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# **DISCLOSURE OF AIDS -**

**Better partial than none.  
Better full than partial!**

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# **DISCLOSURE OF THE CONDITION OF A PERSON STRICKEN WITH HIV/AIDS**

Introduction:

There has been a great deal of publicity generated about the disclosure by Mr Nelson Mandela that his son, Mr Makgatho Mandela, had died of HIV/Aids. Newspapers used front page headlines to narrate the event. Editorials sang Mandela's praise for the courage shown in making the disclosure. Radio show journalists competed with each other for composing the highest degree of praise they could muster for the man.

Is the matter as straightforward as it appears to be? A conscious public never takes media presentation at its face value. There are, almost invariably, many forces and motives working behind the scene. The discerning reader will always pause and seek hidden meaning through analysis and contemplation.

## **PLACING EVENTS IN CONTEXT**

1. It is necessary to look at the wider picture and try and place events in the context of that picture. The wider picture is that there is a deep split within the ANC. It has been there for well over twenty years. That split in turn is a manifestation of a split in the South Africa Communist Party.
2. Among the leading figures in the one faction have been and/or are Govan Mbeki (now late), Raymond Mhlaba (also late), Joe Gqabi (deceased) and their successors, Thabo Mbeki, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, Joel Netshitenzhe, Patrick Lekota, the Pahad brothers, Essop and Aziz, Jabu Moleketi, Mrs Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. The leading figures of the other faction are Joe Slovo,(deceased), Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu (deceased), Ahmed Kathrada, Mac Maharaj, brothers Mo and Shabir Shaik, Blade Nzimande, Jeremy Cronin and other members of the openly functioning faction of South African Communist Party.
3. Mr. Jacob Zuma, the Vice President, has been guilty of faction hopping. Initially, he was of the Slovo faction and in a public contest with the Mbeki faction, he defeated Patrick Lekota for the leadership position of the ANC in KZ Natal. This was followed by a reconciliation by Zuma with the Mbeki faction. That is how he

became Vice President of the ANC and of South Africa. This was followed by yet another switch of loyalty – back again to the Slovo faction.<sup>1</sup>

4. One does not know the real reason for the last switch of faction loyalty. It could have been something that had nothing to do with politics but everything with money! Whatever it was, it made him a mortal enemy of the Mbeki faction, which is presently going all out to destroy him politically.<sup>2</sup>

Make no mistake. The person occupying the second highest position in the ANC and in the South African government would never have been attacked, as Zuma continues to be, by the Scorpions and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, without explicit instructions to do so by the real decision making body of the Mbeki faction.

5. The above gives the reader some idea of the picture or context in which political actions and statements are made.

## THE DISCLOSURE

1. After Chief Buthelezi made public disclosure of HIV/AIDS being the cause of the death of his son and his daughter, Nelson Mandela could do no less. Already, by making the public disclosures, Buthelezi and the IFP were one step ahead of the ANC, especially the Mabuchi and his band of Aids denialists which refused until the very end to state/admit that its high profile members, Parks Mankahlana and Peter Mokaba had died of HIV/AIDS.
2. As was the case with Buthelezi, Mandela's disclosure was a direct assault on Thabo Mbeki who denied that he knew of any person who had died of HIV/AIDS! In view of the fact that millions of South Africans have the HI virus and in view of the fact that hundreds of thousands in this country have died and are dying of HIV/AIDS, Mbeki's denial is particularly callous and a distancing from the unfortunate victims.<sup>3</sup> It was the callousness which invited a stinging riposte from Lawrence Dube of Kaya FM talk Show:

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<sup>1</sup> By this time Joe Slovo was dead and the mantle of leadership of that faction of the SACP fell on Mandela.

<sup>2</sup> When a person is destroyed politically, economic ruin follows. A good example is Mac Maharaj. Once you join the millionaires' brigade, you will not manage on a market related salary.

<sup>3</sup> When it suits him Mbeki is quick to claim close affinity to everything in Africa. See his "I am an African" speech.

“Unlike President Thabo Mbeki, I know someone who has died of Aids. And that person is my brother.”<sup>4</sup>

The statement was made at the public funeral of his brother.

