



# Non-violent Communication in the Context of Zambia: An Exploration

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Received: 19 Mar., 2022

Revised: 29 May., 2022

Accepted: 05 Jun., 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Violence in all shades has been a threat to any civil society. In present times we are witnessing the turbulence of increasing tensions that are adding up to grief and agony all over the world. Undoubtedly, any kind of violence that erupts from the human minds not only affects other beings, the environment, economy, relations between states, and other aspects of modernity. The thought of humans, developed through different cultures, backgrounds, practices, and the choices we make in our lives, plays a crucial role in combating the issues of violence and terror. The Cold War is over, yet 2022 saw another war break out in Europe, with severe economic and other repercussions for the entire globe. The frequent occurrence of killings of innocent children and other unarmed persons in schools and shopping malls has become a routine affair in many parts of the world. In this paper, my aim is to highlight nonviolent communication in the context of Zambia that is inspired by the teaching of the Bible, and the changes brought by the first President of Zambia, Kenneth David Kaunda, whose thoughts were similar to those of apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, and served to inspire movements for civil rights and freedom across the world, with the objective of retaining harmony and peace.

**Keywords:** Peace, Nonviolence, Zambian Humanism, Ubuntu, Nonviolent Communication

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In Zambia, from the time of its independence under Kenneth Kaunda, it has long been held that the 'Golden Rule' in the teaching of the Bible is a rule of thumb if we were to succeed in life. Jesus Christ of Nazareth taught, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like, unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 34-40). Kenneth Kaunda's growth as a proponent of internationalism and Non-violence was propped up by his Christian faith and interaction with followers of Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, among others. Kaunda proved he was more

universalist in understanding the word "neighbor" than his opponents, to the extent that he moved ahead, diplomatically engaging with the political pariahs like Prime Ministers of South Africa, including John Vorster, and Frederick de Klerk, then considered leaders of the arch-enemy of the indigenous Africans from the era of white minority ruled South Africa. Kaunda was aware that growing ethnic animosity and violence led South Africa into a racial civil war. Amidst this violence/hatred, the racist state security forces committed widespread

**How to cite this article:** Muzyamba, F. (2022). Non-violent Communication in the Context of Zambia: An Exploration. *Int. J. Peace, Edu. Dev.*, 10(01): 09-15.

**Source of Support:** None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



human rights abuses against indigenous people. The need was felt for South Africa to release Nelson Mandela to move towards majority rule. This paper attempts to explore the tradition of non-violent communication in Zambian society.

### **Zambian Humanism, Ubuntu and Nonviolence**

Nurtured by a devout Christian faith and his African experience, Kenneth Kaunda developed a philosophy called Zambian Humanism, characterized by the following pillars: 1. Man at the center, 2. The dignity of Man, 3. Non-exploitation of Man by Man, 4. Equal opportunities for all, 5. Hard work and Self-reliance, 6. Working together, 7. The extended family, and 8. Loyalty and Patriotism (Lusaka Times, 2020; University of Pennsylvania, undated). While the philosophy placed humanity at the center of thought, words and actions, it also placed a premium on God as the Creator of humanity. In this respect, it rejected the secular Humanist view that faith in God was antithetical to human emancipation. For Zambian Humanism, faith is an essential element in understanding life issues, and human liberation. The Christian faith also input strongly in the foundation of Zambian Humanism. At public and private meetings, Kaunda frequently referred to the Golden Rule: *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”* (Mathew 7: 12).

A version of “Humanism” is the related philosophy that goes by the African name “Ubuntu,” derived from the Bantu language word for “human” or “humanity.” Many Southern, Central, and Eastern African people are largely Bantu-speaking, and “Ubuntu” hails from the Bantu language word for “human” or “humanity”. It embraces all dimensions of morality, compassion, empathy, and other indicators typifying the richness of human love, and appreciation thereof. Indeed, Kaunda’s Christian Humanism was translated into Zambian indigenous languages as “Ubuntu,” “Buntu,” “Butu,” “Buntu-susu,” and the like. And true to the philosophy, Zambia shared its resources to develop the hitherto neglected educational sector by constructing the

University of Zambia, many schools and colleges, and expanding the medical and other social sectors. Zambia also never abandoned the indigenous people from the racist-ruled countries. They were accorded the same rights as Zambians in schools, hospitals, and other facilities, despite declining revenues after the 1973 oil crisis and economic depression. Zambia also accepted the use of its territory as a rear base for the freedom fighters after the country and nationalists had failed to reason with the racist rulers in the south.

