

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY AZAPO PRESIDENT NELVIS QEKEMA AT REGINA MUNDI TO
COMMEMORATE THE 46TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JUNE 16 UPRISING ON 16 JUNE 2022

Programme Directors, AZAPO National Chairperson Simphiwe Hashe and Deputy President Kekeletso Khena;

PAC President, Cde Mzwanele Nyhontso;

Leadership of AZAPO and the PAC;

Families of our Martyrs;

Comrades and Friends;

As I recognise the warm presence of AZAPO past Presidents in Cdes Pandelani Nefolovhodwe and Strike Thokoane, I salute the organisers of this June 16 Uprising Commemoration for delivering a packed 5000-capacity Regina Mundi.

Thanks to you all for braving this chilly day and deserting your warm blankets to ensure that the memory of the June 16 Uprising martyrs is never erased from the memory of the struggle history. That Uprising marked a turning point in the Azanian Revolution.

As a show of respect, let me pause and recognise the presence of President Nyhontso and the moving speech he delivered here this afternoon. Together with Teenage (that's how he used to be known), we were fellow students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Our respective AZASCO and PASO operated almost as one organisation. That was the level of mutual trust and unity that was demonstrated at the time. It is that tried and tested positive experience and energy we are bringing into the noble Cooperation between AZAPO and the PAC of Azania.

Let me repeat a bit of what I said in the past. The PAC and AZAPO are two sides of the same coin. The coin may have two sides, but it is one and the same coin. We are flesh of the same flesh; blood of the same blood; and bones of the same bones. We may be two different organisations in appearance, but we are one in political purpose and ideological direction. That is why the students in recent times refused to be forced to choose between Pan Afrikanism and Black Consciousness. They just "merged" the two into what they called BCPA.

As we present AZAPO and the PAC as a united political force to the Azanian Masses, we are presenting the masses with an arrow and a bow. We are presenting them with a spear and a shield. In both cases, one doesn't work well without the other. In a sense, we are uniting the bullet and the gun. The bullet and the gun are useless when they are separated or disunited. We are defenceless and vulnerable in that mode. We cannot march forward and fight for the repossession of our land and total liberation. That's why we are uniting the bullet and the gun.

Some Comrades make the mistake of thinking AZAPO's Black Power Salute and the PAC's Open Palm Salute are two different things. They are making a grave mistake. The Open Palm and the Clenched Fist are united and effective in their oneness. We have to know and internalise the fact that they are both executed in one and the same arm. That means you have to be "armed" to execute them. When you firmly close the Open Palm, you get the Clenched Fist. And when you open the Clenched Fist, you get the Open Palm. Both Salutes arm you with different weapons of defence and attack. An Open Palm positions you to clap and strangle an enemy, while a Clenched Fist arms you to punch that hostile enemy.

In this united mode, the PAC and AZAPO are presenting themselves as a formidable contender for power. These liberation organisations were never formed to merely fight for the vote or democracy. Our political resolve went far beyond those limited milestones. In our united position we bravely march to representation in Parliament and proceed with speed to Land Repossession, Total Liberation and Socialism. We are in power politics. We are therefore not a pressure group, but a united contender for power.

And so today we are gathered in this packed iconic Regina Mundi to keep the memory of the June 16 Uprising alive and active. We have to do this because we are in the struggle against forgetting. The legendary Don Mattera has told us that "Memory is the Weapon". We are gathered here to remember the thorny and rocky path we travelled from the Sharpeville Massacre to the June 16 Uprising. The dryness of that path was soaked in the blood of our militant black people. Sometimes we slipped and choked in our own blood. But we never turned back. We marched forward with courage and determination. That thorny path was decorated with the lifeless bodies of our Azanian Warriors. We picked them up and put them on our shoulders as we marched forward because no bone of ours should be left stranded on the ground as if it is not the bone of our bones. That was the symbolism of the unity of the living and the dead. We are here today in Regina Mundi to carry on with the shouldering of our Azanian Martyrs as an act of rededicating ourselves to the liberation struggle.

