

ANC Today

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THIS WEEK:

*** Letter from the President: Let us together honour those who brought hope**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Let us together honour those who brought hope

Like all others, our struggle imposed many sacrifices on those who chose to fight for freedom, and on the people as a whole. As we go about our daily work to build the new South Africa, many among us quietly carry the pain and the anger occasioned by some of the criminally inhuman things the oppressor did to perpetuate the apartheid system.

As we negotiated the peaceful resolution of the conflict in our country, we were very conscious of the fact that if nothing was done to address and assuage that pain and anger, a terribly destructive conflict would ensue.

For this reason pursuing the strategic goal of peace, stability and national reconciliation that had always been a central pillar in the policies of our movement, we decided on the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We have also worked and are working in millions of other ways to build a new South Africa based on a new reality of peace, stability, non-racism and national reconciliation. The remembrance and celebration of our heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives so that all South Africans have the possibility to live together in conditions of democracy and peace, is a vital part of the important process on national reconciliation.

Such occasions give the possibility to all our people to celebrate a shared pantheon of heroes and heroines, and thus begin to develop a common heritage that emphasises a common destiny rather than a divided past. This is especially important given that here we speak of patriots who engaged in struggle to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor, ever loyal to the

vision that South Africa belongs to all who live in it.

However, our recent experience, when we lost two of our outstanding leaders, Walter Sisulu and Beyers Naude, showed how far we are from achieving this goal. I refer here to the fact that so many of our people "discovered" these heroes only after their death.

It was only when they were no more that those who had known nothing about them began to ask the question - why were such noble South Africans subjected to the persecution they were forced to endure! Why did we know so little about them while they were alive!

And these were towering figures with long records of struggle, who were celebrated by millions among us as well as other people beyond our borders! Nevertheless there were some in our country who either did not know them or associated their names with things negative, only to be surprised at the moment of their death.

Forty years ago, on the 6th of November, 1964, not long after Walter Sisulu and his comrades were given life sentences at the Rivonia trial, the apartheid regime executed six of our liberation fighters, combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe. These were Vuyisile Mini, Wilson Kayingo, Zinakile Mkaba, Nolali Mpentse, Daniel Ndongeni and Samuel Jonas.

The apartheid courts had found them guilty of eliminating one among them who had turned traitor and then worked for the forces of repression of the apartheid regime. The oppressors would not tolerate that they should be deprived of a valued informer. They would not allow the understanding to become firmly entrenched, that the reward for the betrayal of the democratic struggle was death.

Fully understanding that the death had occurred not in pursuit of criminal ends, but for the liberation of all South Africans from a racist tyranny and the suppression of the apartheid crime against humanity, the peoples of the world waged a united struggle demanding that the lives of the six patriots should be spared.

Thirsty for the blood of the patriots, the Pretoria regime refused to listen. And so our country lost six brave men of conscience that would have been welcomed in all other countries of the world as outstanding examples of the nobility of the human soul. The oppressors interred their remains in paupers' graves.

Despite this act of judicial murder, intended to intimidate our movement and

people into submission to tyranny, victory was won. 30 years after the martyrs died at the hands of the apartheid hangman, the apartheid regime was defeated. Though dead, Vuyisile Mini and his comrades had scored the success they sought, in the interests of all our people and all humanity.

The achievement of the freedom for which they sacrificed their lives gave us the possibility to exhume their bodies and rebury them with the dignity due to such heroes of the people. One such place of final rest for these heroes is the Emlotheni Memorial Park in Port Elizabeth, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality.

Exactly 40 years after they were executed, on 6 November 2004, a memorial service will be held at Emlotheni Memorial Park. Emlotheni had served during the years of struggle against apartheid as a venue for rallies organised to mobilise the people further to intensify the struggle. As activists for our liberation, Vuyisile Mini and others had known this sacred place well. It was therefore fitting that it should provide their final place of rest.

Emlotheni Memorial Park has become one of our honoured heritage sites. It is a place open to all to visit, reflect on what happened in the past, and make silent vows to cherish and defend the freedom we have won, and respect the memory of those who laid down their lives so that we could gain our liberty.

On many occasions various people in our country have regretted the fact that some of our citizens tend to stay away from events that celebrate our national heritage. I speak here of such heritage as our Human Rights Day on 21 March, our Youth Day on 16 June and Women's Day on 9 August.

Soon after the new national flag was adopted, some others made it a point, especially on some sports occasions, to carry and display the old flag of apartheid South Africa. To this day, there are some who will not join in singing the first two stanzas of our National Anthem.

And yet all these, the National Days and the National Symbols should serve to unite our people, standing out as emotional moments and icons that speak to the shared destiny of our diverse but united people. To salute and honour them is as important a contribution to the nurturing and further entrenchment of the spirit of national reconciliation as any other activity in which we might engage.

The ceremony to honour Vuyisile Mini and others will provide an opportunity for all the people of the Nelson Mandela Metro, black and white, to come together to say, together, we salute these fallen heroes who laid down their lives so that all of us can live together and in peace in the new South

Africa that is giving so much hope to all our people.

Those who knew the martyrs, who were moved by their humanity, by the powerful and melodic singing of Vuyisile Mini, and inspired by their courage even at the moment of death, will still carry the pain of their death when they should be alive.

Nevertheless as they gather at Emlotheni, they will not be harbouring any desire for revenge against those who took away the lives of patriots whose memories they cherish. They will be proud that these heroes refused the temptation to betray the cause of freedom in return for miserable lives lived in the shame of treachery.

Surely, it is not asking too much to say to those whom apartheid sought to benefit - respect and honour as our common national heroes and heroines all these who have brought peace to our land, friendship among our people, reconciliation among those who saw one another as mortal enemies, and hope to all of us.

Thabo Mbeki