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NOW HEAR THIS! WITH **KENNETH MESHOE**

Leaders must have the guts to spread Africa's wealth

ON TUESDAY 25th May, our country joined other African nations in celebrating Africa Day with great pomp and pride. On this day in 1963, the Organisation of African Unity (now known as the African Union) was formed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Africa Day is a day of celebration of African Unity and its people. It is a day when progress made by Africans is acknowledged and common challenges reflected on.

One of the goals of the African Union (AU) is to have a "united and strong Africa" that promotes building "a partnership between governments and all sectors of civil society, in particular women, youth and the private sector." Its main focus is on "the promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent."

In reflection on these lofty aims, we should question whether these goals have been achieved, and whether the focus of the "promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent" has produced the desired results. It's time to be brutally honest with ourselves as we consider the common challenges facing us as a continent with particular focus on those issues pertaining to women and as well as the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa.

I believe the African Union has failed in many ways. One such failure is not stopping the war that has been raging in East Congo for more than a decade. Unicef estimates that children account for half of the more than 4 million deaths in the Congolese war.

According to a ranking released by humanitarian organisation CARE on 8 March 2010, among the top-ten worst countries for women, seven are African.

Female genital mutilation, sexual violence, lack of education, HIV risks and traditional discrimination are women's worst enemies in Africa.

Is it possible to truly celebrate Africa Day with pride when up to half the world's child soldiers are in Africa? Can we be proud of the AU, when in Sierra Leone's civil war murders,

rapes, tortures and thousands of amputations were committed by boys, and girls recruited to serve on both sides of the war? Why are Africans so brutal and cruel to their own? I'm just asking.

At the release of the African Progress Report in Johannesburg, former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, challenged African leaders to show a bit more "tough love" to their counterparts. He bemoaned the fact that African leaders "don't speak up and get involved in the internal affairs of other countries."

African leaders are aware of what's happening in East Congo, but they are conveniently quiet about it. We all know of the great suffering the Zimbabwean President has caused his own people, yet our government has persisted with their policy of 'quiet diplomacy'. Is the government quiet because it doesn't care, or is this policy a smoke-screen to its cowardice? I'm just asking.

Kofi Annan also called for Africa's growing mineral wealth "to be spread beyond the confines of powerful elites. He further "criticised governments and external investors for striking deals, especially in the minerals sector, that too seldom benefited the people from under whose feet the precious metals and ores are being dug."

African governments must first address poverty and corruption on the continent. They must have guts to challenge the powerful elites across all spectra of society, stop their greed and facilitate the spread of African wealth to the people by whose sweat and tears it's extracted.

Only when this is done, can we truly celebrate Africa Day. Otherwise, it's just a matter of the rich getting richer and the poor becoming poorer.

■ **The Rev Kenneth Meshoe MP is the president of the African Christian Democratic Party**