3. The disclosure made by Mandela about the cause of death of his son did not come easily. We are told that his son and his family withheld the information about the illness from Mandela and informed him of it just seven months prior to the death. The family was reluctant and uncomfortable about releasing the information, even to the father.
4. Mandela claims that one should treat HIV/AIDS “Just like any other illness”. If that were the case, then why was the public led to believe that Mr Makgato Mandela was being treated for problems of the pancreas, gall bladder, lungs etc. Everything except HIV/AIDS! Mandela’s anecdote of how he disclosed to his fellow prisoners on Robben Island that he had contracted tuberculosis does not help. Mandela did not wait until he died before making his fellow prisoners aware of the disease he had.

The sad fact of the matter is that HIV/AIDS is *not* viewed like any other illness. This is a reality which we must accept as being in existence. To erase this reality there has to be a massive campaign to make people accept that HIV/AIDS is like any other *deadly* condition; there is nothing morally reprehensible to have contracted it; that there should be no stigma attached to it.

5. Where possible, it is far more preferable to make a disclosure while the affected person is alive. For a start, the person can educate his listeners about the dangers of Aids; about how to avoid getting it; what steps to take once you know that you have it. The public will see the Aids-stricken person socialising with family and friends to demonstrate that Aids is not contracted by touching, hugging or kissing. The advantages are endless.
6. The question that people are asking is: Had Mr Makgato Mandela overcome his medical crisis in hospital would there have been a public disclosure that he had contracted Aids?

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<sup>4</sup> Mail and Guardian of 31/10/03

## THE PUBLICITY GARNERED.

The sad occasion was used to publicly assert that Mr. Makgato Mandela had died of Aids. The publicity garnered from the public announcement constituted a heavy body blow to the section of the Mbeki faction which still harbours Aids denialist views and which will not admit death through HIV/AIDS.

But Mandela faction was not the only beneficiary.

There was also Chief Buthelezi.

The reader will recall that Chief Buthelezi has had the misfortune to lose two of his children. Both died because of HIV/AIDS. On the death of each child Chief Buthelezi publicly stated that the cause of death was HIV/AIDS. It was a first among persons regarded as *national leaders*. Bearing in mind the conservative constituency he represents, it was a brave thing to do. Due credit came generously from all quarters except from Mbeki and his coterie of Aids denialists

When Nelson Mandela made the public disclosure about his son's death, Chief Buthelezi stepped onto the scene. Ostensibly, it was to congratulate and praise Mandela. But there were other consequences.

- Mandela had to follow the example set by Buthelezi concerning the disclosures about his children's deaths
- When Buthelezi states: "I would like to pay tribute to Madiba for his courageous decision..." he is paying himself a compliment for courage since he did the same thing as Mandela - not once, but twice!
- When he goes on to say: "Such courage and selflessness is the mark of the man" he is in effect saying that that "courage and selflessness" is also his mark.
- When he says: "As I have repeatedly said, and as Madiba so powerfully said today, HIV/AIDS is a disease like any other...", he is reminding the reader that what Mandela "said today" is travelling on a path already carved out by Buthelezi since he has been saying it "repeatedly" in the past.

## THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE MANDELA AND MBEKI FACTIONS

In his obituary in the Sunday Times of the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2005 on the late Mr Makgato Mandela, Chris Barron sought to elicit a response from Mr Nelson Mandela about the different approach to the matter of HIV/AIDS by him and Mr Thabo Mbeki. Before Mr. Mandela could answer, Minister Lindiwe Sisulu, who was present, deflected the question.

But the very fact Barron dared to suggest that there was a split in the ANC on the issue of HIV/AIDS has raised the ire of a section of the ANC. One supposes it is more a question of the embarrassment caused by a public mention of it. That the split exists cannot be denied. Within the ANC, members, especially the intellectuals, would have talked themselves dry on the issue. We now have people (the double denialists) who also deny the existence of the denialists!

Surely, it is significant that although, President Mbeki was present at the funeral, he did not deliver the funeral speech. There is little doubt that Mbeki would have been offered the honour of being the funeral speaker. That he was not meant that the honour was declined.

### CONCLUSION:

We trust that we have given the reader some idea of what can surface when a critical study is made of news items in the press. There is far more than meets the eye. News reports will only make sense if one is aware of the background – of the personalities involved; their relationship with one another; their relationship with the various organisations and the relationship of the organisations with one another.

Life will become far more revealing, interesting and meaningful if we had a better idea of what was really going on around us.

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