We have to do that because Steve Biko warned us that “a nation that forgets its martyrs will itself soon be forgotten”.

And so we are here to remind ourselves of the bloody path we travelled from Sharpeville to Soweto. We know that the PAC hoisted the flag of Sharpeville. We also know that the Black Consciousness Movement hoisted the Flag of Soweto. Both the PAC and AZAPO are here united to remind us that Sharpeville and Soweto are one path that must lead us to the liberated Azania. Sharpeville and Soweto are one. It was the same blood of Afrikans that spilled on that thorny and rocky path from Sharpeville to Soweto. While Sharpeville is the embodiment of Sobukwe's immortality, Soweto is the embodiment of Biko's immortality. You find both leaders on that path of the liberation struggle. When Sobukwe was beginning to age, the enemy was happy because they thought the time for Sobukwe to exit the struggle was near. The enemy's smile soon froze on his lips because our Sobukwe had no plans for any departure. Instead, he reincarnated and perpetuated himself in Biko. Yes, Sobukwe rejuvenated himself in Biko. In that sense, Sobukwe and Biko are one. In Sobukwe, there is Biko; and in Biko, there is Sobukwe. They represented the Old and Young souls of each other in their respective bodies. They were united in life, and they continue to be united in spirituality.

While Biko took rest on 12 September 1977, Sobukwe took his on 27 February 1978. It has to be some political or spiritual irony that the predecessor Sobukwe outlived the successor Biko by four months. It is now history that the Movement of Biko played a pivotal role in the burial of Sobukwe. In that sense, and while Biko left first to prepare a place in the spiritual world for Sobukwe, you could say the successor buried the predecessor. Both Sobukwe and Biko had the mind of spirit to perpetuate themselves in their political children Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo – the young leaders of the June 16 Uprising.

When I talk about the June 16 Uprising era I refer to it as the “Stone Age” because Azanians had to rely on the stones they picked up from the rocky path from Sharpeville to Soweto to defend themselves and advance the liberation struggle. The guns we were waiting for were nowhere near us at that time. That's perhaps when we decided to say “we are the ones we are waiting for”. And this is the message for the youth of today. Activate your own youth agency and just do the Black Thing. In that “Stone Age” we summoned nature to arm us. That was our own way of implementing Biko's SASO call that “Black man you are on your own”. The Stone of 1976 was the same Stone that our forebears rolled down the mountains and hills to crush the land-grabbing colonialists during the Land Wars. That Stone was the same Stone that marked the Graves of the June 16 Uprising martyrs. It is the same Stone with which we shall pave the rocky path to a liberated Azania. That Stone may crush one of our own who degenerates to stand between us and the enemy.

When I turn on the radio or television, I often hear some people claiming that the June 16 Uprising came to be because of our rejection of the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction by the white settler-colonial regime. With respect, that is not entirely true. That is part of the picture, and not the whole picture. Even that part of the picture needs to be viewed in context. Otherwise, the whole picture will be out of focus and foggy. To start with, Afrikaans is an Afrikan language developed by Afrikan and Indonesian slaves in the early 17th century because they resisted to speak the Dutch language, which was the language of the invader and coloniser. As a matter of fact, there is no country or nation in the world where Afrikaans is spoken other than in Afrika. Of course, Afrikaans is somehow a West Germanic language due to its historical association with the Dutch language. But a more precise description would be to say Afrikaans is an Afrikan-Germanic language. To be sure, Afrikaans is a language that is a symbol of resistance against the very colonial language from which it developed on Afrikan soil. It is a language that was largely spoken by the Afrikan and Indonesian slaves among themselves, and with their slave masters. In its process of development, Afrikaans borrowed generously from Khoisan and other indigenous languages in Afrika. Ironically, the term "Afrikaans" is derived from the Dutch term "Afrikaansch", which means Afrikan. This should partly explain why it is that many Afrikans fondly express themselves in the lingo called "isicamto", which embraces a lot of Afrikaans terms and phrases.