It is interesting to note here that the 1995-98 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, guided by President Nelson Mandela, and its Chair Desmond Tutu, in the spirit of Ubuntu as explained above, witnessed and heard the pain of around 23,000 victims in sittings. They considered amnesty applications from each side and kept the promise not to prosecute those who told the truth, despite many people criticizing it for “prioritizing truth over justice.” The commission was regarded as crucial to South Africa’s peaceful transition from apartheid. Further, it marked a landmark choice by the people of life and non-violent trials in exchange for full disclosure of truth as a foundation for the future.

### **Kenneth Kaunda and Nonviolence**

Enough has been said about Kaunda’s philosophy and ideology. He was also a nationalist (for Zambia), and an internationalist (for others, especially oppressed peoples). He believed in diplomacy, active engagement, and persuasive rhetoric, with all parties relevant to a problem, irrespective of their race, creed, or nationality. He was a gifted orator and musician who minted “Tiyende Pamodzi” or “Let’s Walk Together,” or “Let’s pull together,” a melodic and lyrically rich unity song that became his hallmark wherever he addressed meetings.

Among the rhetorical strategies he used were the use of song to prepare or mobilize people for a purpose, repetition for emphasis, and the use of comparisons to draw lessons. In recognition of Zambia’s efforts for peaceful, non-violent practices to reach internationally, during the liberation wars,

Zambia hosted numerous UN, AU, and regional peace conferences. It hosted the signing of peace accords among the belligerents. The following accords and meetings were pivotal to stopping growing violent conflicts:

1. Lusaka Peace Accords of 1999 – signed by Angola, Namibia, Congo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Rwanda to stop the fighting in the Great Congo War.
2. Lusaka Protocol (1994) between the MPLA and UNITA to stop fighting in Angola.
3. 1989 – Kaunda met Frederick de Klerk on plans to end the Apartheid.
4. Lusaka Accords (1984) –ceasefire agreement between South African and Angolan forces in the Angola Civil and Angolan Border Wars.
5. 1982 Kaunda met with the South African Prime Minister in P.W. Botha on the S. African border with Botswana.
6. 1975, Kaunda met Prime Minister John Vorster of South Africa on the Victoria Falls bridge.
7. Lusaka Accord (1974) signed between Portugal and Mozambique’s FRELIMO, paving the way for independence one year later.
8. Lusaka 1978 – Kaunda met Ian Smith of Rhodesia.

### **Principles of Non-violence as Taught by God Yahweh and Lord Jesus Christ**

In sharing ideas of non-violence globally, it behoves Zambians to now scrutinize the essentials of the chosen faith Christian faith. As indicated in the afore-going, Kenneth Kaunda chose the Christian faith as essential for his Philosophy, Ideology, and Politics for the governance of his people and international outlook. He chose this paradigm, and his successor, Frederick Chiluba, took it a step further and declared Zambia a Christian nation on 21 December 1991, which went into the constitution of Zambia by 1996.

#### ***1. The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”***

As indicated earlier, Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia’s

first President, frequently uttered the golden rule in an effort to help people think, say and act in more peaceful ways. The rule encourages followers of God to love their neighbor. Written in total, it reads “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*” (Matthew 22: 37-39; Mark 12:31; 1 John 2:10). In line with this, it is now said that, for over 10 years, no convicted death-sentence prisoners have been executed in Zambia, as the country moves away from the death sentence (Zambia Human Rights Commission, 2022).

#### ***2. Unconditional love, even for enemies***

A second principle emerges from the same universal love for all. ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The “others” in the Golden rule were explicated to mean a universal brotherhood and sisterhood covering all people irrespective of their place or class, origin, ethnicity, race or belief, and included one’s enemies (Proverbs 25: 21; Matthew 5:43-48). For one who grew up in Zambia, many witnessed their Presidency under Kenneth Kaunda, talking to people they liked and those across the border of the politically desirable. “Kaunda spoke to leaders irrespective of color, tribe, or political groupings.”

“He spoke to white minority Prime Ministers; John Vorster of South Africa in 1975, Ian Smith of Rhodesia in 1978, P.W. Botha in 1982, and, with South African Premier Frederick de Klerk in 1989, for the purpose of seeking long term peace and universal suffrage for the majority indigenous people”.

