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Omar warns business to pay up or face wealth tax

Stephen Laufer

JUSTICE Minister Dullah Omar has warned that an apartheid reparations tax could be introduced if business and others privileged under the previous government did not contribute voluntarily to the president's fund for the victims of gross human rights violations.

At an African National Congress (ANC) briefing on his role as a national executive committee member, Omar said proposals had been made to compel those who benefited from apartheid to make a contribution. The organisation "views these proposals with sympathy and understanding", although "what is possible and not possible is

a matter that needs to be discussed and worked out".

Pressed for details on the possible legislation, Omar said the necessity for Parliament to compel companies to contribute via legislation would become less likely the more generous business was. There had so far been virtually no response from business to calls for voluntary contributions to the president's fund.

Referring to business leaders who were on record as opposing a wealth or reparations tax, Omar said: "If they say compelling business is not the route, they must put alternative proposals on the table."

Prof Sampie Terreblanche's suggestion of a special apartheid tax on assets of more

than R2m had been "courageous", a "jolt" and a "wake-up call" for white South Africans, especially business, "into realising the seriousness of the situation".

There was a need for reparations and rehabilitation measures to "be real" if dignity was to be restored to the majority, and if reconciliation was to succeed.

The road to reconciliation would be more perilous if there was insufficient reparation and rehabilitation, and unless concrete programmes were implemented to restore the dignity of victims, their families, and the nation. Business, particularly big business, needed to say what it proposed to contribute towards making reparations real, Omar said.

Leading business representatives last week rejected Terreblanche's proposals for a reparations tax. They said such levies were generally unwieldy and that business had not been homogenous during the apartheid era.

Omar said there was a growing perception that blacks were the only South Africans expected to extend the hand of reconciliation. Whites, especially in the business and professional sectors, had failed to respond concretely to proposals to promote reconciliation.

The suggestion from the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut that reparations should be drawn from the Sasria riot insurance fund warranted consideration, Omar said.

However, it was not an alternative to business looking at itself and what meaningful contribution it could make.

Asked to comment on former state president PW Botha's refusal to appear at a truth commission hearing on the state security council, Omar said he hoped the truth body was not put in the position of having to decide what to do with him if he failed to respond.

Commission chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu had said Botha would be subpoenaed if he did not co-operate voluntarily, and that the law would take its course if he failed to respond.

TREFWOORDE

1 *Laufer Stephen*

2 *Omar D.*

3 *waarskynlik*

4 *rehabilitering*

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