

Gratifying focus on next year's Book Fair

The focus country for the 2020 Göteborg Book Fair is South Africa. It is a choice that is welcomed by the Church of Sweden, which is the Book Fair's largest partner.

"It is with pleasure and inspiration that we are starting the work arranging next year's programme, which will be characterised by the Church of Sweden's longstanding involvement in South Africa," says Archbishop Antje Jackelén.

South Africa was the first country to which the Church of Sweden sent missionaries, in 1876. They founded schools, built hospitals and churches, and conducted humanitarian aid work for a long time in a country characterised by discrimination and segregation – in a system that became known as apartheid. It was in these missionary schools that the leaders of the liberation movement were shaped, including Nelson Mandela, Steven Biko, Thabo Mbeki and Desmond Tutu.

From the mid-1950s, Swedish missionaries made active efforts to disseminate knowledge about, and create opposition to, the apartheid system.

"This was long before the Swedish media began to seriously draw attention to the situation in South Africa," says the archbishop.

The Church of Sweden actively supported churches and democracy movements in South Africa during the apartheid era. There was also great involvement in these issues at home in Sweden, with demonstrations, torchlight processions and thematic services of worship in parishes from north to south, featuring songs about freedom and the fight against oppression.

When the apartheid system finally collapsed, the South African Church Council, SACC, which includes the Church of Sweden's Lutheran Collaborative Church ELCSA, played an important role in the events that led to the release of imprisoned leaders and the first democratic elections in April 1994.

Today, the Church of Sweden continues its close cooperation with local churches in the fight against poverty and against the widespread corruption in the country.

The Church of Sweden has regularly welcomed guests from South Africa to the Book Fair over the years, such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, his daughter and human rights campaigner Mpho Tutu and the doctor Ingrid le Roux.

"We are looking forward to having a presence at the Book Fair next year that reflects our close and deep relationship with South Africa, but which also looks at the major challenges the country faces today," says Mikael Ringlander, project leader for the Church of Sweden's work at the Book Fair. .

Caption: The Church of Sweden has regularly welcomed guests from South Africa to the Book Fair. This picture, taken at the 2014 Book Fair, shows Bishop Desmond Tutu together with Archbishop Antje Jackelén and Mpho Tutu. Photo: Mikael Ringlander