



HOPE AND DESPAIR: SOUTH AFRICA AFTER APARTHEID

**ADDRESS BY H.E. SIBONGISENI DLAMINI-MNTAMBO, HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA, AT OTTAWA UNIVERSITY, CANADA,**

27 JANUARY 2020

Dr. Rita Abrahamsen: Director, at the Centre for International Policy Studies

Mr Jeffery Simpson,

Special guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sanibonani! Let me thank the Centre for Policy Studies for inviting the South African High Commission to this afternoon's speaker series of talks. This platform affords us, Heads of Mission accredited to Ottawa an opportunity to inform and engage with audiences on developments in our respective countries.

I have titled my talk this afternoon "Hope and Despair: South Africa after apartheid. This after some discussions I had with a few individuals to determine what would be of interest about South Africa for the audience I am addressing today. I was informed that the past, the present and the future – is of interest to Canadians as this country played a very important role in the history of South Africa.

I will therefore start by giving you some background on the history of South Africa especially the apartheid era, highlighting some of the atrocities which were committed during the apartheid era; the journey of the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa; the role played by the international community and in particular Canada in our struggle for freedom; I will explore the assumptions employed by the Government of National Unity to construct a post-apartheid society. Lastly, I will then look where we are today and if there is hope for the future.

Brief History

Some of you may have read or been informed that South Africa's history began in 1652 after being "discovered" by the arrival of Europeans. From the onset let me dispel this. Mrs. Ples, a two million year old humanoid fossil found just outside Pretoria, proves that there has been life in South Africa long before the first Europeans arrived.

The once-proud Kingdom of Mapungubwe, now declared a world heritage site by UNESCO, may have been wiped from some history books, but it stood in South Africa one thousand years ago, trading with nations in the East. The Dutch arrived in 1652, the British in 1820. The South African War between the descendants of the Dutch, the Afrikaners, and the English followed.

The discovery of gold and diamonds represented a lucrative opportunity for white-owned mining companies to employ and exploit black workers. White settlers viewed black South Africans as a natural resource to be used to turn the country from a rural society to an industrialized one. Starting in the 17th century, Dutch settlers relied on slaves to build up South Africa. Those mining companies all but enslaved black miners while enjoying massive wealth from the diamonds and gold they mined. They relied on intimidation and discrimination to rule over their black workers.

Racial segregation and white supremacy became central aspects of South African policy. In the late 1940's those of European descent under the National Party devised and introduced apartheid into law. Apartheid, a system whose goal was not only to separate South Africa's white minority from its non-white majority, but also to separate non-whites from each other, and to divide black South Africans along tribal lines in order to decrease their political power. These policies empowered white South Africans who descended from both Dutch and British settlers in South Africa while further disenfranchising the indigenous black South Africans. They kept South Africa's majority, the black population under the thumb of a white minority.

State institutions were used to give preferential treatment to whites, primarily Afrikaners, in virtually all areas of political, social, and economic life. Conversely, the system progressively stripped the

indigenous black people of their dignity, their rights, their citizenship and they could not vote in their country. The oppression of the indigenous population had become entrenched and deeply systemic.

Repressive laws like the group areas act; separate amenities act; and the prohibition of mixed marriages act were introduced to control the movement of the indigenous people now deemed non-citizens.

However the "official" and systematic dispossession of Africans of their lands dates back to the Native Land Act of 1913. The land act of 1913 stripped the indigenous populations of the right to own land and effectively handed 90% of South Africa's land to 20% of the population. The indigenous people were forced to migrate inland to the 10% of land which was neither arable nor had any known mineral deposits.

Apartheid is often construed as a largely political construct, but architecture and planning were critical to implementing apartheid policies. Design practices became cultural extensions of state power, for instance the design of monumental structures such as the Union Buildings and the Voortrekker Monument both in Pretoria were meant to validated the power of the white minority.

Cities were designated "for whites only," and townships became, in effect, the mechanism for housing the nonwhite labor force, mandated under laws such as the Group Areas Act (1950), which specified where racial groups were allowed to live in urban areas. These policies accelerated the growth of separate townships across the country at all scales — from cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg to the smallest villages.

Even vibrant multiracial settlements were cleared and razed, their residents separated by race and relocated into distant townships. As an example, in District Six near downtown Cape Town, about 60 000 residents were forcibly removed between 1968 and 1982; Cape Technikon, a white-only university, was built on a portion of the land, while the rest sat vacant for decades.

The Struggle for freedom

It would take decades of struggle to stop the policy, which affected every facet of life in a country locked in centuries-old patterns of discrimination and racism. With the barrel of a gun - military occupation, violent suppression of protest and threats of imprisonment became the order of the day.

