



**THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**  
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**MCSA ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS UNIT FIRST THURSDAYS NEWSLETTER**

**#Fifteen**

**8 OCTOBER 2020**

At the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's hybrid zoom/physical Connexional Executive (CE) held from 1-3 Oct 2020, a resolution was passed calling for the ban of the production of autonomous weapons.

The CE was asked if we should not ask for all guns to be banned. And we were reminded that the MCSA has for decades had a resolution advocating for a gun free society and ban on all weapons.

I quote this resolution in full:

**35. WEAPONRY AND GUN-FREE CAMPAIGN**

Trust in lethal weapons is a sign of our failure to fashion a society free of violence and fear. The only long-term answer to this problem lies in obeying God's teaching about caring human relationships and respect for life.

The Methodist Church therefore:

- (a) Calls on all in civil society, especially Methodists, to turn away from firearms;
- (b) Requests the Government to ban private ownership of firearms;
- (c) Affirms the Gun Free South Africa Campaign designed to achieve the voluntary surrender of firearms and calls on all Methodists to participate in the campaign;
- (d) Directs our Ministers not to assist people to gain firearm licences;
- (e) Directs that no firearms be brought to worship services and other meetings of our church;
- (f) Calls on toy manufactures to stop manufacturing gun replicas of any kind;
- (g) Methodists should work for the conversion of the arms industry in South Africa to the production of humane civilian products, with due consideration to existing employment levels and/or adaption of present skills;

The Gun Free Campaign should address the increase in the advertising of handguns with a view to having such advertising banned in our violence-ridden society;

This resolution about weapons from the MCSA, even thou at the time was SA-Centric, however, is relevant to Southern Africa; Africa and the Globe at large.

I have been schooled in the maxim coming from Christian Aid and CAFOD in the 80's when they encouraged seekers of peace and justice to think Globally and act Locally. In recent years I have

changed this to Think Globally; act Continentally; act Locally. Like it or not everything is connected; for better or worse.

Allow me to reverse this order in this article:

### **FIRSTLY, ACT LOCALLY.**

Yes, as the CE points out, we should be banning all guns in our back yard. However, it is necessary to note the African and Global links of those using guns to realise that there are principalities and powers whose self-interest it is to keep that single gun firing in your back yard.

For example, local Gangs have gone global. Yes, for decades we have sought as a society both civil and political to address the issue of gangsterism where the proliferation of small arms persists, however in the last ten years, gangs are now less parochial and are connected to global syndicates. What happens on the Cape Flats is connected to Johannesburg, Lagos and Beijing. According to a *“study by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) shows that many Western Cape gangs have links to international criminal syndicates.”*

Another disturbing reality is that now we are also bringing guns into the temple to solve our differences. This was visibly displayed recently in South Africa when *“10 people were killed at various places in the ongoing leadership tussle within the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC), headquartered in Zuurbekom.”* This sadly is not confined to this denomination alone.

To act locally without thinking globally will, in my opinion, be a futile exercise unless we think of the global links of these guns.

### **ACT CONTINENTALLY:**

The African Union had called for all guns to be silenced in 2020. A noble call indeed!!

**Ms. Aïssatou Hayatou** is the ‘*Silencing the Guns in Africa*’ Operations Manager at the African Union Commission (AUC). *The AU’s campaign on “Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020” aims to achieve a conflict-free Africa, prevent genocide, make peace a reality for all and rid the continent of wars, violent conflicts, human rights violations, and humanitarian disasters*

**In an interview in the online publication Africa Renewal Ms. Aïssatou Hayatou responded to these questions:**

#### **How can guns be silenced in Africa once and for all?**

*“We need to address the root causes of the problem. To build peace, we need to create inclusive multi-sectoral programmes that will address the economic, social and environmental causes of the challenge. About 600 million young people in Africa are unemployed, uneducated or in insecure employment. We need to invest in economic development in order to stop our youth from taking up arms.”*

#### **What challenges do you foresee?**

*“The biggest challenge would be the national uptake of the campaign by member states. Governments taking ownership of silencing the guns and actually developing national plans. Political will and leadership should be at the top level. The AU and UN can come in and support countries. We also need to mobilise resources to support all these activities.”*

Let us together reimagine the stillness of a Continent where the guns go silent:

- No more rifle cracks resounding through urban and villages

- No more screams of children
- No more screaming women as women are brutally raped with rifle barrels.
- No more gun related death
- No more children carrying weapons for abusive adults
- New gun-free ways of resolving conflict will be sought.
- More money for enhancing the quality of life for all Africans

**May the guns in Africa grow silent NOW!!**

**THINK GLOBALLY:**

Who are the principalities and powers whose self-interest it is to keep guns blazing? Who benefits with the spread of guns globally?