Many Africans were outraged by the acts of political talks with the racists, and they labeled Kaunda a traitor. The man explained Zambia’s position and the reason for opting for this route. It remains uncertain what the conditions of Southern Africa would have been today if Kaunda had chosen to remain in his comfort zone, and only engaged with his friends. “But to you who are listening, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate

you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:26). The whole idea of hosting an enemy under your roof even for hours is repulsive to many people, but the fact that Zambia under Kaunda could do it, and reap dividends in the long term is instructive to many Zambians, and other peace-loving people.

### ***3. Avoid Revenge and Retaliation***

The Lord Jesus taught: “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5: 39). And again, through the Apostle Paul: “Dear friends, but give place to God’s wrath, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’” Romans (12:19). Not once was Zambia heard to have attacked a white Mozambican, Angolan, South West African, Rhodesian or South African city, even though pressures from some quarters to retaliate would mount, after enemy incursions into Zambia. That was never allowed to happen, even after Zambia had acquired more modern warplanes in 1980 that tilted the balance of air power in her favor. The Mig 21 was faster and superior to any plane flown by the Rhodesian Air Force, and was “at least equal to” the Mirage fighter planes flown by South Africa (Christian Science Monitor, 1980). Apparently, the warplanes had been bought as a deterrent and for defensive rather than offensive purposes. Some people had been excited by the news of the purchase, hoping to see some “action,” but fortunately, the leaders were sober and reflective, continuing the path of non-violence rather than engaging in more provocative bloodshed. It is worth noting at this point that Zambia had, in line with its chosen non-aligned, balancing approach, also approached the West for modern defensive war planes against the attacks by the racists. Still, she only got a positive response from the then USSR, and China.

### ***4. Live in Peace with all***

The eight Beatitudes by Jesus Christ are always inspiring when believers think about the correct paradigm or “world view” for a good person. These

Beatitudes taught by Christ also place a premium on peace and gentleness – (Matthew 5: 1-12).

He taught:

1. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,”
2. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,”
3. Blessed are the gentle; they shall inherit the earth,”
4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and they shall be satisfied,”
5. “Blessed are merciful; they shall obtain mercy,”
6. “Blessed are the pure in heart; they shall see God,”
7. “Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God,” and
8. “Blessed are persecuted for my name; theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

All these attributes are antithetical to the employment of violence against others. Instead, they remind us that living in peace with all men and women is a duty for devoted religious people. It is expected that non-violence advocates and Conflict Resolution practitioners will increasingly review such scriptural foundations for inspiration and possible applications in the conduct of civic and other leaders so as to approximate more closely, the path God wants for Zambia.

### ***5. Reject hate speech***

The Lord Jesus forbade the use of violent speech or language. He expanded the meaning of the sixth Commandment (Thou shalt not kill – Exodus 20:13) by revealing the spirit of the law against taking human life. Knowing that evil thoughts give birth to bad evil acts, he argued for cutting the root of the wickedness. Jesus also showed that it’s not just the physical act of murder that breaks the sixth commandment (“Thou shalt not kill”). He also taught that inner anger and hostility toward other human beings breaks this law. With the “One Zambia, One Nation” rallying cry, and the rejection of tribalism and racism, Zambia has tried to live

in unity and promote socio-economic welfare. Her leaders have encouraged the highest journalistic ethics and laws, tried to help by doing the same for other nations or peoples torn by racial or tribal hate, and taught against the publication or airing in media of any hateful sentiments which beget conflict.

### ***6. Teaching on instruments of violence***

Jesus admonished the Apostle Peter not to use violence against the Roman Soldiers who arrested Jesus. He even healed and restored the ear of Malchus, which Peter had cut off. He also taught that violence breeds violence. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Due to their possession of instruments of violence in their proximity or home, many people get tempted to carry out acts that are way more than what they would have done if the means to carry out the violence had not been accessible. Zambia has been fortunate, from the time of independence in 1964, to have continued with the British tradition where the instruments of war such as firearms are kept in armories, especially machine guns and other advanced weapons, which are handled, and operated, mainly by trained security personnel. This has helped the country reduce the number of violent attacks and deaths.

### ***7. Prevention of violence***

The Lord Jesus teaches us how to prevent violence and shut it off at its origins by his teaching on the love of enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). By refusing to see anyone as an "alien" or "enemy," the violence that begins in mind through the act of labeling is stopped before it can rot, and harm people. Traditionally, many Bantu communities welcomed aliens and, after asking them questions, introduced them, and helped them settle among their new "relatives." Even though not widely discussed, even in modern Zambia, some aliens of various nationalities have now settled among Zambians and obtained citizenship status. It is hoped that around the earth, there will be increasing rejection

of the idea of people labeling each other "enemies" or "allies" on the planet, so a fresh wind of genuine brotherhood will prosper. It has, for instance, been suggested that peace has never indeed been given a chance to prosper in Europe despite the end of the Cold War in 1991 because the cold war alliances have not disbanded but actually increased in size – despite warnings that this should not happen.