Many of our people were exiled, some jailed, *mass* murders were committed with impunity, and some of our people even to this day cannot be accounted for.

Though they were disempowered, black South Africans protested their treatment within apartheid. In the 1950s, the African National Congress, the country's oldest black political party, initiated a mass mobilization against the racist laws, called the defiance Campaign. Black workers boycotted white businesses, went on strike, and staged non-violent protests. These acts of defiance were met with police and state brutality. Protesters were beaten and tried en masse in unfair legal proceedings. But though the campaigns took a toll on black protesters, they didn't generate enough international pressure on the South African government to inspire reforms. At this juncture, I would like to touch on some of these horrendous atrocities which took place during apartheid-some of which might have made it to your history books.

Sharpeville Massacre

On 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville Robert Sobukwe led thousands of people in a demonstration against the pass laws, which restricted the movements of black people. The police fired at them killing 69 peaceful protesters, sparking nationwide dissent and a wave of strikes. The sixty-nine people killed at Sharpeville were not armed they were ordinary men and women protesting against the hated dompas.

A subgroup of protesters who were tired of what they saw as ineffective nonviolent protests began to embrace armed resistance instead. Among them was Nelson Mandela who helped organize a paramilitary subgroup of the ANC in 1960. He was arrested for treason in 1961, and was sentenced to life in prison for charges of sabotage in 1964.

Bantu Education

The most disabling act of the apartheid system was when its claws extended to the education space, supressing whatever glimpse of hope or dreams there was for a black child.

Hendrik Verwoerd the architect of apartheid, who was South Africa's Minister of Native Affairs from 1958-1966, addressing parliament on governments education policies said < I quote>

“There is no place for Bantu in the European Community above the level of certain forms of labour.... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? Education must train people in accordance to the sphere in which they live.” <close quote>

Bantu education system was the most debilitating and deadly act of South Africa’s apartheid policy on the soul of a people. Bantu education stultified the minds and crippled the future of black children, training and equipping them only for servitude in the lower echelons of the labour market.

The vindictiveness of the Bantu education system and the degrading comments in reference to blacks and attempts to keep the black child away from school made Chief Albert Luthuli, President of the African National Congress (ANC) from 1952 to 1960 and the first African who in 1960 received the Nobel Peace Prize to comment that <l quote>

“Take every opportunity to present us in the world as sub-human beings incapable of assimilating civilization, this matter of dwarfing our personality and trying to make us believe that we are nobodies is the worst sin the white man has committed against Africans”

Of course some countries had similar segregation mechanisms but South Africa took it to a different level of extreme. Prior to **1990**, the state in its education budget spent eleven times more money on each white pupil than on each black pupil.

June 16 Soweto Uprising

Anti-apartheid protests continued as life for black South Africans became more direr under apartheid. For many, 1976 or Soweto Uprising conjures up an iconic black and white photograph taken by Sam Nzima. In that iconic photograph, 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubo is carrying Hector Pieterse, a 13-year-old boy who was fatally wounded when police fired on students protesting the official lowering of academic standards in South Africa’s black schools.

Up to 10 000 black schoolchildren, marched to protest a new law that forced them to learn in Afrikaans. In response, police massacred a number of protestors. Despite attempts to restrain the protests, they spread throughout South Africa increasing the number of victims. The image of the dying boy spread around the world. In response, exiled movement leaders recruited more and more

people to resist. "Soweto" became the symbol of the profound social, cultural, economic and physical divisions of apartheid.

In order to preserve the status quo in the face of determined and mounting challenge, the apartheid state now enacted security laws designed to **close** off all remaining avenues of dissent. This arsenal of legislation eliminated all due process principles and made it possible for the state to arrest, detain, torture, imprison, ban, and kill its opponents with impunity. Some of the more notorious laws included the Prohibition of Interdicts Act of **1956**, which denied blacks access to courts to challenge the implementation of apartheid policies; the Suppression of Communism Act of **1950**; the Terrorism Act and the General **Law** Amendment Act. States of emergency and forced removals heightened the trauma of the black community. Amongst the countless who were murdered by the regime we remember:

Mr. Bantu Stephen Biko, the young leader of the Black Consciousness Movement who died of a massive brain hemorrhage while in police custody in 1977. His killing set off international outrage but no one was ever held responsible. Evidence at the inquest showed that Biko had died from head injuries inflicted over a period of days. Naked and shackled, he was dumped without identification outside the emergency room of a hospital.

