Interview with Judge Zac Yacoob   11 July 2011
                                                                Johannesburg

There is racialism throughout the world. True non-racialism does not exist anywhere. Not in America, the UK, India (where there is a caste system). The achievement of a non-racial society is not a challenge for South Africa alone, but for people everywhere on earth. It is important, but is the achievement of complete non-racialism a realistic achievement? In reality it is like wanting a crime free society.

Racialism and power – Power and the existence of power does have an impact on whether there is non-racialism. It discriminates between the majority and the minority. The *real question is how to prevent racial majority from oppressing the minority*. This also applies to religion etc.

Broadly we have made many advances towards achieving a non-racial society. But there is a long way to go. But *new elements are appearing to detract from this progress*.

1.   What is your understanding of the historical roots (pre-94) of non-racialism?

People who came in to South Africa were not African. The white took over by conquest. They had a dastardly plan. The absence of non-racialism was used as a tool to expand the hegemony of whites. The danger now is that racialism can be used the other way to ensure nobody criticises the black majority.

There is a human element. Despite everything the most powerful tool in getting non-racialism is to talk to people. True non-racialism should involve talking to people and trying to explain what humanity is. People should explain the dangers of racialism. As you develop this you might get to a critical mass of true non-racialism.

2.   Does this understanding of non-racialism still apply today?

The idea of non-racialism is taken for granted. Too may assume non-racialism exists because structures of racism have been taken away. Too many believe racisim went away once people had the vote. Because the Constitution prevents exclusion it is ok. We have many non-racialists but we have not reached a critical mass. There are many whites who don't accept Africans as their true equal. There are many African's who don't trust whites. Many Africans who don't trust Indians. Many Indians who don't treat Africans well. There are many Indians who believe they are a cut above and disagree with Affirmative Action. There are too many South Africans who believe they are a cut above. There are many English speakers who think this about Afrikaans speakers.

To change all this requires a whole range of education. The problem arises when you think you are better than the other people because your ideas are better.

3.   What kind of non-racial society are we looking for?

Should start converting people to non-racialism. People should see every human being as a being equal. More blacks should get jobs etc. We shouldn't see others as 'they' and 'them'.

Affirmative Action is extremely important. It can go wrong but it is essential. BEE is essential. This is because economic inequality is a consequence of racism. Affirmative Action has to be done to remedy this. Measures must be taken to protect those who were disadvantaged. Blacks need to become powerful elements of society.

Two elements to non-racialism:
- People get rid of the feeling of racialism
- Empower disadvantaged so they can fight for their own equality.

We cant have a single culture. Different people do things differently, and there is no better way to do things. People should be given freedom in their culture. We have got to understand equality.

4. What makes people feel part of a non-racial society?

Every element has a role. The judiciary, the media, business. Every large entity should have employed within it a division aimed at achieveing non-racialism.

Every large newspaper and media generally should have as an objective achievement of non-racialism. Then they have to decide as the media how they can achieve it. They should see how newspapers can detract from racialism. If they apply their mind then each element could make a contribution. Two tiers:

- Achieving non-racialism in our own ranks
- Achieving non-racialism in society.

Political parties are not doing enough. All political parties, for the most part have made acquisition of votes a more important element than achievement of non-racialism. For example the statement by various actors in relation to the coloured community in Cape Town was about getting votes.

5. What do you see as the key features of a non-racial society?

Improving the condition of life of poor black people does have the potential to increase the possibility of non-racialism. What would stop people thinking of blacks as smelly, violent, etc. All these are a function of circumstances in which black people live. People smell because they cant afford to buy soap etc. We need to link the dignity of human beings and socio economic conditions. Link dignity of blacks and non-racial approach.

6. What do you think are the key challenges to building a non-racial society?

African nationalism is not out of hand yet. It is beginning to show some trouble. Anti-white and anti-Indian feeling comes out of this feeling. Any nationalist movement which has the potential for unintended racial consequences should be aware of this and should build in prevention mechanisms.

Government should start programmes to erode racialism. We need to think how to make this possible in a programmatic way. Government and political parties need to adopt non-racialism as a specific area to focus on. There are some programmes where there is unity building but we need to go beyond this.

a. Xenophobia? South Africans having difficulty accepting other Africans?

This is an extension of the same thing (racialism). A Zulu person thinks he is better than a Xhosa. It is part of the definition of racialism. It is cultural superiority - if you define non-racialism broadly and if you define race broadly as being any group of people who are different on account of inherent characteristics. Should define race more broadly. I agree xenophobia is in a sense a kind of racist thing.

1.c The Freedom Charter set parameters and then the Constitution settled it. Society is less racist than it was. You hear people and meet them and listen to them on the radio etc. but the number of racist people who call in is decreasing.

7. What do you think the Foundation should focus on in its work?

It should facilitate the adoption of programmes within different areas of society. The media – it should call media together and talk. It should look at (with the media) what contribution the media can make and what they can do.

I hope this ends in moving us forward and in the development of a programme of action.