that we already have answers to our challenges but we need to expand them and generalize them. I wish I didn't have cancer and I'd be doing much more on that. So, I now rely on others to do the work.

Thanks, Denis,

I have a simple proposition. I want to say something but it's a bit abstract. I believe in Utopia but, I know, Utopia is nowhere - that's the meaning of the word in Greek. Well, how do you get to nowhere? Well, today I want to go somewhere and tomorrow I want go somewhere further, but Utopia gets even further away. But think of what we've achieved in going towards utopia. That's what I want. That's my belief. And now it seems an abstract philosophy, but it's real. It's real. Will we ever reach Utopia? No!

There are always people who want more for themselves and don't care about others, they seem to be born that way. And we need to overcome that.

You know, Nelson Mandela at the end of his long walk for freedom, made some observations. He gets released from prison and one of his friends says "now you're free", and he answered "no, now we're free to become free". We have to create the conditions for freedom. And then he says, to be free, it is not enough, "you have to shape your life that you advance and enhance the freedom of others". And that's again is this concept of Ubuntu, which is a universal belief. We belong in society. And then right at the very last sentence, almost, he says "in my life I've climbed many mountains of social progress and now I stopped to look back how far we've come".

And I see we have climbed many mountains, but I've also discovered that as more mountains you climbed, there are more mountains to climb. And that's my utopia story, you see? He then quotes and I think it was his American co-author, Emily Dickinson: "There are miles to go before I sleep, miles to go before I sleep" and Nelson says "I cannot stay long, there's too much ineffect in miles to go. I must hurry because there's so much more to do".

And, yet, I think we're in a hurry. We should be. I just wish all my people well.