**Why is there an emphasis in South Africa on white people having a restitution responsibility towards black people?**

The prolonged generational human rights abuses and exploitation of black South Africans unjustly benefitted white South Africans and enabled them to enjoy a living standard comparable with the highest living standards in the world. This injustice is the root cause for the conflict in South Africa. The only solution to resolve this conflict is by addressing the root causes through acts of restitution by white South Africans.

**What is the social and political context for the need for restitution in South Africa?**

The Portuguese explorer Bartholomeus Diaz established Europe’s first contact with South Africa in 1488. This contact set in motion a racist process of colonialism and apartheid which had a devastating effect on the lives of all people of colour living in South Africa. It robbed the indigenous people of their land and the mineral wealth of the land. It dehumanised and subjected all people of colour to euro centralism, white superiority, humiliation, slavery, socio-economic exploitation, inequality, poverty, torture and death. It robbed people of colour from their dignity, the freedom to express their identity, their traditional religious beliefs and their cultural practises.

The indigenous people of South Africa became strangers in their own country. The adoption of the policy of apartheid by the white minority government in 1948 legislated the racial discrimination of the colonial era and legitimised racism in all spheres of the South African society including sexual relationships, marriage, home, school, workplace, places of worship, sport fields, hospitals and even grave yards.

The colonisation of land, mineral wealth and the African mind accompanied with the denial of equal opportunities to people of colour enabled white South Africans to misuse people of colour as cheap labour. In doing so they enriched themselves at the expense of the black majority. This exploitation enabled white South Africans to amass material resources which enabled them to enjoy a living standard competing with the best in the world while most South Africans of colour lived in abject poverty. The victims of colonialism and apartheid become ‘beggars’ in the country and continent of their birth and slaves on the land that rightfully belongs to them.

Colonialism and apartheid caused South Africa to become one of the most unequal societies in the world. While most white South Africans endorsed the principles of white superiority, the world community identified colonisation and apartheid as crimes against humanity.

**What is the difference between restitution and charity?**

Massive amounts of money are donated annually by Christian communities and others in South Africa, towards charitable projects. Food baskets, winter clothing and Christmas gifts are familiar acts of charity. Charity can be described as: giving out of one’s surplus; being non-relational; is often a one-time act; the giving is what the giver thinks is needed rather than what the recipient has identified as a need; and it is an act that identifies who the giver is, and who the recipient is. There is often a power dynamic between the two parties that puts the ‘giver’ in a stronger position than the recipient.

Generally, charitable giving is used to fund projects where the physical needs of many poor people are being addressed. But all too often charity, done by well-meaning givers, is merely applying a band aid on a gaping wound. It is often a short-term answer – which does more for the giver than for the recipient. Charity can be an assault on the dignity of the recipient: she is not asked what her needs are; why she is in the bad situation she finds herself in; why her community is suffering; what she thinks the solution is. But she is simply reminded that she is poor, while others have plenty.

Restitution, on the other hand, is a way of trying to make right a historical injustice. It entails recognising that a wrong has been committed; that there were perpetrators who applied the injustice or who were somehow complicit in it; that the ramifications of these injustices continue to be felt; and that giving back is the essential next step. A significant difference between charity and restitution is simply a paradigm shift on the side of the donors/perpetrators: recognising that he/she is in fact a perpetrator and is not giving out of magnanimity.

Restitution, unlike charity, is very relational; potentially costly; of a long-term nature; is developed in conversation with those toward whom restitution is being made; is an act taking place between two equal partners rather than one who always gives and another who always receives. Restitution always involves the development of relationships between givers/perpetrators and recipients/disadvantaged.

In a general sense, most corporate social investment (CSI) spending by companies and the giving to the poor by churches in the country are charitable by nature, as opposed to justice-based restitution. This also applies to most situations where a white family gives gifts to their domestic worker or gardener. Gifts by an employer can also be regarded as “fringe benefits”, and these would therefore not be restitution.

