

# Sins of colonial powers can be washed away

**T**HE Star-Bulletin published a story back in April headlined "De Klerk apologizes for apartheid." However, the content of the story only told that he deeply regretted the loss of freedom, dignity and development inflicted on the majority Africans by apartheid.

F.W. de Klerk, South African president, who had first defended and then rationalized the racial segregation policy of apartheid, offered this kind of "apology" last October also. That was a carefully worded evasive message: "For too long we clung to a dream of separated nation-states when it was already clear that it could not succeed... For that we are sorry."

As the African National Congress pointed out correctly, de Klerk failed to acknowledge that apartheid was fundamentally wrong and evil.

Now he comes up with a new story: "It was not our intention to deprive people of their rights and to cause misery, but eventually separate development and apartheid led to just that."

Why did it take this long for them to understand? Could they have attained this sudden enlightenment without the valiant struggle and patient suffering of the oppressed people? Colonialism, in some people's thinking, is a bygone historical process. No, it is alive and well. Many nations have managed to bring the overt political colonialism to an end. But it is still active in multifarious ways in the Third World.

Let us just consider political colonialism, leaving the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions aside. When the victims got political, the so-called "historical process" was ended abruptly and the colonizers packed up. What is amazing is that the colonizers could get away with their wrongs without making any changes in the post-colonial world polity. When I think about colonial atrocities, I cannot help comparing it with the "comfort women" concepts



**VIEW  
POINT**  
By S.P.  
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Despite the Japanese government's initial denials and evasive responses to accusations of wrongdoing, the Korean comfort victims continue to campaign for justice. In the colonial arena too, people have been struggling to cope with the recent history and attempting to tackle the situation politically. The "comforted" in both cases care little about these struggles because they are quite comfortable now.

**L**AST October, a resolution was passed by the U.S. Senate which acknowledged the Jan. 17, 1893 usurpation of Hawaii as an illegal act and expressed the regret of the United States. This was not exactly an action of apology as such; neither did it contain any reparations to redress the grievances of the native Hawaiians for the loss of their land and resources and independence. Even that empty resolution was stymied by the House later.

Also last October, Emperor Akihito of Japan merely "deplored" the Japanese occupation of China in 1931-45 which killed millions of Chinese.

(Last month, 48 years after Japan's surrender, new Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa spoke more bluntly than past government leaders about Japan's World War II aggression. He offered his "humble condolences" to war victims in neighboring countries of Asia and around the world.)

Touching on another era of aggression, just before the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America, Pope John Paul commented to reporters on his way to the

Dominican Republic that European explorers committed sins while colonizing the Western hemisphere. But he hailed the spreading of Christianity as "one of the great events in history."

In June, French President Francois Mitterrand visited Vietnam, the country ruled by France for nearly a century until 1954. "Taking a fresh look" at the nine-year war between Vietnamese nationalists and the French colonial forces, he said: "I always said this war, a war between France and Vietnam, was a mistake. It was wrong."

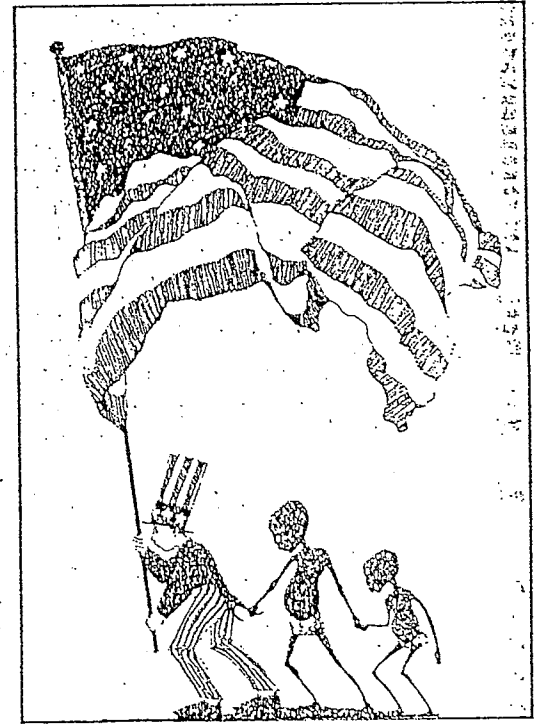
These are all evasive and amoral disclaimers, not responsibility-assuming apologies. "Regret," "deplore," "sorry" are different from "apology."

A true apology should include repentance of the victimizer and seeking of the victim's forgiveness. You need some extraordinary human qualities for that: moral courage to see your wrongs, spiritual wisdom to see the right, political will to rectify the wrongs, and solemn undertaking not to repeat them ever.

The colonial powers have to face the judgment of the world community and pay for their mistake.

**F**IRST, they must agree to the formation of an international commission on the destruction and damages of colonialism. They must cooperate with their respective victims and this commission in the fact-finding mission and the preparation of a report for the world community.

Second, they must render an unconditional apology for their colonial atrocities and ask for forgiveness from their victims. Third, they must pay reparations to the affected people in cash, kind and training. They may undertake sister towns/cities project



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and contribute to rebuilding the victim country. They may open up their borders for their victims to engage freely in trade and commerce, exchange programs and employment schemes.

They should rewrite history in such a way that it addresses the truth, acknowledges wrongs, and accommodates victims' grievances. They should open up new communication channels to understand the cultural and historical heritage of their victims.

They must undertake legally and morally not to commit this crime any more. Until then the world polity will continue to be a calamity as it is today. There can be no peace without justice.

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