What is Social Cohesion and Nation-Building?

a) Defining social cohesion

The department defines social cohesion as the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities.

In terms of this definition, a community or society is cohesive to the extent that the inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability or any other distinctions which engender divisions distrust and conflict are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustained manner. This, with community members and citizens as active participants, working together for the attainment of shared goals, designed and agreed upon to improve the living conditions for all.

b) Defining Nation-Building

Nation-building is the process whereby a society with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals, to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide conscious sense of being proudly South African, committed to the country and open to the continent and the world.

Nation-building in this sense, and in the context of South Africa, cannot be the perpetuation of hierarchies of the past, based on pre-given or ethnically engineered and imposed divisions of people rooted in prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. It calls for something else; that is, a rethinking, in South African terms, of what social cohesion, linked to nation-building, should be. It should, no doubt and in essence, be directed towards the practical actualisation of democracy in South Africa.

Accordingly, a nation is conceived as a social formation based on the unity and equality of its members consisting of the following shared and recognised attributes:

- Shared Origin and history

- An internationally recognised territory

- A unitary sovereign state

- A single judicial system

- Single public education system

- Nationally recognised languages

- Nationally recognised cultures

- Nationally recognised religions

- Shared values

- Shared Symbols

- A shared national consciousness

In South Africa, the diverse cultures, languages and religions should not be seen as impediments to national unity given the statutory equality accorded to all citizens.

SOCIAL COHESION PROJECTS

a) Community conversations/dialogues

Prior to the National Social Cohesion Summit which was held in Kliptown, Soweto, from 4-5 July 2012, the Department had initiated a project on developing a National Strategy on Social Cohesion, which was to form the basis for Summit discussions. In developing the strategy, consultations with the wider South African society had to be done, and their comments and inputs to be added into the document. To gather these comments the department had to conduct a nation-wide campaign, holding community conversations or dialogues. Comments from these community conversations were incorporated into the National Social Cohesion strategy and informed discussions in the National Social Cohesion Summit.

The community conversations are an on-going project. The National Social Cohesion Summit drafted and adopted a twelve (12) point's declaration which informed the Social Cohesion implementation or operational plan. Inter alia, the declaration resolved that South Africa has, "to convene a national social cohesion report-back and monitoring summit in 2014 when we celebrate 20 years of our freedom and democracy, and thereafter at five-year intervals progress". This meant that the department had to report back to communities on how to implement the summit resolutions and make inputs for the 2014 National Social Cohesion report back summit.

A nation-building project management manual and toolkit for application at all levels of society is being developed by the Department. This nation-building project management manual and toolkit will assist in creating awareness and encourage people implement the resolutions of the national Social Cohesion Summit. It is meant to provide step-by-step guidelines on how to manage and implement the summit resolutions.

b) Awards

The inclusion of Social Cohesion awards is another project that was determined at the National Social Cohesion Summit. The summit resolved that, the existing national, heritage and other honours and awards be expanded to recognise individuals, organisations and communities that contribute significantly to Social Cohesion and nation-building. The Department, in collaboration with its entity, the National Heritage Council (NHC), has completed the feasibility study of the project. It is envisaged that the awards will be conducted towards the end of 2013.

c) Advocates for social cohesion

Advocates for Social Cohesion is a group of distinguished persons who play a prominent role in taking forward the commitments made at the National Social Cohesion Summit, including the commitment to building a nation that is caring, dignified and with a great sense of humility and mutual respect for fellow South Africans and humanity at large.

In November 2012 they presented the National Social Cohesion Summit report to the country's president, the Honourable, Mr Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma. The Department has developed a detailed implementation plan as contemplated in the 12 point summit resolutions and these eminent South Africans will present the plan to the President and cabinet.

In preparation for the 2014 National Social Cohesion report-back summit, the advocates together with the Ministry of Arts and Culture will be having a conference to chart the way-forward.

Members of the Social Cohesion advocates include the following: Judge   Yvonne Mokgoro from the Judiciary, Mr Sandile Zungu from the business sector, Mr Yusuf Abramjee from the civil society, Mr Dennis George from labour, Ms Brigalia Bam and opinion maker, Advocate George Bizos and opinion maker, Dr Alex Borraine and opinion maker Ms asmin Sooka of the TRC, Ms Glenda Wildschut of the TRC.

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