The Cradock four - Messrs Goniwe, Calata, Mkhonto and Mhalwuli disappeared in 1985 from Port Elizabeth. They were abducted as they were traveling between Port Elizabeth and Cradock in Cape Province - taken into bushes, beaten, shot and stabbed to make it appear as if their deaths were vigilante killings and then burned.

The Pebco Three - Messrs Hashe, Godolosi and Galela disappeared in 1985. They had been abducted from the Port Elizabeth airport after the security police had lured them there with the promise of meeting a potential donor. They were never to be seen again.

Boipatong - The brutal murder of at least 45 Boipatong residents on 17 June 1992 was one of the worst of many atrocities committed by the apartheid regime and a critical turning point in our long struggle for freedom and democracy.

These are just a few examples of cases which made it to the TRC. Hundreds of people died doing no more than demanding basic human rights, One did not need to be a political activist to become a victim of apartheid; being black, alive and seeking the basic necessities of life that whites took for granted and enjoyed was enough.

INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION

South Africa attracted intense international scrutiny and condemnation. Organisations like the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), for example, demanded sanctions against South Africa. The Sharpeville massacre of 69 black people on 21 March 1960 made the UN reconsider its stance about South Africa's membership; declaring apartheid as a crime against humanity.

South Africans during that time lived under a censored media. Only those who managed to leave our borders, were able to grasp how many friends we had abroad. Despite some countries' support for the apartheid regime and opposition to the African National Congress (ANC), we saw the display of the spirit and philosophy of *ubuntu* from other nations. "I am a person because you are".

We remember and appreciate how our humanity was recognised by so many of our African neighbours and countries across our great continent. Some African countries sheltered our liberators when others called them criminals or terrorists. For this South Africa is forever indebted to you. We appreciate the role that was played by some countries abroad but given my limited time, I would now like to focus on the role Canada played during our struggle

THE ROLE OF CANADA IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

It was not a coincidence that immediately after his release from prison; Nelson Mandela listed Canada as one of the priority countries to visit. In June 1990, four months after 27 years of imprisonment, Nelson Mandela, a non-head of state addressed a joint session of the House of Commons and the Senate here in Canada. In his address he said <and I quote>

"We are made better human beings by the fact that you have reached out from across the seas to say that we too, the rebels, the fugitives; the prisoners deserve to be heard." <End quote>

Canada's fight and involvement stretched to over three decades, notably from when the then Prime Minister Diefenbaker made his stance known at the Commonwealth gathering in 1961. Diefenbaker told the gathering that Canadians as a whole unequivocally deplore the practice of apartheid and believed that... the principles of equality without regard to race or any other considerations must be generally acceptable to all the member nations.

An impasse ensued whereby; Mr. Diefenbaker proposed that, instead of rejecting South Africa, they declare racial equality an essential principle of the Commonwealth and so, South Africa's application was rejected.

We recognise also the efforts of your former Prime Ministers like Clark, Mulroney and Trudeau. Clark often engaged with the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa in enforcing sanctions. In the 80's Prime Minister Trudeau reaffirmed Canada's opposition to apartheid saying that racial discrimination was an insult to mankind and could not be acceptable. The South African presidency acknowledged that Prime Minister Mulroney's firm anti-apartheid stance at times put him at odds with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

After a particularly critical August 1986 meeting in London which left an isolated Britain on the sidelines, Canada moved with other Commonwealth nations on 11 additional sanctions. Even after the release of political prisoners, now under Prime Minister Jean Chretien, Canada ensured that sanctions were not lifted until just before the first democratic elections.

In 2004, Mandela sent a letter in which he said Mulroney had provided strong and principled leadership in the struggle against apartheid. He also said this was not a popular position in all quarters, but South Africans today acknowledge the importance of his contribution to South Africa's eventual liberation and success.

As a symbol of our appreciation to Canadians, the South African Government awarded former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney with the Order of the Companion of OR Tambo in Gold. It was through the efforts of your ethical leadership whose strong moral conviction helped dismantle the formal system of apartheid. And for that South Africa is grateful.

The Truth and reconciliation

The early 1990s saw political parties opposing apartheid unbanned, political prisoners like Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathadra released; Exiled politicians like OR Tambo; Joe Slovo; Denis Goldberg; Frene Ginwala; Ruth Mampati made their way back home. Negotiations started. South Africans of all races engaged one another – not in a battle of gunfire, but a battle of *words*.

