

JUST GOVERNANCE A Coalition of Conscience

Dr Otis Moss

Pastor, associate of Martin Luther King Jr,
advisor to US Presidents

'I've devoted my adult life to the Civil Rights movement, which has at its heart the unshakable paradigm that God is love, and the conviction that service, suffering and sacrifice are redemptive. It called into direct action tens of thousands of men and women of all ages, gathering them together in a 'coalition of conscience', and brought the USA a new birth of freedom.'



'It is not too late to seek a better world, and all of us have a responsibility to commit ourselves to the task during our lifetime.' This was the central message in the keynote address of Dr. Otis Moss at the plenary session on Just Governance, one of the themes of the Caux Forum for Human Security.

Dr. Moss, of Cleveland, Ohio, USA, close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King in the American Civil Rights movement, spoke of just governance in the context of non-violence.

Before outlining the history of the Civil Rights Movement, which was in the final analysis a struggle for just governance in the modern world's first democracy, Dr. King described the tragic flaws in the original American Declaration of Independence, authored largely by Thomas Jefferson.

Explaining that slaves, women, Native Americans and all those who did not own property were excluded from that first ringing declaration – 'All men are created equal' – Dr. Moss commented that it was deeply troubling to hear calls for a Supreme Court in his country that would uphold the spirit of the original constitutional document.

The long, protracted struggle for human and civil rights was rooted in the imperfections of the original document, he said. And even after three amendments to the Constitution at the end of the American Civil War, in which 600,000 people were killed, it was still necessary to continue this struggle.

'I've devoted my adult life to a movement that seeks a more just society, a movement anchored in the teachings of Jesus Christ.' At the same time, he acknowledged the contributions of other faith traditions and cultures to the American Civil Rights movement: 'No culture or religion holds the monopoly on truth.' He continued, 'we come to Caux, guided by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, the great soul of India,' referring to Gandhi's insistence on non-violence in the struggle for freedom and

justice for his country.

Emphasising the inclusive nature of the civil rights movement, he said that it called to action tens of thousands of men and women of all generations and ages, including children, gathering them together in a 'coalition of conscience.'

Just governance must be intergenerational, he said. 'A government can be measured by how it treats children, the poor, the aged and the most vulnerable in society.'

He recalled that the greatest criticism of the Birmingham movement of 1963 (part of the civil rights movement) was that it included children in the Civil Rights March. One of the participants in the movement responded to the criticism with the question: 'Why shouldn't it involve children when the movement is all about them?'

The President and Congress of the USA responded and passed the Civil Rights Bill in 1964 and the Voting Rights Bill in 1965. But the struggle for just governance was not yet over, he said. During his last days, Martin Luther King devoted his life to combating militarism and racism and to promoting environmentally friendly policies. Dr. King spoke out against 'weapons of mass destruction' such as racism, that kept millions in poverty, and policies which devoted vast resources to military action, or which neglected the environment.

Dr Otis Moss USA

Otis Moss has been the pastor of Cleveland's best-known African-American Baptist Church for many years. As a young man he was a close associate of Martin Luther King, and active in the civil rights movement. A prolific writer and frequent speaker, he has been a consultant to President Carter and others American leaders including President Obama.