



THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OR TAMBO MEMORIAL LECTURE BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE 24 OCTOBER 2014

Vice Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare, Dr Mvoyo Tom,

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Horst Freitag,
Master of Ceremonies,
Members of the Tambo family,
Members of the Fort Hare community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we speak of the life, work and thought of Oliver Tambo, we cannot but speak of the unwavering desire of the South African people to be free.

We cannot but speak of the determined struggle to end oppression and exploitation in all its manifestations.

For there are few individuals in our history who embody this desire, who embody this struggle, more than Isithwalandwe Oliver Reginald Tambo.

There are few individuals whose singular contribution to the cause of

freedom will be felt for generations to come.

Oliver Tambo was not only the President of the African National Congress during the worst excesses and most extreme repression of the apartheid regime. He was also the leader of a global movement to eradicate a system that was rightly determined to be a crime against humanity.

Oliver Tambo was an internationalist.

He understood that the freedom of his people could not be divorced from the freedom of all people everywhere. He sought to build strong bonds of solidarity with other nations, not only so that South Africa may be free, but so that together we could build a better world.

We have just returned from Lesotho, a neighbour that stood by us during the darkest moments of our history - a neighbour that paid a heavy price for its support for the struggles of the South African people.

We recall with great sadness the Maseru massacre of 1982, in which 30 South Africans and 12 Basotho were killed at the hands of the apartheid state.

We recall the words of Oliver Tambo at the funeral of those who died, when he said:

"These events have united us because, your Majesty, your people responded to this massacre with the courage that is part of their tradition and part of their history."

That relationship has survived to this day. It motivates the efforts of SADC to bring stability to the Kingdom of Lesotho.

The courage of the Basotho that Oliver Tambo spoke about in 1982 remains in evidence today, as all parties in the country work towards a common resolution of the challenges they currently face.

In the spirit of Oliver Tambo, we will continue to stand with the people of

Lesotho as they forge a better future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Oliver Tambo has left us a rich legacy.

Not only did he struggle against the injustices of his time, but he established the foundation for a democratic future.

Though he would be the last to admit it, in many senses he is the architect of our freedom.

He led us to the threshold of our democracy.

It remains a source of great sadness that he did not live to finally cast his vote for a government based on the will of all the people.

We nevertheless draw comfort from the fact that the vision to which he dedicated his life - of a free and democratic society - remains at the centre of everything we do.

The values that he espoused and the qualities he possessed continue to inspire and motivate us.

Oliver Tambo was among the first leaders of the ANC to champion the empowerment of women. He understood that South Africa could not be free until its women were free.

His firm, principled stance sometimes placed him at odds with prevailing attitudes and cultural norms. Yet he never relented.

Like him, we should never relent.

For though we have made great strides in improving the representation of women in almost all spheres of society, there is still much that we need to do to combat gender discrimination, oppression and exploitation.

We cannot claim that South Africa is free for as long as its women are subject to crimes of violence and abuse.

We cannot claim that South Africa is free for as long as girl children are forced to drop out of school, or for as long as women do not enjoy the same opportunities for development and advancement as men.

We owe it to Oliver Tambo to continue this struggle.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Oliver Tambo was a unifier.

He understood that nothing of value could be achieved unless we were united in our efforts.

Even during periods of great danger and great difficulty, when it seemed that the centre would not hold, he worked tirelessly to ensure that the movement and the people remained united and focused.

He managed to do so without suppressing divergent views.

Rather he created space for people to express, engage and persuade. And in so doing, arrive at common positions that all could embrace and defend.

As we grapple with the challenges of the present, we would be well advised to draw on the example of OR Tambo.

Speaking at the ANC's first legal National Consultative Conference inside the country, in December 1990, Tambo said:

"One can never overemphasise the importance of unity. Our very survival as a cohesive movement depends on our unity in action. The struggle is far from over. If anything, it has become more complex, and, therefore, more difficult."

The passage of time has not altered the significance of that statement. More than two decades after he spoke, Tambo's words remain relevant.

The struggle we continue to fight - against poverty and inequality - is more complex and more difficult. It requires unity of purpose and action.

Yet we find great rifts in our society. We remain divided along lines of race, gender and class. We find divisions between the urban and the rural, between the employed and the unemployed, between the left and the right (and those who present themselves as the even more left).

We find divisions within our movement, where the politics of power, patronage and personal advancement have steadily eroded our organisational fabric.

These divisions militate against the attainment of the truly free, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society for which Oliver Tambo fought.

They undermine the impressive gains we have made.

Now more than ever, we are called upon to heal these rifts, to confront these divisions.

We need to unite all South Africans around a common programme of change that addresses the significant social and economic challenges that still hinder our progress towards a society in which all may experience a better quality of life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Oliver Tambo was an incisive thinker.

He had a remarkable ability to understand the environment, to analyse the balance of forces, and to formulate an appropriate course of action.

He possessed an intellectual honesty.

He would tell no lies and he would claim no easy victories.

And as we mark the 20th anniversary of the attainment of democracy, we can indeed point to significant strides made in establishing stable and resilient democratic institutions, in turning around our economy and placing it on a path of growth, and in addressing many of the basic needs of the poor.

But, outstanding though our achievements may be, we are acutely aware that we still have massive challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

If we fail to meaningfully address these challenges, not only will we be unable to right the economic and social wrongs of apartheid, but we may find that the very achievements of the last two decades are gradually eroded.

