

A TALK DELIVERED BY AZAPO PRESIDENT, MOSIBUDI MANGENA, AT THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AZAYO HELD IN PORT ELIZABETH TECHNIKON: 22 SEPTEMBER 2001

Theme: Youth Development through Service and Sacrifice

Programme Director,

Distinguished Guests,

Comrades,

Please allow me to express my gratitude and delight for being invited to come and address this National Congress of the Azanian Youth Organisation. Day after day, year after year, you just continue to make us proud in the Black Consciousness Movement family. Those of us who have a keen and direct interest in the goings-on in AZAYO have been pleasantly surprised by the rapid growth and relative stability achieved by the organisation over the past few years. There is no doubt that you have come of age. There are good prospects that you will relive the positive attributes of your predecessors like the South African Students' Organisation, National Youth Organisation (NAYO) and SASM, from which you draw your inspiration and political legacy. This fully packed colourful Congress bears a living testimony to this assertion.

I have been made aware that this Congress is dedicated to the memory of your late former President Thami Mcerwa. This is a sign of maturity. As if to commend this effort beforehand, Steve Biko once cautioned that "a nation that forgets its martyrs will itself soon be forgotten". The theme of your Congress finds perfect expression in Comrade Mcerwa's rich contributions in the struggle for youth development in this country. Here was someone who was not merely prepared to lay down his life, but someone who was to give meaning to this ultimate sacrifice by living his entire life in accordance with the dictates of our people's interests. That was a life well lived. When they say leadership and comfort are not compatible, they are actually describing the life of Mcerwa – a man who had no experience of comfort in his lifetime.

We remember vividly that countless attempts were made on his life, and each time he defeated death. At one stage he was attacked by a group of gun-wielding would-be assassins and left for dead. Once again his bullet-riddled body scorned death and got back to work as usual. One newspaper, overwhelmed by this occurrence, referred to Mcerwa in its caption as 'a leader with the life of a cat'. If we remind ourselves that Comrade Mcerwa held a Masters Degree at the time of his death, we might be compelled to ask why he would return to the struggle every time he miraculously survived death? The answer is contained in your Congress theme, "service and sacrifice."

Indeed, if you have not decided what it is that you will live and die for, your life is meaningless. You are dead alive. There is meaning in and essence to your life if you live for something. That something can only be decided by you, but that something must be to the benefit of humanity if it is to be genuine and worthwhile.

To talk and do in this manner is to pay tribute to a gallant fighter I have known very closely, and have had occasion to meet in distant lands.

Young people under apartheid and white racism were subjected to myriads of systems and conditions, all of which were designed to arrest and cripple their development. This is particularly true of the black section of the young population. A cobweb of racial legislation, disabling political and economic conditions were imposed by the apartheid regime to ensure we had a youth with a distorted self-concept and low self-esteem. The parents and grandparents of this youth were themselves victims of different forms of brutal oppression at different times in history. These various generations of parenthood passed the subculture of chronic humiliation and disfigured social fabric on to their off-spring. So our young people have a first hand experience of poor housing conditions, unemployment and its consequences like high levels of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and the general disintegration of social networks and communities. In a nutshell, black people were denied their basic human rights.

Where social institutions are under siege of the nature described above, the family unit is always the first casualty. The family is one basic unit that plays a critical role in the socialisation of the child at its formative stages. Unfortunately, the family has little time left for parenting as they expend much of their time grappling with structural miseries. Hence it comes as no surprise that in their over-crowded *mikhukhu*, parents have a hard time nurturing their children, and imparting the values and norms they hold dear. Kids tend to learn too many wrong things in a very short space of time. With the moral fibre of society having gone down the drain, teenage pregnancies are in abundance. Such pregnancies soon disrupt the correct sequence of priorities of the teenager. His or her functional role in society is catapulted from a dependent kid into a still dependent father or mother. Scarce resources that should have been dedicated to the upbringing and education of the teenage parent get diverted to the care of the newly born baby. Even though the Constitution protects the right to education of pregnant learners, the schooling environment is not adequately equipped to provide the requisite health care for pregnant teenagers. The idea of separate schools for pregnant teenagers has not yet been in full swing due to lack of resources.

Aids is on the rampage wasting the lives of our people. The more vulnerable victims are said to be young people according to available data.

