

International Theatre Institute ITI

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Wole Soyinka 1986

To all men and women of theatre, to all who create and to all others who share in the communion of theatre, who are consoled, sustained and challenged by its products, greetings and welcome once again to the challenges of this, our conventional "New Year" for the theatres of the world.

I proceed directly to assail one such challenge, Some may claim that it is not necessarily the most urgent preoccupation for the meager resources and potential of our art, citing in its place famine, disease, the threat of global annihilation, etc. Few will deny however that it is the most strident of these times that the shrill anguish of its victims has lately and belatedly begun to crack the stubborn callous on world conscience. I refer of course to racism, and specifically to its most perfected form as instrument of state repression-Apartheid.

Theatre has never failed to address itself to this, among other affronts to humanity. Artists in many parts of the world have taken down steps to prevent performances of their world have taken steps to prevent performances of their works or refuse to exhibit their skills in that part of the world where the state denies the humanity of the majority of its peoples. A few have chosen themes from the more notorious outrages committed by the Apartheid regime. Such artists remain aware of the limitations of their gesture, making no exaggerated claim for the capacity of any art form to redress the world and restructure human societies.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to deny the potential of this activity of man in highlighting the world's many dilemmas, in re-directing the consciousness of societies and mobilizing the responses of peoples towards eventual change. And it is this conscientisation of the quite ordinary peoples-the youths, teachers, urban workers, farmers and even businessmen etc, that sooner or later transmits its goals to rulers and governments and affects, however subtly, their policies. In the attitudes of various governments towards Apartheid, this process has been particularly self-evident in the past two or three years. We have witnessed the seeming change of heart within formerly impregnable bastions of support for the arrogant challenges of apartheid in South Africa.

The tempo of erosion is recognizably quickened. And while the intensification of struggle is an internal responsibility of the oppressed peoples themselves, the outside world cannot deny its own awareness, cannot evade a moral participation, a universal statement of solidarity: We propose therefore that this year be manifested by theatre practitioners all over the world as a year of World Theatre Against Apartheid. From mere passive withdrawal from that racist environment, dedicate a portion of their creativity to mobilizing the moral awareness of their peoples and governments, erecting a permanent bridge of their peoples and governments, erecting a permanent bridge of empathy with the violated majority of that corner of the world community: We urge voluntary institutions and governments of conscience all over the world, to give their maximum support to this humane undertaking, recognizing that neither the security nor the peace of the world can be divorced from the

total liberation of man and woman in every aspect of their daily existence, and in the guarantee of creative fulfillment for all in the common undertaking for a progressive humanity.