According to an article in the Washington Post

*“The National Rifle Association is trying to export its guns-for-everyone-everywhere agenda overseas — and its global activities have little to do with its mission to protect the constitutional rights of gun owners.*

The United States is already the largest gun exporter in the world, with firearm exports increasing over the past six years. A recent report from the Centre for American Progress concluded that U.S.-sourced guns *“were used to commit crimes in nearby countries approximately once every 31 minutes” between 2014 and 2016.* And just last month, *partly at the NRA’s behest,* the current USA administration *“made it even easier for U.S. weapons manufacturers to send their products overseas by imposing a less onerous licensing process for exporters. The new system will also make it harder to track how American weapons are used globally.”*

Is it not time for us to work with our Ecumenical partners in the USA to embrace this MCSA resolution globally? Let us encourage and challenge our US ecumenical partners to be more active in ensuring that demons like the National Rifle Association are exorcised from their society.

**THE TALE OF TWO GUN LOVING COUNTRIES:**

**USA & Switzerland.**

It is said of Switzerland that their *“cultural attachment to firearms resembles America’s in some ways, though it has no constitutional right to bear arms—it has the third-highest rate of private gun ownership in the world, behind the United States and Yemen. Yet Switzerland has a low rate of gun crime, and hasn’t seen a mass shooting since 2001, when a gunman opened fire in the legislative body in the Canton of Zug, killing 14 people, as well as himself.* This was the only mass killing ever in Switzerland.

*So, it’s possible to have widespread gun ownership without so frequently seeing the kinds of incidents that the U.S has. “*

However, the article does point out that in Europe Switzerland has the highest gun related deaths, these are mostly suicides.

The other gun-loving nation, the USA *“has suffered more mass killings in 2019 than any year on record, according to researchers. A database compiled by the Associated Press (AP), USA Today and North-eastern University recorded 41 incidents and a total of 211 deaths.*

Mass killings are defined as four or more people being killed in the same incident, excluding the perpetrator.

However, none of this seems to deter or disturb Americans beyond a national outcry for a few months of mourning and outrage and then it goes back to business as usual. For example the current US administration *"quietly rowed back on a pledge to curb guns, reportedly after a long phone call with Wayne LaPierre, the chief executive of the National Rifle Association - a powerful lobby group which opposes gun control measures"*.

Of course, we dare not forget the hundreds who are killed each year through homicides and other gun related ways in the US.

### **REIMAGINING A WEAPONS FREE WORLD:**

Based on Ezekiel 47 passage, among the many rich images presented to us by Presiding Bishop Purity Malinga, in her address to CE is that of *"diluting the salty water until it becomes fresh water where fish multiply and provide food for fishermen!"* – As I listened, I thought to myself this is actually possible through the technology of de-salination (already used to good effect in Namibia). The de-salination process through the use of sophisticated technology is able to dilute salty sea water into water for everyday use.

With technology could this not also mean that it is possible to turn weapons to plough shares?

Methodists together with our ecumenical partners the church universal should work, as the resolution says, *for the conversion of the arms industry in South Africa to the production of humane civilian products, with due consideration to existing employment levels and/or adaption of present skills;*

Let us reimagine a world without weapons. Technology has taken arms production into a very dangerous space – let us call for the ban of all weapons (look how successful the ban on landmines has been; and chemical warfare).

Just imagine if the peace-prophets were able to ban all weapons from being produced in the first place? The time is now that in order to ensure that generations to follow are not threatened by autonomous weapons who have the capacity to racially profile and kill; are banned before production. Imagine if these miniature killer drones fall into the hands of white supremacists?

Let us reimagine arms industries with their highly qualified scientist turn these energies and intellect toward healthcare; building affordable smart houses for everyone; enabling urban environment friendly farms (already happening in high rise buildings); provide timeous qualitative healthcare for all.

I often quote Anglican Archbishop Thabo who says the greatest crisis facing humanity is the crisis of imagination. PB Purity says that we need to re-ignite our reimagining that another world is possible. And where two such great leaders agree so it is in heaven. *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."*

**As it is in heaven let it be so on earth.**

**May weapons of death become life giving plough shares for the benefit of all huminty?**

**Shalom  
Rev Mike Vorster  
Director of Ecumenical Affairs**