The association of Afrikaans with the Afrikan slave and the Indonesian slave that was brought to Afrika to augment the labour resources of the indigenous people is what caused it (Afrikaans) to be resented and undermined by the colonialists who dismissed it as a "kitchen language" (kombuistaal), "incorrect Dutch" (verkeerd Nederlands), "geradbraakt Hollands" (broken Dutch) or "uncivilised Dutch". It is effectively in the 20th century that the Afrikaner made a desperate attempt to colonise our Afrikaans and claimed it as a white settler-colonial language, of which it was not. To the extent that Afrikaans was appropriated by the coloniser, there is therefore no denying the historical fact that Afrikaans had an unfortunate association with settler-colonialism, land robbery, racism and apartheid. Even so, the majority of the speakers of Afrikaans are outside the Afrikaner/Boer community. One is proudly making the bold statement that the majority speakers of Afrikaans are black people!

However, with that unfortunate association with oppression, it came as no surprise that black people reacted with anger when in 1975 the apartheid regime made known its wish to make Afrikaans a medium of instruction following the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974. The majority of black people were already encountering learning difficulties with having to do their studies in the foreign English language. It was one thing to voluntarily and fondly speak and write Afrikaans, but it was another thing to be forced at gun point to study through Afrikaans as an imposed

medium of instruction. It was at this point that Afrikaans served as a trigger mechanism to the June 16 Uprising. But what were the underlying causes of the Uprising?

The rise to power of the crudely racist Nationalist Party in 1948 came with the introduction of apartheid laws to further entrench and worsen the oppression and underdevelopment of the black people. This underdevelopment strategy seems to have prioritised the systematic education deprivation of black people. Where there was any education available for blacks, it was meant for miseducation purposes. Apartheid racial segregation, sometimes sugarcoated as “separate development”, was taken further by the introduction of the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959, which meant that black students would no longer learn at the same institutions of higher learning with their white counterparts. “Bush university colleges” were specifically established for black students. Some of those were Fort Hare, Western Cape, Venda, and Vista. It went without saying that these “bush colleges” would be underfunded and generally under-resourced.

Though the Verwoerdian system had no intention to educate the black child, it soon was confronted with an economic problem that the economy needed some trained cheap labour. The black schools experienced a drastic growth in enrollment to the extent that the pupil-teacher ratio increased from 46.1 in 1955 to 58.1 in 1967. Overcrowding forced a desperate situation where classrooms had to be used on a rotational basis. The availability of teachers was also a challenge resulting in the throwing of underqualified teachers at the black learners. By 1961 the authorities recorded that only 10% of black teachers held a matriculation certificate. As underqualified as they were, they were also expected to dish out the inferior “Bantu Education” to the black child. Put differently, the ill-prepared parent was expected to administer the poison to their child.

Your attention is drawn to the historical fact that during the period under examination, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was in its embryonic stage and went on to be formed in 1968 and inaugurated in 1969 with Steve Biko as the first President of the pioneer organisation, SASO. A number of sectorial organisations were formed thereafter under the BCM with the Black People’s Convention (BPC) as the vanguard political organisation.

On the other hand, there was the apartheid policy of the “Bantustan” system, which operated on the political myth that black people were not citizens of “Suid Afrika”, but belonged to the various “homelands”, which were deemed to be their “countries” where they would vote and do politics. The influence of this system meant that no new high schools were built from 1962 to 1971 for black children in “Suid Afrika” where Soweto and other townships were located. The apartheid

understanding was that black learners would relocate to their “countries” (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei and technically, Zululand) where they would attend school. White business was in the business of making super profits through cheap but trained labour. They put pressure on the apartheid regime to build more schools in “Suid Afrika” for the black child. As a result, 40 new schools were built in Soweto with the number of black learners in secondary schools increasing from 12,656 to 34,656. Meanwhile, the apartheid government was spending R644 on the white child annually, while spending a lousy R42 on the black child. Poor funding and overcrowding were time bombs waiting to explode. There were 257,505 learners enrolled in Form 1 in 1976. Yet there was a limited capacity to absorb only 38,000 learners. Having already phased out Standard Six, the apartheid regime was aggravating the crisis by phasing out Standard Eight (Junior Certificate, JC) in 1976.