Successful training in peaceful and non-violent ways of preventing conflict is being encouraged for Zambia and Africa at family, workplace, national, regional, and international levels. Zambia has also successfully carried out peacekeeping duties in various countries, under the United Nations Mandate, to stop and prevent violence.

### ***8. Transformation***

In Matthew 5: 38-42 – Jesus states "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and does not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Indeed, lack and deprivation through structural inequities are frequently at the bottom of violence, such as armed robberies by weak-minded individuals. Further, the Lord Jesus, by arguing for a change from "an eye for an eye" toward unconditional love for all, seeks transformative thought, words, and deeds for a more humane and non-violent future, even for those who hurt one previously. These teachings are already part of teachings in churches, schools, and homes in Zambia, and Zambians are expected to be more active participants in Peace-building efforts worldwide.

### ***9. Civil Resistance to overcome structural weakness***

By Jesus healing the sick on the Sabbath and overturning the tables of money changers in the Temple of Jerusalem, saying: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13; John 14:27; Mark 11: 15-17). Jesus was resisting structural wrongs in society. Kenneth Kaunda and his fellow freedom fighters employed non-violent means of struggle to attain

independence. These included trade boycotts against offending shops, protests, picketing, and marches. They learned these strategies and tactics from Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Mahatma Gandhi of India, and Martin Luther King of the USA. It is expected that aggrieved people in and outside Zambia will continue to use such non-violent tactics when aggrieved, as trade unions, civil society, and others continue to do when appropriate.

### **10. Reconciliation, purity, and forgiveness**

The Lord Jesus taught non-violent reconciliation among members of the community or church and how to deal with non-compliance to rules (Mt. 18: 15-17, 20; Mt. 18:21; Luke 23:14). “They said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her... they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him” (John 8: 4-10). Accepting that they were all sinners convicted the men to this and do differently. This use of the reflective technique for non-violence had a big impact on the audience. The church in Zambia has repeatedly led processes of reconciliation between or among leaders where it seemed they wouldn’t reconcile – with successful results. Such processes should be encouraged since they form one visible basis for any claim to tolerance, forgiveness, and Ubuntu or Humanity.

### **11. Humanity's non-violent future**

Zambia looks forward to the Heavenly peace promised for the earth. Lord God Yahweh (Bible) states through Prophet Isaiah, “And He will judge between the nations and will render decisions for many peoples, and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.” (Isaiah 2:4). It

is promised that when Jesus, the “Prince of Peace” rules, all bloodshed will cease. (Isaiah 9:2-6)“And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war” (Micah 4:3-4).

Zambians believe such a reality will be achieved physically on earth as the Kingdom of Heaven comes down to earth, as seen by the Prophet Isaiah cited earlier. Although the challenges are many, the lessons given to the earth are available in spiritual, philosophical, ideological, political, and other physical ways to achieve the lofty objective of sustainable peace and development for humanity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Zambia, through Kaunda, learned much from the Bible, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and other proponents of non-violence. Indeed, the similarities between Christian, Ubuntu, and Gandhian ideas about non-violence cannot be denied. Citing Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Kundu, V. (2022) wrote that the following fundamental pillars of Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violence are: respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation, and compassion. Indeed, these are, in a way, a reflection of similar Christian and Ubuntu principles stressing the Cosmo-centric view of humanity (*ibid.*), harmony, and universal love among humanity. Kundu (2022) also gave actual detailed guidelines for non-violent communication, which could help educationists, lawyers, and others, achieve success and harmony in professional and other settings (*ibid.*). Indeed, many have hailed Mahatma Gandhi as probably the first person in modern times to unwaveringly follow the path of non-violence as taught by Jesus (Dear, John 2017). Little wonder men and women of peace and non-violence who came after him realized he was a unique icon and example to emulate. This paper has explored non-violent communication as taught in Zambia by Kenneth Kaunda, the first President, and others after him. Under Kaunda, the people translated the philosophy into life and stood for

their neighbors, local and international. It is the chosen philosophy of the people of the country as they continue to seek to try and live the path of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood in a world so badly in need of love, compassion, and mercy.

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