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WE, THE PEOPLE, ARE THE SOLUTION TO THE COUNTRY'S MESS

It is correct to blame the government for the current political and economic crisis in the country. Yes, the government should take the blame for load-shedding as it appears that some within their ranks are benefiting from load-shedding. Yes, the government should take the blame for high levels of crime. At least 84 people are murdered in the country every day.



Public health care has all but collapsed. There is a critical shortage of health professionals in public hospitals, but hundreds of qualified medical doctors are roaming the streets looking for employment. Some of them are migrating to other countries where their skills are required.

Public education is in a mess. There are children who are still forced to learn under trees because there are no classrooms.

The economy is not only failing to create new jobs, but it is shedding jobs, resulting in record unemployment

of more than 40%. The situation is worse for young people. More than 70% of young people are unemployed. The government should take the blame for this state of affairs. The country is poorly managed by politicians and the ruling party in particular. But that is not the entire story.

The plain and bitter truth is that the soul of our nation has been corroded. It is in a state of decay. The conscience, that little voice inside that warns against wrongdoing, has died. While this may be more pronounced in those in power, it applies to different people across the board.

Consider the following: A cleaner at Eskom is bribed with R5000 to use a screwdriver to tamper with a gearbox by delivering a sharp jab knock to the sight glass where the oil is checked. The oil drains, leading to the gearbox to fail. A contractor appointed to do maintenance is then called and he does repair work, fixing what is essentially an act of sabotage. He gets his money as usual.

The obvious question is why is the cleaner not worried about loadshedding? Why is the contractor not worried that his plan undermines economic growth and job creation? Is he not worried that his children and extended family will become victims of unemployment if the economy is not performing?

What is happening at Eskom cannot be resolved by deploying police. Workers at Eskom should do the right thing. Clearly as things stand, they lack patriot consciousness.

In addition to the example of a cleaner, outgoing Eskom Chief Executive Andre De Ruyter also spoke about the inflated prices. He gave an example of a pair of knee-guards that can be bought for R380.00 from a hardware store but that Eskom paid R80 000.00. Of course, De Ruyter should have recovered the money from those stealing from Eskom but the bigger question is why do people steal public funds with such impunity?



Police cannot be trusted either. There are reports that police are part of a syndicate that take stolen cars across the borders into Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Some police officers have also been implicated in helping cigarette smugglers in their illegal operations.

It gets worse. Officials working for the office of the Auditor General are intimidated from doing their work by government employees. In one terrifying case, an official assigned to do inspection on a government project was shot and killed when he refused to authorise shoddy workmanship.

In hospitals, nurses are accused of beating up patients. In schools, learners attack teachers with impunity. In government offices, public servants generally do not serve people in line with the adopted police of Batho-Pele.

According to the crime stats released by the police authorities, many of the rape cases that are reported happen at the home of the victims and are perpetrated by assailants known to the victim. The same applies to gender-based violence. These crimes occur at the homes of the victims. Surely, police cannot be expected to be in every home to ensure that there is no violation of women's rights.

As a society, we need to ask ourselves a few questions. What is wrong with us? Why do we allow things to deteriorate so much?

Some may have ready answers that they should not be held to account for the criminal activities of a few in our society. But the deeper reality is that each and every one of us should take a portion of the blame. Yes, you may not be involved in corruption as an individual. Yes, you may not be involved in any criminal activity. But if you witness a crime, just like De Ruyter did, and not report it to the police, your lack of action amounts to an act of conniving with criminals.

It was Bantu Biko, our ever towering revolutionary intellectual, who alerted us to the reality that the power to change things is in our hands when he said the period of oppression is prescribed by the endurance of the oppressed.

Everybody is complaining that this government has failed and is not doing anything to improve the quality of life, but nobody seems to realise that as individuals we have the power to stop the abuse and the misrule by those in power.

As bad as things are in South Africa, we live in a democracy. There is no persecution of political opponents. People are allowed to hold free political activities. There is free political association.