As this crisis was brewing up in the black education front in South Africa, the 1973 Arab-Israel conflict further devastated the apartheid economy. On 6 October of that year, the Arab coalition had launched an attack against the Zionist Israel. This was the Arab response to the 1967 capture and occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. With the US arming Israel to win the 1973 war, the (Arab) OPEC countries reacted by imposing an oil embargo against Israel and its western allies like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Japan and the Netherlands. The oil embargo was extended to cover South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). That embargo ended in March 1974. By that time the price of oil had increased almost 300% with a debilitating effect on the global economy. That global economic meltdown had a catastrophic effect on the already isolated South African economy, more so because the BCM-aligned Black Workers Union (BAWU) launched a general workers strike in the same 1973. Add to all this turmoil the falling of the price of gold in 1975 up to 1976. As we know, South Africa’s economy was heavily reliant on the mining industry.

On the international political front, the Cold War and the growing strength of the Eastern Block meant that the national liberation movements were receiving some encouraging financial and material support from the Eastern Block. Within the context of this support, colonial power Portugal experienced internal strife which led to its pulling out of both Mozambique and Angola with the result that Mozambique gained its independence on 25 June 1975, and Angola on 11 November 1975. In the same period, the Zimbabwean liberation forces were intensifying the guerrilla warfare towards the 1980 independence. These political events had such an effect on the BCM and the Azanian Revolution that SASO organised the Viva FRELIMO Rallies, which got banned by the apartheid regime. The Rallies were defiantly pursued despite the ban, and that led to the mass arrest of the BCM leaders some of whom appeared in the SASO-BPC Trial of 1975. Interestingly, these BC Trialists got sentenced after the June 16 Uprising to 5 to 8 years’ imprisonment on Robben Island.

What completes the picture of the causative factors of the June 16 Uprising was the presence of the institutional and ideological factors in the form of the BC organisations and their work of conscientisation and mobilisation of the Azanian Masses. All this transpired under the inspiring leadership of the Founding Father of the BCM – Steve Biko. Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo – the members of the BCM’s SASM and Soweto Students Representative Council – provided the leadership at the coalface of the Uprising.

With the picture I have drawn above, I am making an attempt to demonstrate that it is not entirely true that the rejection of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction was the cause of the June 16 Uprising. While the imposition of Afrikaans provided the trigger mechanism, there were more fundamental factors that combined and fermented the June 16 Uprising.

At this stage, please allow me to have a spiritual conversation with Cdes Tsietsi, Khotso and the Azanian martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the Uprising.

Tsietsi and Khotso, you know that you died demanding that our country should be officially called Azania because that is the name recognised by the liberation struggle. Of course, Azania means “the land of black people”. 28 years into democracy, the ruling party continues to snub your sacrifices by preferring the name “South Africa” which was coined by the colonialists who are your murderers. Your Graves are still trapped in “South Africa”. It is as if somebody is ridiculing your sacrifices. What makes that snub and betrayal painful is that it is made by those who politically benefitted from the spilling of your blood.

Tsietsi and Khotso, you died vowing that you would never sing Die Stem. You made that conscious vow because Die Stem is the song that robbed us of our land Azania – the land of Zanj. Die Stem is the song that colonised and enslaved black people. It is Die Stem that raped our mothers and sisters and stripped black people of their humanity and dignity. Yes, it is Die Stem that killed Lembede, Tiro, Biko, Sobukwe and Hani. You, yourselves, were killed by Die Stem. Yet those who are ruling are forcing us to sing Die Stem. Our National Anthem Nkosi Sikelel’ i-Afrika has been brutally mutilated to accommodate the anti-black Die Stem.

