

PRINCESS VLEI

We welcome you warmly to this service. What a wonderful gathering with traditional Koi leaders and all the major religions – Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian. We are here praying for the future wellbeing of Princess Vlei, this community, the community of Cape Town and our planet.

In offering these prayers, we remember Father John Oliver, for whom this was of great importance and concern.

We were most grateful that at his memorial service in St George's Cathedral our mayor, Patricia De Lille not only attended but spoke warmly and with great appreciation of the work of Father John. We hope that in honouring him and in honouring his memory, our Mayor will support us in our call that Princess Vlei should remain the property of the people and that it should be preserved for our children. In fact, can we all say we ask our good Mayor to ensure that her Council does not allow the development of a shopping mall here?

Letter to Cape Times 7 June 2013

SAFCEI wrote that religious leaders are involved because what we are confronted with is a moral issue - a matter of right and wrong. Religious leaders are deeply concerned about the wellbeing of people and planet in the here and now.

But this is not just a moral issue. It is a deeply spiritual matter. How we live together – with God, one another and the rest of creation is a deeply spiritual matter. We have come because all religions call for justice and righteousness - for fairness.

We have from the book of Amos those memorable words, held dear by both Christians and Jews. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

But we have lost sight of justice and fairness in today's world. We face huge inequality and poverty – in a world of abundance.

You know the story of Jesus, peace be upon his name, in the Temple. It is well-known among Christians, and Muslims who recognize Jesus as a prophet

"And Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons... And he taught, and said to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?', But you have made it a den of robbers." (Mark 11:15-17)

But what is God's temple? Is it to be found only in Jerusalem?

Is not the whole world God's temple? Has not God brought life to this planet? Hasn't Princess Vlei been a temple for generations of users?

Yet we have made this wonderful planet of life, this temple of God, into a den of thieves. We do everything to make money.

We exploit people - all to make money.

And so we have people luring young people onto addiction to drugs, so that they can make money, or promoting alcohol so they can make money, or selling armaments so they can make money.

We rape the environment, so we have rhinos facing extinction, so that people can make money. We have open cast mining, polluting air and water and destroying the soil, all to make money.

And now we ask, is Princess Vlei to be destroyed in order that people might make more money?

The Vlei belongs to us all. You know, they say we all originated from Africa. We started here. We are all related! It is ours!

Let us stop the divisions where the rich get richer

We are about to celebrate Heritage Day. The City can honour Heritage Day by assuring this Heritage will be kept for future generations.

The City and the Province have no right to sell it to anyone, particularly to so called developers, who will destroy it and also destroy the local business community. Who will benefit? The rich will get richer, while the local businessmen and the local communities will be the ones who suffer and pay. The poor will get poorer, and the rich will get richer.

We have got to do the right thing for people and for planet – not profit.

Let us stop just making the rich richer.

I therefore call on you all to follow the example of Jesus – not following Jesus, but his example because Muslims recognize him as a prophet and Allah the Almighty strongly calls for justice and righteousness - I call on all of whatever faith, all of us who are seeking justice and righteousness for people and the planet, to drive the money-lenders out of the temple.

Let us tell the City council, let us tell the developers that they cannot touch the Princess! Can we do that?

They cannot turn the Princess into a den of thieves. Those who dare to want to turn the Princess into a shopping mall, let them know now, that we will not allow it. We will overturn their tables and scatter their goods, we will occupy our Princess.

Am I right? Will we do that?

Not east, I know. But if developers are so insensitive and arrogant to persist, we can warn them we will encourage our congregations to boycott them.

If you say, we will be breaking the law, they must know that they are breaking the laws of God and the natural laws of the universe:

The laws of God that say we must establish justice and care for one another as people, not financial items.

Laws of the universe that we live in harmony with God's creation

We are seriously destroying life on this planet, all in the name of profit – we are using up 11/2 times the resources of the planet

The City and Province must ask what is best for you and for this wonderful, amazing world, which we are so blessed to live in, particularly here in Cape Town.

We must care for this planet that gives us life. This is worth far more than their financial profit.

Those in authority must do what is right for people and planet, not for the money-lenders.

Some of my fellow faith leaders might feel I am being too radical. On Wednesday at the AGM of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum we heard an excellent talk by The Revd Peter Storey on "Faith and Politics". He reminded us that Caesar is Caesar and God is God, and that we must be faithful to God. He pointed out that in the Old Testament we frequently read that the "Kings did what was evil in the sight of God", only occasionally was there a good King, who did what was "right in the eyes of God." (1 Kings 16:25,30; 2 Kings 22:2). It was the prophets who spoke God's word to the rulers.

We must now be prophets to the secular authorities. We are now calling on our leaders in this city, on our provincial leaders, on our government to do what is right in the eyes of God.

The Council must simply not allow the shopping mall. If they persist, we have a legitimate and legal way of expressing our views – we don't vote for them at the next election! Though I don't know who we do vote for! Which party is doing what is right in the eyes of God?

So I ask all who are here now to commit themselves to seek justice and to being a community of peacemakers among people and all living beings.

We know we can't find peace without justice. We know that in South Africa we had to remove the injustice of apartheid before we could find peace.

So we now call on the authorities to seek justice for the people and the planet. If they allow the development of a shopping mall at Princess Vlei, we know that they are bringing conflict and perpetuating injustice.

We ask them to seek justice and peace. We pray, we pray they will support us, the people, support us in caring for this community and for Princess Vlei for our children's children.

ENDS

Jewish/Christian and Muslim Quotations:

Amos 8: 4-6

4. Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end,
5 saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale?

We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances,

- 6 that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the sweepings of the wheat"
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Allah (SWT) has created everything: the animals, plants, skies, lands, rivers and oceans.

Caring for this world is an act of *ibadat* (remember your intention)

The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) emphasizes low consumerism and environmental consciousness in our everyday lives.

We have been appointed as *Khaleefa*, as stewards of this planet (Surah 6:165). We have a religious duty to care for the environment.

Every single organism has been created by Allah (SWT) and has value. In the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) takes oaths by natural elements, names Surahs after various animals and calls us to witness his wondrous creation

Continuation of Cape Times letter 7 June 2013:

All we seem to have heard from the City and the Province to date is the legal position - the legal standing of the developers.

In the Apartheid years, Apartheid was legal, though of course it was morally indefensible and wicked.

Even if the lawyers decide the developers have a legal standing, we are asking that the City and Province consider what is best for people and planet. Of that there is no question.

Yet another shopping mall will help no one, except make money for those involved. It will destroy an irreplaceable open space and green lung and corridor in the city and obliterate well established local community shops. The new buildings will alienate existing community infrastructure and have a heavy energy consuming carbon footprint.

If the DA City and Province decide that "economic development" is more important than social development and environmental wellbeing, we suggest they reflect before the next election on the imperative to achieve real sustainability, to recognise our total dependence on the wellbeing of the natural environment - on the essential need for clean air, water, fertile soil, well managed marine life and wilderness areas.

We must make the wellbeing of people and planet our priority if we are to bring about future sustainability.