

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT THE
NELSON MANDELA MEMORIAL DIALOGUE

NELSON MANDELA FOUNDATION, JOHANNESBURG

5 DECEMBER 2016

Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Prof Njabulo Ndebele,
Chief Executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Mr Sello Hatang,
Deputy Minister Ayanda Dlodlo,
Dr Leon Wessels,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to mark the anniversary of a profoundly painful moment in the life of our young democracy, the day on which our founding President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, drew his last breath.

Three years later, we are here to remember him, to celebrate him, to honour him and to reflect on his legacy.

We also recall several other moments in the history of our nation – moments that, in different ways, defined the struggle of our people for freedom and shaped the country that we inhabit today.

It was on this day 60 years ago, in 1956, that Madiba and 155 other leaders of Congress were arrested and charged with high treason.

It was a moment of great uncertainty for our country and of great peril for the Congress movement and its leaders.

It was an audacious and cynical attempt by the apartheid regime to destroy the Congress movement and define as treason the demand for those freedoms that are now enshrined in our Constitution.

Later this month, we will mark the 55th anniversary of the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, with Madiba as its first Commander-in-Chief.

The decision to form the People's Army to fight an apartheid regime armed to the teeth was an act of courage and resolve.

Its mere formation gave hope to our people, who continued to bear the brunt of the increasing brutality of the apartheid state.

Later this week, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the signing into law by Madiba of our country's democratic Constitution.

It was a moment of jubilation, as the South African nation was born.

The Constitution became our nation's birth certificate.

With that one signature, the solemn promise of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa, handed down from generation to generation, was fulfilled.

The freedoms for which so many people had fought – side by side, throughout their lives – had been won.

As we reflect on these moments in our past – moments of pain and sorrow, of courage and fortitude, of triumph and celebration – we are bound to ask how history will remember this moment in the life of our young nation.

Twenty years after the adoption of our democratic Constitution, we are bound to reflect on whether we have given concrete expression to the aspirations it embodies.

Have we healed the divisions of the past?

Have we established a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights?

Have we improved the quality of life of all citizens?

Twenty years after the adoption of our democratic Constitution, we can make bold to say that we have made remarkable progress.

In a recent report on 'Life in South Africa', the Institute of Race Relations tracked various measures of development since 1994.

In summarising its findings, the Institute says that, amidst the turmoil, it sees the story of a young democracy that has made a vast amount of progress in fields ranging from the economy and employment to living standards, poverty, education, health care and crime.

It says:

“Most importantly, we should not lose sight of the gains the country has made, lest we become too pessimistic and cynical about our future and fail to build on the solid foundations that have been laid over the past two decades.”

It confirms what we know to be true.

Working together, we have built robust and durable democratic institutions.

As a country, we have done much to push back the frontiers of poverty and to meet the basic needs of millions of our people.

According to the Institute of Race Relations, extreme poverty among Africans has seen a real decline of over 60 percent since 2002.

Over 1,000 houses have been built every day since the year we adopted our Constitution.

The enrolment of African students in university has more than doubled since 2000.

We have built a stable economy which, until the global financial crisis, achieved sustained periods of growth.

By last year, real per capita GDP was a third higher than in 1994.

We have restored the dignity of our people and engendered a sense of collective pride in a nation at peace with itself and the world.

Yet for all the progress we have made, there is still much more to do.

We have, as Madiba said, climbed a great hill.

Yet we know there are many more hills still to climb.

Too many of our people go hungry.

Too many of our children do not finish school.

Too many people cannot find work.

Too many people live in fear.

Too many people have yet to fully realise the rights contained in the Constitution that Madiba signed into law 20 years ago.

Now, at this moment, as we consider the work we must necessarily do to correct this grave historical injustice, we are bound to acknowledge that this is a difficult time for South Africa.

Many of the challenges we face are due to developments beyond our borders.

Some are of our own making.

South Africa's fortunes are inextricably linked to the global economy.

For much of the past decade, global growth has been subdued and it shows little sign of significant recovery in the immediate future.

This means there is reduced demand and lower prices for the resources that South Africa exports and less appetite to invest here.

The benefits of globalisation have not been evenly shared, with the result that many people remain outside of meaningful economic activity.

This undermines global development, economic inclusivity, stability and security.

At the same time, driven by some of these economic pressures, many countries have seen the rise of right-wing populist formations.

Though they take many forms, common among them is a narrow nationalism, resistance to immigration and a rejection of multilateralism.

The effect that these political currents will have on the global economy – and on South Africa's position within it – remains to be seen.

But we can be certain that the task of building a more just, more equitable and more peaceful world has become a lot more difficult.

This must motivate the progressive forces in South Africa, Africa and around the world to intensify our efforts to build a new world order.