Instead of begging the ruling party to renew or wishing that they should act against those within their ranks who are stealing from the public purse, people should use their constitutionally guaranteed right to choose leaders they can trust. But again, South Africans appear to be hypnotised. They keep on asking: if we do not vote for the ruling party, who will we vote for? And because in their view, there is no alternative, they decide to shun the election as they did in the last election when only just over 30% of the registered voters cast their votes.

If you truly believe in the ruling party, you should accept that it will be a better party if it has a worthy opponent. The test of a viable democracy lies in the insecurity of tenure of the incumbents.

But after almost 30 years of the same thing, should you not try AZAPO? This is not a fly-by-night

organisation. It has a history of liberation struggle that dates back more than 50 years. It is the only organisation that champions Black Consciousness, a liberating philosophy that seeks to restore the dignity of Black people.

As a voter you have more power than you realise. Otherwise, you should also take the blame for the mess in our country.

MANGALISO SOBUKWE: HIS LIFE & TEACHINGS FOR TODAY'S PAN-AFRICANISTS

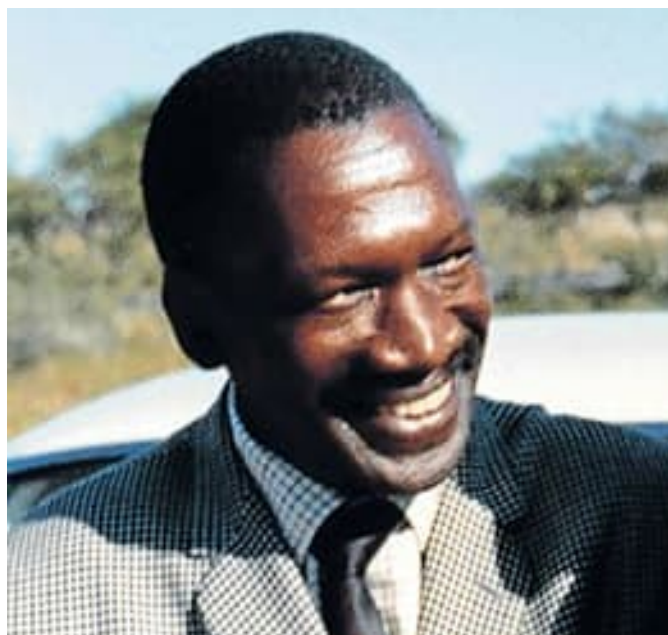
Allow us to greet the leadership of The Friends of the Congo, fellow Afrikans in the Diaspora and those in the continent of Afrika, our comrades in the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, our comrades in the A-APRP, the Sobukwe family, fellow Panelists and organisers of this 2023 Mangaliso Sobukwe Commemoration event.

AZAPO is grateful to be invited to speak at this event as we and the PAC are politically joined at the hip. Our connection is traceable to the release of Sobukwe from Robben Island in 1969 to the Galeshewe Township in the Northern Cape, which was a beehive of Black Consciousness activism. It is traceable to the meeting that Sobukwe had with Biko in 1975. It is traceable to the Kadoma discussions, in Zimbabwe, where the unity of the liberation forces was discussed in an effort to intensify our struggle.

Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism are considered as hand in glove. Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism are one. It is no wonder then that there was no problem for the BPC comrades to receive and look after Cde Mangaliso Sobukwe upon his release from Robben Island. You will also note the prominent role AZAPO played at the burial of Sobukwe on the 11 March 1978 as AZAPO leaders like Nthibedi Tloubatla, Ishmael Mkhabela, Mlungisi Mavana and others were involved in the burial of Sobukwe.

Today marks the 45th anniversary of the transitioning of Mangaliso Sobukwe, a Pan Africanist and a revolutionary whose desire was the liberation of his people and the return of the land of Afrikans to Afrikans. He determined early on in his political involvement and leadership that the struggle for true liberation can only be waged by those who are victims of land dispos-

session and indignity. That is why he could never accept the leadership of white liberals in the determination of the agenda of struggle as he saw them as a group 'with arrogant conceit that has set itself up as the "guardians", the "trustees" of Africans'.