A greater number of people in prisons are young people. Our youth is exposed to criminal activities at an early age. They indulge in drugs, alcohol and gangsterism. They come from dysfunctional families and communities where there are hardly any role models to look up to. Crime presents an attractive image to them. They have seen a notorious thug in the community owning a fleet of German cars, while a respectable teacher in the community still travels by taxi or train to work. Worse still, the very few black professionals we have migrate to town leaving the townships and villages devoid of any role models. The black elite carts their kids to former model C schools in town where they make their huge financial contribution. This tends to condemn our school system in the villages and townships to perpetual lack of resources.

The scenarios I have just drawn make a strong plea for youth development by way of a concerted and sustained effort to overhaul and transform all institutions that entrench negative stereotypes about young people. It is not fair for society to fail young people and still call them all sorts of names like “the lost generation” or “marginalised youth”.

In collaboration with AZASCO, AZAYO could:

1. Form health support units to give care and counselling to Aids victims. Your members who are pursuing studies or are qualified in disciplines like medicine, pharmacy, nursing, social work etc could be mobilised to participate in such a well managed programme. You may pilot the programme at a few and controlled areas at first.
2. Revive the anti-drugs awareness campaign, and get some personnel to run it effectively. This should involve the sensitisation of young people of the damages of all drugs – legal and illegal. The use and abuse of legal drugs such as tobacco and alcohol benefit no one. Think about it, nobody has ever improved his or her life by smoking or getting drunk. They all just waste your wealth, health, time and reputation.
3. Run some legal awareness clinics. You have members who are either studying law or are already qualified. These comrades and their skills must be of service to our communities.
4. Initiate literacy programmes to help our illiterate citizens. There are 6 million compatriots who cannot read or write. They need help from all of us who can read and write. We can do that by starting literacy projects in our areas, or joining the existing ones that require volunteers. You develop and grow as an individual when you help others.
5. Revive and co-ordinate sporting activities for the youth, and campaign for the installation of facilities where these do not exist in our communities. Sporting codes such as rugby,

cricket, swimming etc. must be promoted right from primary schools upwards. The absence of these activities at primary schools in the villages and townships may partly explain why it is that we do not have sufficient supply of black sports-persons at national level.

6. Volunteer to give assistance of one sort or another to trade unions. They might be involved in a strike, picketing or any such thing.
7. Help in agricultural activities in the villages.
8. Promote the culture of reading and writing in our society by, among other things, reading yourself. Buy books, and buy your younger brothers and sisters that are still at school books to read, especially books by us and other authors on the continent. A nation that does not read cannot progress and cannot compete with others on the international scene. By all means, buy CDs that keep you jiving, but you also need books to nourish your brain and your soul. And when you learn from these books, you will be a better person that understands the world better.
9. In addition to what we have just mentioned, do look for opportunities to take part or start other community development projects and programmes. Our communities can only be developed by us, and as young people you have a lot to contribute.

But to be able to do all these things you need an ideology. Any viable development programme has to be based on ideology. That ideology is Black Consciousness in our case. We have to teach each other the basic tenets of BC that primarily hinge upon *ubuntu*. Central to the teachings of BC is to put the collective interests of the community above the interests of the individual. The essence hereof is nothing else but service and sacrifice.

An ideology as a coherent, well-articulated system of beliefs, values and goals, is not just meant to justify action, but more importantly to move people into action. BC, therefore, provides us with a philosophical framework and a practical programme that guides us into positive action.

It is well and good to have an ideology—a revolutionary ideology. But ideology is meaningless without a solid and cohesive organisation. We have already said our ideology is BC. Our organisation is the Black Consciousness Movement, the leading party of which is AZAPO. AZAYO, AZASCO, AZASM, and Imbeleko are all organs of AZAPO. There exists an organic relationship between these components. If one organ is weak and does not do its designated function it will have a negative effect on the entire organism. Thus AZAPO cannot be strong if its growth points like AZAYO and AZASCO are weak.

Your organisation must be well polished and lubricated for the long journey ahead. There is no time for playing. Roll up your sleeves, and let us all work. Let us go all the way to organise our people. There can be no substitute for organisation.

There is nothing that kills an organisation like lack of discipline. Everything you do, do it in accordance with order, method, plan and discipline. Lack of discipline destroys the organisation like a virus destroying the immune system of the body.

With these few words, I wish your Congress fruitful deliberations. All indications are that you are an organisation of the moment. I trust that the product of this Congress will be to mobilise for an AZAPO government. You must always remember that all our good programmes mean little if we are not in power, for they will never be implemented. Instead, they will collect dust on the shelves, or be stolen by others. The key lies in your actions.

I thank you