While we confront global economic headwinds, South Africa must still grapple with the devastating legacy of a system that deliberately stifled the potential of our people.

Despite the progress of the last two decades, we must acknowledge that we have not transformed our economy to serve the interests of the majority.

Although we have experienced periods of economic growth, we have not built up an industrial base of the scale and diversity required to extract optimal value from the natural resources we possess in abundance.

And while we have significantly expanded access to education, we have not done enough to overcome the substantial skills deficit that keeps so many of our people out of work.

We have lifted millions of our people out of extreme poverty and have seen the rapid growth of a black middle class.

But the lack of work opportunities, the lack of assets, the rising cost of living and the impact of apartheid spatial planning all contribute to the perpetuation of widespread poverty and extreme inequality.

As we grapple with these economic and social challenges, we must acknowledge too a sense of unease about developments in the political sphere.

While we should be cautious not to exaggerate reports of discord within the state and in some of our public institutions, we cannot ignore the fault lines that appear to have emerged in our body politic.

Nor can we ignore the fault lines that appear to have emerged in the Congress movement and in the broader Alliance.

These are developments about which we must all be concerned because, should they continue unchecked, our progress may be arrested and our dream of a better society may be forever deferred.

We therefore find ourselves at a moment when the remarkable achievements of the last 20 years face the real prospect of being eroded.

We risk being diverted from the path we have chosen.

It is at a time like this that we are called upon to look into our past.

It is perhaps at moments like these that we should seek counsel from the lives of our forbearers.

We are called upon to remember the legacies, the struggles, the values and the qualities of the great leaders of our people.

We are called upon to reflect on the history of our movement, the principles for which it has stood and the ideals for which it has fought – and for which we continue to fight.

At the centre of the historical mission of the Congress movement is the task of uniting all South Africans for the complete liberation of our people from all forms of discrimination and oppression.

As we confront the manifold challenges of the present, we need to place this imperative at the centre of our efforts.

For this is a moment that calls for the unity of the movement and the unity of the people.

It calls for unity in action.

We need to emulate the united mass action of the 1940s and 1950s, of the 1970s and 1980s.

The unity we achieved throughout those difficult and dark days empowered the ordinary masses of our people to change the destiny of our country.

Such is the power of united action.

Unless we are united, unless we work together, we are bound to falter.

History is replete with lessons about this.

The unity that we must work with great urgency to build should be underpinned by the the discipline and principles that leaders such as Madiba subscribed to as well as the values contained in our Constitution and the vision of a free, just and united nation that it describes.

The Constitution is not only the supreme law of the Republic.

It also informs who we are and what we want to be.

The unity that we must work to build must be founded on the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism.

It requires that we grapple directly with the attitudes, practices, institutions and material circumstances that perpetuate racism and sexism.

Fundamentally, we need to redress the economic inequality that underpins racial division in our society.

For as long as the natural state of the black South African is poor and the natural state of the white South African is privileged, we will never succeed in building a non-racial society.

For as long as the economic and social conditions of women are inferior to those of men, we will never succeed in building a non-sexist society.

There is an urgent need – if we are to be a united nation – to redistribute the wealth of our country.

A united South Africa requires the restoration of the land to those who work it.

It requires meaningful transfer of ownership and control over the country's natural resources, over the means of production, to the people as a whole.

Reconciliation resides not so much in forgiving the wrongs of the past, but in righting the wrongs of the past.

To do this, South Africans need to be united around a shared vision of a better society.

South Africans need to be committed to a common programme to achieve that vision.

That vision and that programme is the National Development Plan.

The actions it identifies for the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality by 2030 have largely been embraced by a broad cross section of South African society.

They form the basis of the programme of the current administration and the mandate of our public representatives.

They motivate and guide the efforts of non-governmental organisations, community groups, business associations, trade unions and individuals across the country.

The achievement of a united South Africa also demands of us that we listen to each other more intently and more sincerely.

At the root of many of the challenges in the political and social arena is that people are not listening to each other.

From the benches of Parliament to the highest structures of our movement, from our radios to our Twitter feeds, everyone is talking.

But very few are really listening.

We need to be engaged in a national dialogue in which each of us is prepared to give honest consideration to the views of others.

It is only by doing this that we can hope to build a national consensus.

Madiba often spoke about how his early antagonism towards the Communist Party was broken down through his conversations with people like Moses Kotane, with whom he would debate issues of difference into the early hours of the morning.

The most significant advances in our struggle – indeed in much of human endeavour – have been achieved through dialogue.

But where there is no meaningful engagement, where those in positions of responsibility do not listen to the cries of the people, then the seeds of discontent, of instability, of conflict are sown.

This is a moment when we, as leaders, need to listen and be in conversation with our people.

This is the time to listen.

This is not the time to display a sense of arrogance.

This is not the time to ignore our people.