We know that the challenges we face have deep roots.

The country we inhabit today is the product of three centuries of dispossession and exploitation.

Most of our people were deprived of productive assets, were denied the opportunity to run their own businesses, and were refused the education that is the right and desire of every person.

We have the means to overcome these challenges. We have the means to build a new country.

Our history tells us what is possible when vision is matched by application, and when commitment is matched by capability.

Even when faced with the most intractable of problems, South Africans are capable of the greatest feats of collective action.

From the formation of the African National Congress in 1912 to the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign of 1952 to the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961, our people have demonstrated a remarkable ability to cast aside the jealousies that Pixley ka Seme spoke of to forge a common

course of action.

Master of Ceremonies,

Oliver Tambo was a builder. He built alliances. He forged partnerships.

For three decades he travelled the globe meeting heads of state, union leaders, activists, business people, cultural workers, celebrities, community leaders, revolutionaries.

He ignited in all of them a shared determination to fight for the rights and freedoms of all people. He rallied them behind a shared vision of a different society and a different world.

That vision still remains.

If we are to pursue that vision - if we are to achieve a better life for all - we need to tackle poverty, unemployment and inequality. We need to radically transform our economy.

The National Development Plan seeks an economy that serves the interests of all South Africans, one that is able to absorb people seeking work, one that is competitive, with a rising share of income going towards investment.

It envisages an economy that is more diverse, both in terms of what we produce and in terms of who owns, manages and works in that economy. We seek firms that are profitable and that play a constructive role in supporting development and social cohesion. We seek an effective state able to support business expansion, protect the rights of workers and drive the transformation of the economy.

Through more effective provision of a broader social wage, we should enable even the poorest of people to have a decent standard of living, to build the capabilities to get better jobs, higher incomes and a broader range of benefits.

Given our history of exclusion and the skewed distribution of wealth and income, it is only natural for economic policy to be among the most contested terrains of discourse.

While there are areas of disagreement, there is much more in the plan that enjoys widespread support.

Nevertheless, we need to remain engaged on the areas where we differ, for it is only through honest, open dialogue that we will be able to forge broad consensus on the path we need to follow.

We need to be united on these matters because achieving the targets set out in the plan will require an extraordinary effort.

It is evident that no social force on its own can fulfil either its own interests or achieve the shared objective of growth and development.

The private sector, for example, cannot flourish without a capable and effective state. The state cannot achieve its developmental objectives without a strong vibrant private sector. Workers cannot improve their long term earnings without a growing private sector and employers cannot expect to grow their businesses without the support, input and collaboration of workers.

And none of those social partners can grasp the nature of the challenges faced or appreciate the solutions required without an engaged and vibrant intelligensia.

Without evidence, without analysis, without critical review, we will never succeed in our efforts. We need our universities, our institutes and our research bodies to guide and advise.

Most importantly, we need the people of South Africa to be directly involved in undertaking these tasks.

Vice-Chancellor,
Ambassador,

Colleagues,

The achievement of democracy was the culmination of years of tireless struggle. Through our efforts, working together, we overcame decades of conflict and animosity and mistrust. We found a solution where many said a solution could not be found.

We owe much of this to Oliver Tambo.

He was a visionary, who realised, when few others did, that negotiations with the apartheid regime were inevitable.

Bravely, and at great expense to his health, he mobilised the ANC, the country and our allies on the continent in preparation for negotiations as a new terrain of struggle.

We succeeded thanks to him.

We succeeded because our vision was far greater and more compelling than any of the myriad obstacles we encountered.

Even in the darkest moments, even as we suffered setbacks, our resolve never slackened and our determination never wavered.

We are a democratic nation today because we refused to accept as inevitable the circumstances in which we found ourselves.

We imagined a different South Africa. We imagined a new nation.

We worked together to achieve it. And we prevailed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even when faced with the most intractable of problems, South Africans are capable of the greatest feats of collective action.

From where we stand today, there seem to be few problems more

intractable than an unemployment rate upwards of 25%, of a generation of young people without the skills and experience to find meaningful work in the formal economy.

There are few problems that seem more intractable than the poverty and inequality in South Africa today.

And yet, like Oliver Tambo taught us, we remain hopeful.

We do so not because we are unable to comprehend the enormity of the challenges we face. We do so not because we are naïve.

We remain hopeful because our lived experience confirms what each of us innately believes - that there is no obstacle that we cannot overcome. There is no problem that does not contain the possibility of a solution.

Let me conclude where the National Development Plan begins.

In its vision statement, it imagines our country in 20 years time. It says:

We, the people of South Africa, have journeyed far since the long lines of our first democratic election on 27 April 1994, when we elected a government for us all.

Now in 2030 we live in a country which we have remade?

Once, we uttered the dream of a rainbow. Now we see it, living it. It does not curve over the sky.

It is refracted in each one of us at home, in the community, in the city, and across the land, in an abundance of colour.

*When we see it in the faces of our children,
we know: there will always be, for us, a worthy
future.*

It was to that worthy future that Oliver Tambo dedicated his life.

And it is to that worthy future that we, now, must dedicate ours.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY THE PRESIDENCY

24 October 2014

Website: www.thepresidency.gov.za