Do you remember, Tsietsi and Khotso, how you used to sing the song “Siyay’ ePitoli”? By that song you vowed that not even bullets would stop you from marching on Pretoria and destroy the “Union Buildings” and repossess our land. I am ashamed to reveal to you that those who are

ruling us moved into the "Union Buildings" like a snake crawling into a hole. They inherited the "Union Buildings" and continued to proudly call the structure by the same name the colonialists and racists called it. Nobody seems to have had the presence of mind to ask about the meaning of the "Union Buildings". In AZAPO we know that after the English and Boer colonialists slaughtered one another for the control of Azania and enslavement of black people in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, the two sets of colonialists agreed to pool their loot of the so-called Cape, Transvaal, Natal and Oranje River colonies into the "Union of South Africa" on 31 May 1910. It is from that unholy "union" of colonialists and their vow to continue to plunder our land that the "Union Buildings" get their name. No matter how empty your political soul can be, but no revolutionary can operate from a place so called with a clean conscience.

You won't believe, Tsietsi and Khotso, that 28 years into democracy we still sing the struggle songs you used to sing. Yet you sang those songs so that we sing them no more in a democracy where power is in black hands. "Thina sizwe esimnyama" is one of the songs. In this song you were making the point that black people are crying for their land, which was robbed by white people. You must be asking yourselves what are your people still "crying" for when they are supposed to be in power. The President is black. The Premiers are black. The Ministers are black. The Councilors are black. The majority of the members of the armed and police forces are black. So, what the hell is the "crying" for? The other song is "Senzeni Na?" In this song you were asking not only the white people, but also God, as what have we done to deserve this inhuman treatment on earth? In that song you rhetorically offer our blackness as our "sin". Now tell me; 28 years into democracy, from who are we asking those questions? If anything, those who are ruling should be made to answer these questions.

28 years into democracy, black people are the only ones who are using pit latrines and bucket toilets. Nobody else does, but black people. Whichever way you look at it, this is structural violence against our humanity and dignity as black people. In a loo, you are supposed to relieve yourself. But the pit and bucket toilets do nothing but remind and torment you that you are less than a human being. When black people are overwhelmed and subdued, they are usually quick to take to prayer for a solution. But even when we pray, we pray to the "God of Israel". It is as though we don't believe there is the God of Afrika – the God of Lembede, Sobukwe and Biko. Why do we pray to the God of other nations? Have we stopped believing that "we are made in God's image"? It is about time we stopped looking for God outside ourselves as Afrikans. Everyone who ill-treats and enslaves us ill-treats and enslaves God. We therefore have a responsibility to liberate God from the ungodly.

We have had enough as black people on this earth. More than enough. This chronic pain is unbearable. The pain has moved from the body and mind to the soul. Our wounded soul is no

longer bleeding because gangrene has set in. It is the gangrene of the soul. We have become so numb that we don't even feel the repeated amputation of the vital parts of our soul. It is this amputation of our soul under the noses of our political rulers that made me curse them in one television programme as the ones who are urinating on the tree that is irrigated by the blood of the Azanian martyrs. The people have no choice but to reactivate their agency and set the political and liberatory agenda outside Parliament. If anything, let Parliament get the political mandate from the people.

It is within these spaces that the youth should "discover its mission and fulfill it". They will wait until the grass grows from under their feet if they would wait for a baton to be given to them. We all have a race to run in our different lanes. Nobody must wait for others. When some racers tire and stop, others must race on because there are enough lanes in this track of the liberation struggle. There is nobody to wait for, because "we are the ones we have been waiting for".

Liberate the Land!

Liberate the People!

Liberate the Soul!