This is the time to heed what they are saying, however difficult it might be for us to do so.

This indeed is the time to put the interests of our people ahead of our own parochial interests.

We also need to listen to the students protesting on our campuses, to the workers eking out an existence on paltry wage, to the communities whose taps have run dry and, yes, we need to listen to those veterans of our struggle who believe that we may have gone astray.

For if we are to succeed in uniting the people of South Africa, those of us within the Congress movement need to be united.

Now, as we seek to weather the storms of incumbency, we should recall the words of former ANC President Oliver Tambo at the Kabwe Conference in 1985 that each member and each leader needs to regard themselves as the principal guardian of the unity of our movement.

It is only through unity, that we become effective agents of social change.

It is only through unity, that we can improve people's lives.

It is only through united action that we can collectively counter the effects of patronage, corruption and the unrestrained scramble for positions and resources.

It is only through unity that we can defeat the virus of consumerism, individualism and greed.

But unity is not the same as closing ranks.

Unity is not a conspiracy of silence in the face of misdeeds.

Unity is not an excuse to avoid the difficult, painful questions that we need to ask ourselves.

That is why, as we work together to tackle the challenges of the present, we must make a concerted effort to correct some of the the bad and deviant tendencies that have infiltrated our movement and our society.

For as much as this is a moment that calls for unity, it is also a moment that calls for renewal.

It calls for the renewal of the values and the character of the Congress led by Chief Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela.

It calls for the restoration of a culture of selflessness, sacrifice and service.

It calls for a renewal of the structures of our movement so that they may no longer serve as instruments for self-enrichment, but as instruments of fundamental social change.

It calls for the revival of the moral tenets that guided the conduct and informed the outlook of the members and leaders of our movement.

It is at such a moment that the nation turns once again towards Madiba – for inspiration, for guidance, for lessons in leadership.

For he embodied so much of what we seek in a leader.

Although he was one of the most famous figures of the 20th century, he was humble to a fault, never arrogant and devoid of any sense of entitlement.

He listened to those he disagreed with.

The more he disagreed with someone, the more intently he listened.

He was always a unifier, never a divider.

Now more than ever, we need leaders of his quality and integrity, leaders who are committed to serve only the interests of the people.

We have to ask ourselves uncomfortable questions such as “Does South Africa today have such leaders?”.

Does our movement have such leaders?

Are we living up to the example that Madiba, Tambo, Sisulu and Luthuli set?

Most importantly, are we living up to the expectations of our people?

For unless we have leaders who are united, who are credible, who are honest, who listen, who are inspirational, we will not be able to unite our movement or unite our nation.

This is also a moment for renewal across society.

We need to renew the promise of a better life for all and reaffirm our shared commitment to the defining values of our Constitution.

Though we have held fast to our goal of a better life for all, there is a possibility that with the passage of time and the exigencies of the present, our attention will be diverted and our efforts misdirected.

Inherent in any revolution is the risk that it may go off course.

We need to renew the bond of responsibility and accountability between the people and those elected to represent them in government.

We must address challenges of social distance, mistrust and the neglect by public representatives of their duties.

We must restore the confidence of the people in the institutions of the state by ensuring that we do not allow them to become vehicles for the pursuit of narrow interests or private enrichment.

But most importantly, we need to renew the timeless bond between the oppressed masses of our country and the movement that has fought for them and alongside them for over a century.

It was in 1997, at the ANC's Mafikeng Conference, that Madiba handed over the baton of leadership to the next generation with the warning that we should never lose touch with the people.

It is our solemn duty to ensure that that never happens.

Comrades and friends,
Distinguished guests,

This is a moment for unity. This is a moment for renewal.

It is a moment when we need to raise our gaze and look to a future that is better than yesterday and even much better than today.

It is also a moment for action.

For unless we want history to judge us unfavourably, we must act now to build a united South Africa with a clear vision and a firm plan.

We call on all South Africans – black and white – to work together to build a society which belongs to all who live in it.

A society in which leaders are elected to serve and the people are empowered to lead.

We want a society where leaders regard themselves as servant leaders rather than leaders who shout "follow our lead".

We call on South Africans to continue Madiba's long walk.

We are a resilient people.

We are an industrious people.

Even at the most difficult moments of our history, we have been capable of the most astonishing achievements.

We have many hills still to climb.

But through united action, through principled struggle, we will indeed succeed in climbing them.

Let us remember how Madiba characterised his journey through life.

Let us make Madiba's journey our journey.

Let us make Madiba's long walk our own long walk.

I miss Madiba more when I remember his moving and touching words about his journey when he said:

"I have walked that long road to freedom.

"I have tried not to falter.

"I have made missteps along the way.

"But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.

"I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come.

“But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.”

I too dare not linger for my long walk has not yet ended.

I thank you.