As we reflect on his life and teachings for today's Pan African activists, it cannot escape one's mind that only two weeks ago, the Azanian revolution lost one of its foremost revolutionaries in Cde Peter Cyril Jones – a Black Consciousness theorist and activist – the last Black Person to see Steve Biko alive. Cde PC Jones was speaking of Sobukwe when he said, of himself 'I want to be remembered as the everlasting revolutionary'. For it is always a few amongst a generation of people that emerge with selflessness, love and dedication to the plight of their people.

Following the derailment of the Azanian revolution through a declaratory charter of rights at Kliptown, in Soweto in 1955. It was Sobukwe and his cohort of comrades who had the presence of mind to recognise that the struggle for freedom in Azania is underpinned by the return and repossession of the land to Afrikans as the land cannot belong to those who live in it. He could not countenance the idea of the colonisers also laying claim, like the colonised, to the land on the basis that they all live in it. For Sobukwe, Azania belongs to Afrikans, period. No sooner had he realised this than he quickly mobilised his comrades and established the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) in 1959.

It was under the auspices of the PAC that he called on leaders to lead from the front in line with the newly established PAC's motto of "Leaders in Front" as they dared the system of apartheid and colonialism by mobilizing people to leave their places of employment and march to the various police stations in the country to hand over their passes to the police under the banner of "No bail! No Defence! Sobukwe was in front when he led his troops of marching Afrikans to Orlando Police Station.



Sobukwe's leadership of the anti-pass campaign was to be the last time that he enjoyed freedom of movement in his country of birth, as this anti-pass campaign led to his arrest and three-year imprisonment that was soon converted to life incarceration through the notorious Sobukwe Clause that was inserted in the General Amendment Act of 1963 which gave powers to the Minister of Justice to review and extend the incarceration of a prisoner at his discretion. It was through this clause that Sobukwe was sent to Robben Island and kept there for six years in solitary confinement. He was to be banished to Galeshewe in the Northern Cape upon his release, where he studied further under heavy police guard and security surveillance and obtained his law degree. This is where he is said to have died of cancer on 27 February 1978.

How best do we then remember Mangaliso Sobukwe? What lessons do we take forward from his commitment to free his people, his preparedness to suffer and sacrifice and his relentless effort to lead from the front in the quest for freedom and liberation of Afrikans?

We should remember Sobukwe for his call that we should fight to be in a position to call our souls our own and for as long as we cannot do that, we have

little to no power to achieve anything. This cannot be more pronounced than the experience of living in a neo-colonial settlement, seeing and telling firsthand how difficult the past 29 years have been in Azania.

We live in a country where those who occupy office are Black people who fought tirelessly in the trenches of the revolution, along with other freedom fighters, for the freedom that we still yearn for. And yes, we have rights. The right to associate and belong. The right to choose who rules over us, and many other rights that had nothing to do with the fundamental reason why Black people chose to give their lives to the struggle for freedom.

The struggle for freedom was a struggle for dignity and self-determination. That can only be realised with the reclamation of the land that was dispossessed from our forefathers through the barrel and spear of the gun. Until then, we shall remain with hollow souls that continue to wallow in poverty and the indignity of borrowing from the colonisers the means to decent living and better life.

When we see young people with university degrees loitering the streets, unemployed, we must remember that we didn't choose to educate ourselves, using our own value systems and methods. We were subjected to an education system that perpetuates poverty and dependency. Sobukwe's teachings speak to the desire for Afrikans to obtain education for liberation which gives rise to self-reliance and independence. We must choose to produce and eat our own food, no matter how small the scale is. Our health and healing must be informed by how well we connect with the land and our ancestors. The air we breathe must connect us to our land, our values and our people.

As we remember Sobukwe on the 45th anniversary of his passing, we must call on his spirit and that of Biko and PC Jones to descend upon us and connect with us so that there can be light in our country that continues to live in darkness, hunger and squalor.

Let the Spirit of Sobukwe rise! AZAPO salute this Son of the Soil.

(A talk by AZAPO National Chairperson Cde Simphiwe Hashe at the 2023 Mangaliso Sobukwe Commemoration event organized by the Atlanta based Friends of the Congo on 27 February 2023)