

Interlude 2

Diversity – Our Greatest Asset

Gay McDougall

Q1. What comes to mind when you think about your country?

When I think about America, I think about a great diversity of types of people, from different backgrounds, national origins, races, religions, classes and points of view. The US is made up of descendants of African slaves and recent African immigrants; mid-western farmers and Asian Americans whose families come from nearly every Asian nation; Jewish families from Eastern Europe and Native Americans who have owned our land for centuries before any others. These are only a few of the stories that make up the rich diversity of American society. Diversity is our greatest asset.

Q2. What for you is the most exciting and inspiring philosophical insight, scientific discovery or artistic creation?

The concepts of human rights, and particularly the principle of equality of people, are at the same time simple, seemingly self-evident, yet profound. They are surprisingly new concepts, first enshrined in global policy documents in the late 1940s; that is, the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are transformative ideals that are at the core of notions of freedom, independence and self-determination. They are the ideals that have inspired revolutionaries across continents and centuries; that have shaken societies; toppled dictators and ended oppression.

Q3. Is there a specific part of the world to which you feel particularly drawn or close?

As an African American, I have had a life-long sense of connection with Africa. For most African Americans of my age and era, Africa has always been the symbol of the family histories stolen from us by slavery and the symbol of our aspirations for freedom and equality. The struggles in southern Africa for liberation from colonial rule and apartheid were of particular inspiration to many in my generation.

However, my closest connections are to the southern states of the United States

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where my more recent ancestors found ways to survive slavery, and its equally brutal aftermath, and nevertheless emerged to be people of consequence, dignity and compassion. These are my roots.

Q4. What are your dreams, hopes (and fears) for your country and the rest of the world today?

What I am working for is a world in which every person has what is necessary to live a life in full dignity and without want of basic human needs for self or family. I am hoping that the global community can be convinced that with the right political will we can eliminate poverty. I dream of a world without despair or fear for personal security; a world in which nations and peoples have an equal stake and influence in making the world a better place.

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