The remarkable thing about the negotiations for our freedom is, perhaps, that the solution came from within. If a country's citizens are disagreeing in today's world, it is not uncommon for external powers to swoop in and prescribe – or even enforce – an end to such disagreements. This was not the case with our negotiations. While we had many international friends who we knew we could call on, the parties in South Africa sat down - the oppressed and the oppressor - and we painstakingly ***talked*** our way to freedom.

The arrival of democracy in South Africa shines as an example of the strength of dialogue, but so too does South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation of 1996. This was an attempt to heal the wounds of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid, by seeking answers to painful questions, and granting amnesty in exchange.

South Africa could not make the journey from a past which was marked by conflict, injustice, oppression, and exploitation to a democratic dispensation characterised by a culture of respect for human rights without coming face to face with its history. South Africa was hurting and the country needed to promote national unity and reconciliation.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was conceived as part of the bridge-building process designed to help lead the nation away from a deeply divided past to a future founded on the recognition of human rights and democracy. One of the main tasks of the Commission was to uncover as much as possible of the truth about past gross violations of human rights.

The Commission was founded in the belief that this task was necessary for the promotion of reconciliation and national unity. In other words, the telling of the truth about past gross human rights violations, as viewed from different perspectives; facilitating the process of understanding our divided

pasts, whilst the public acknowledgement of ‘untold suffering and injustice’ (Preamble to the Act) helps to restore the dignity of victims and afford perpetrators the opportunity to come to terms with their own past.

The Commission also sought to understand the individual and institutional motives and perspectives which gave rise to the gross violations of human rights. Under examinations, it sought to establish the contexts and causes of these violations; establish the political and moral accountability of individuals, organisations and institutions. The goal was to provide the grounds for making recommendations to prevent future human rights violations.

Clearly, not everyone who came before the Commission experienced healing and reconciliation. However, extracts from testimonies before the Commission illustrate the varying ways and degrees in which people have been helped by the Commission to restore their human dignity and to make peace with their troubled past. They included cases where an astonishing willingness to forgive was displayed, where those responsible for violations apologised and committed themselves to a process of restitution, and where the building or rebuilding of relationships was initiated.

SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

So, understanding how the system was enforced will make you understand why the apartheid legacy has been so enduring, twenty five years after democracy.

Where are we as a country? Was *reconciliation* the end goal? Should we not, instead, have focussed on economic transformation? Did the end of apartheid lead to the end of *economic* segregation? Do *all* in our economy have the same likelihood of succeeding? Has the *economic* playing field been levelled?

About 80% of the country's population is ethnically black African. Roughly 9% are considered colored (a mix of white and African or white and Asian), nearly 8% are white and about 2% are ethnic Indian. We are yet to address racial oppression in the form of classification and hierarchy which still exists (Whites, Indians, coloureds and blacks – in that order). We have not touched that topic.

- While we have ended the legal imposition of racism and inequality the obdurate nature of racism and privilege still thwarts real transformation in our country. The poor and black of South Africa largely live and function outside of the formal economy. They have virtually no access to the market place. We still suffer from the unjust distribution of the nation's resources that we inherited from the days of apartheid. Jobs for poor black South Africans are few and offer slave wages.
- The unemployment rate for black South Africans stands at 35% while for the white population group it is 6.6%. It was confirmed to me that coincidentally this is the exact figure for Canada's unemployment rate for May 2019: 6.6%. As a result, over 20 million South Africans live in abject poverty, while a small, still mainly white minority, live a life of wealth and luxury.
- South Africa's Commission for Employment Equity reports that – despite only making up 9.5% of the economically active population today – white South Africans still occupy 69% of top management positions and 58% of senior management positions.
- Looking at the gender disparities is also sobering: Males occupy 78% of top management, and 67% of senior management. The position of women, especially black women, remains marginal.
- The inequalities are reflected in every corner of society. We have a two-tier education system, with world-class facilities for the rich elite, but under-equipped and underfunded schools for the majority.
- The same in healthcare, with first-world private hospitals providing excellent service for the few, while the majority has to wait for hours in long queues before being treated in under-resourced state hospitals.
- Housing tells us the same story. The Freedom Charter declares that "All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security". Yet thousands still live in grossly overcrowded, shacks, with no water, electricity or sanitation, often just a kilometer away from mansions worth many millions of rands where single families live in huge houses with spacious gardens and swimming pools.
- It is no wonder that in some of our poorest communities, desperate people who can see no way out of their plight, resort to violent protests and destroy public property, even attacking, equally poor fellow-African residents. We must all condemn such acts, but at the same time

understand that unless we solve the massive crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality, such revolts will become even more frequent.