However, such CSI spending by companies and giving to the poor by churches can have a much more powerful impact upon our society if the focus thereof is justice/restitution and not charity – for this to happen a paradigm shift will be required by the givers/perpetrators. At the household level, if a white family wishes to give, for example, a house to their domestic worker, the restitution approach would be: have a conversation with the domestic worker to discuss the reasons for the big inequality in their respective living standards; in the conversation the white family acknowledges their role in this unjust history; the white family declares their willingness to take responsibility for the role they played; the white family asks what the domestic worker thinks the white family could/should contribute towards restitution; the white family then shares that they are willing to buy/build a house and asks what the domestic worker thinks of the idea.

**How much restitution should white people do before it is enough?**

It is difficult to undo all that has been done, and impossible to return what has been stolen. However, restitution will only be completely done when all the root causes of the conflict of racist colonial and apartheid rule and behaviour have been addressed.

When Gini-coefficient/unemployment rate indicators are much lower, the education levels of all racial groups in the country are compared with world standards, when the GDP for all groups is the same, and when the standard of living is equitable amongst races. When one’s life will not be shortened by decades simply by being born black in South Africa. When the injured party says that enough has been done.

When the people of South Africa start living in real peace with each other.

**Who will determine when enough restitution has been done?**

Whilst nothing can truly undo the past, a measure for when enough restitution has been done is when the section in society who have been harmed by racist colonial and apartheid policies decides that sufficient restitution has been taken place.

**If I have given a house to domestic worker some time ago, was this restitution? Or was this charity? Or was this something I should have done for my employee?**

The fact that you have a domestic worker is indicative of our unjust South African past and that our society is not a normal society. In most countries in the world people are not able to afford to pay people to do their cleaning work. It is not for the employer to decide what the domestic worker should receive (that would-be charity). The more acceptable approach is for the employer to: (i) request a conversation with the domestic worker to discuss the reasons for the huge inequality in their living standards, (ii) to acknowledge his or her role in this unjust history, (iii) to declare his or her willingness to take responsibility for the role they played, (iv) to ask what the domestic worker thinks the employer could or should contribute towards restitution, (v) to share that he or she is willing to pay to build or buy a house, asking what the domestic worker thinks about the idea. If this process has been followed the giving of a house could be considered as restitution and not charity.

**To whom should restitution gifts be distributed to get to those who’ve been harmed? And how should such distribution be handled and managed?**

It is unrealistic and impossible for individual white South Africans to undo the harm caused by racist colonial and apartheid rule. White South Africans should follow a multiple restitution approach: endorse and contribute to a specific national tax/fund where the monies should be used by a national process to address socio-economic inequalities, and secondly, get involved in doing restitution on an individual or small group level to individuals/families.

**What about restitution by businesses? Can the CSI spend be regarded as restitution? How else should businesses do restitution?**

Much of the work done by business (CSI) and churches (*barmharigheidswerk* or charity) could have a much more powerful impact in society if it is packaged in a different way. The focus of the spending should be justice/restitution focused and not charity.

**Why will the general socio-economic situation in South Africa improve when restitution is applied widely? And how will it improve?**

Sustainable peace is only possible when the root causes of a conflict are addressed. The birth of the democratic dispensation in 1994 was not the beginning of peace. It was at most a ceasefire. Much more work (restitution) is required before sustainable peace would become possible.

How we will know things have changed is when where you are born does not determine the length of your life, when the gap between the rich and poor in society is minimised and not race-based, where Gini-coefficient/unemployment rate indicators are much lower, the education levels of all racial groups in the country are compared with world standards, when the GDP for all groups is the same, and when the standard of living is equitable amongst races. When one’s life will not be shortened by decades simply by being born black in South Africa. When the injured party says that enough has been done. When the people of South Africa start living in real peace with each other.

When the poor in the society have nothing to lose it becomes a real possibility that the rich will lose everything