- Among the many interventions President Ramaphosa has hosted two Investment Conferences in South Africa intended to table actual investment deals. The aim is to generate 130 billion Canadian dollars in new investments over the next five years.
- A commission of inquiry into state capture, which is headed by the Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, has begun to uncover evidence of the 'capture' of several state institutions and processes by private interests. This state capture has damaged several critical institutions, damaged confidence in our economy and resulted in the theft of billions of rands from the state – and from the people of South Africa.
- The commission has heard evidence of corruption on a scale far greater than many people had expected. As difficult and damaging as some of the testimony may be, this is an absolutely essential process that must be seen through to its conclusion if we are to put this shameful episode in our history behind us. As part of our drive to end corruption – and to improve the safety of all South Africans – we have taken steps to strengthen the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), South African Police Service (SAPS) and State Security Agency (SSA).
- But there is still much more work that needs to be done. It has now become known that global companies have also been involved in the corruption scandal unfolding in South Africa. There are also allegations that accountants KPMG, public relations firm Bell Pottinger, consultancy McKinsey & Co and software company SAP are among some of the companies implicated in facilitating, being party to or turning a blind eye to their corrupt business dealings in South Africa.
- In many instances corrupt business people tend to be exempt from public scrutiny as the spotlight is fixed on politicians, although in many cases of corruption, it is the private sector which initiates these dodgy dealings. In fact, in most cases, in order for you to have a corrupt politician, you need an equally corrupt businessman or an equally corrupt entrepreneur.
- In order to effectively deal with and root out corruption, we need to ensure that there is no possibility of enabling such relationships.

South Africa has shown progress in the 25 years since the end of apartheid. But, ladies and gentlemen - while it seems like just yesterday for some of us - 25 years is a long time for those who are still waiting for the restoration of their economic dignity. We recognise that our freedom and the transformation of the economy are interlinked.

At a macro-level, we are a diversified economy; with our market-size ranking 27th in the world. We are a G20 country, with the 19th-largest stock exchange in the world. We have among the Top 3 banking systems in the world.

Aside from these macro-level achievements, the lives of ordinary South Africans have improved too.

In our quest to correct the human rights violations by the apartheid regime, we forgot to ask ourselves if it was feasible to re-create a deeply distorted society primarily by employing the human rights framework. The Rights language protected the property interests of the wealthy and the powerful. The property clause as it stands, caters to both groups, although white property-owners have cause to celebrate its wording. It protects the right of every person to acquire property and to dispose of it and prohibits expropriation without compensation.

This means black can now acquire property, a right Africans were generally denied during apartheid, but it also protects white property-owners. The mere right to own property is of little consequence to a segment of the population that has few or no resources to acquire property in the first place. There has been concern that:

- Virtually all land remains in white hands although the few blacks with access to funds can now purchase land on the free market.
- Except for largely cosmetic effects, there is little possibility that the particular conceptualization of rights in the new South Africa will alter the patterns of power, wealth, and privilege established under apartheid. Unfortunately, the poor South African has fallen victim to most of the pitfalls of rights discourse.
- Human rights norms such as political participation; the rights to speech, assembly, and association; the freedom from torture; equal protection and non-discrimination; and the denial of economic, social, and cultural rights have been prioritized.

The economic barriers and income inequalities created by apartheid are still too prevalent today. As Government, we will continue to explore ways of levelling the playing fields, so that all South Africans – regardless of race or gender – have the opportunity to enter the economic mainstream. As we do so, we will continue to look to our constitution to guide our actions. We also recognise that any interventions or policies we introduce must not jeopardise the sustainability of our robust economy.

In June last year I was invited by the Hill Times to write an opinion piece on South Africa based on the theme “Race and Politics”. The theme was informed by this country’s elections which were subsequently held in October 2019. My article was titled “**Out of nothing, nothing comes**”. In brief, I reflected on how yesterday’s design of apartheid policies have robbed South Africa of a chance to grow as a country and for that country to take its rightful place in the world. In the article I quoted the former South African President Thabo Mbeki where he asserted that if the saying “Out of nothing, nothing comes” is true, “**then, it must follow that the future is formed and derives its first impulse in the womb of the present.**”

I wrote this opinion piece not because I was apportioning all South Africa’s current challenges on the apartheid government but I was cautioning - that the government of the day should be mindful of political and policy decisions that are made based on race and politics of the day, specifically with an intent to exclude other races.

As I conclude ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to once again thank the organisers for this invitation. It is an honour for me to be here.

At 25, South Africa is still a relatively young country on the global stage. We have come a long way. But we recognise and appreciate that we – as with almost every nation on this great planet - still have a lot to learn and that we have a long way to go.

I thank you.