

THE INSPIRATION OF A WOMAN FIGURE IN SOCIETY, IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

Maria Ramos' Speech at the Occasion of the Annual Number 43
Trelawney Park Legacy Public Lecture - 2010

The Royal Villas

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The leadership and the people of Swaziland;
The leadership and the people of South Africa;
Members of the regional and international societies present;
The Masilela Family and the extended family of Number 43.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am here on behalf of Maria Ramos this evening who regrettable could not attend today and who, as seen in her video clip, sends her deepest apologies. It is a great honour for me to have this opportunity to address all distinguished guests in attendance on a topic that is close to us.

I personally have also had the good fortune during my working career to be exposed to individuals, particularly women who are the stalwarts of our communities and who have taught me so much in terms of needs and what is important to them which most of us do not understand. These are strong intelligent women like Umagogo, who are providing support and heading up large families.

What follows are Maria's words on the Occasion of the Annual Number 43 Trelawney Park Legacy Public Lecture - 2010.

"I was asked by the Masilela family to share with you my thoughts and experiences on a very important subject, namely "The Inspiration of a Woman Figure in Society, in these Difficult Times".

In my short exposure to the Number 43 initiative, I have come to learn that this theme is an extension of the call made last year at the launch of the Number 43 Trelawney Park Legacy Project.

So, what is this Legacy Project all about? As I understand it, it seeks to do the following:

- i. Raise the awareness and provide the right recognition to those individuals, families and groupings that sacrificed for liberation;
- ii. Stimulate and coordinate objective research projects to collect, document and preserve the historical facts relevant to Number 43, Swaziland as well as the broader liberation of South Africa;
- iii. Run a project to identify and re-unite families, relatives and friends that separated during the struggle ;

- iv. Run a project that will help identify Swazi nationals that contributed to South Africa's liberation and facilitate the requisite recognition of these individuals;
- v. Extend the spirit of giving and sharing, which defined uMagogo, now known as Magogoism;
- vi. Run public lectures to help increase the understanding amongst the youth in particular, of the importance of countries like Swaziland and the role that it played in the liberation of South Africa; and
- vii. Run and manage the House as a historical site and repository of history, ensuring that it is self-sustaining.

The woman who has created this Legacy for us and for generations to come, is none other than Rebecca Makgomo Masilela. The mother of my long-time friend and colleague, Elias Masilela. Rebecca was a leader in her own right, whose energy was spent every waking day on protecting children and focusing on education and discipline.

I have learnt over time that woman's inspiration does not come from challenges of a profession. It does not come from the challenge of the quest to achieve equality with men; it does not come from the love of money and economic power. Instead, it lies in the love for one's family. This comes out clearly in the life story of Rebecca Masilela.

UMagogo was the pillar of her family. She provided the foundation for its development, the education of the children, the healthy neighbourhood that formed the fundamental social security that her family enjoyed throughout the more than forty years they were at Number 43.

Although Rebecca was not the archetypical modern woman (she was a housewife for her entire life), this never prevented her from participating in decision-making in the household. To the contrary, because she was always at home, she ended up taking on the role of ultimate decision-maker in the household.

We can admire her character as a wife, her devotion as a homemaker, her generosity as a neighbour, her influence as a teacher, her effectiveness as a mother as well as her excellence as a person.

Contrasting this family design at Number 43 with what I am used to observing around me, made me think deeply about the society I would like to see, today and in the future.

In a lot of instances society is quick to dismiss women due to the misconception that they are weak and vulnerable. Yet women have been the backbone of African society for many generations. Women are highly resilient as seen through Magogo's life. She was a constant visitor to the Manzini police station but never gave up. When the history of that police station gets written one day, Rebecca's name may well take top position of

the list of people who have had an association with that institution - good or bad.

While many young people may not be able to see a parallel between themselves and UMagogo, what they should realise is that she portrayed the great traits of a human being, that is integrity, strength, compassion, selflessness, love for her neighbours, and community minded-ness. Even in a high tech world of email, internet and chat rooms, these traits remain relevant.

Likewise, men may sometimes feel threatened by successful women. But, there is enough room in our society for everyone to play a role. We should encourage people to play to their strengths. We need to build a society that respects and values women and men for the contribution they make through their work; their roles in society; their roles in the home. We cannot and MUST not assign roles and responsibilities solely on the basis of gender. We need to invest in the education of girl children in particular and recognise that the investment we make in their education is the most productive investment any nation can make.

Today's proceedings and this project are also about leadership. It is also about the values and priorities we hold dear - the values which are core to building a non-racist, not-sexist society; a society in which we have defeated poverty; a caring society. A society where we respect and value each other because of the contribution we make; not the position we hold, or the material wealth we have. A society which truly lives the spirit of Ubuntu.

We have been programmed to judge people by their technical qualification rather than by their life skills. We need to shift this mindset if we are to get the full benefit of all those who contribute to our communities. It is about being a productive member of society rather than a qualified member of society. However this does not mean that education is not important; it is crucially important that we bolster the skills base of the region; in order to improve the overall output.

From my own personal experience, I realised that education was key to my progress as an individual. I decided to take on the challenge of going to university after having started to work. I was a bit older than my fellow students but hopefully also a bit wiser. I had had some life experience at the time which gave me a different perspective from that of my fellow students.

In my career I have made sure that I worked with people whom I respected and whose work I could be proud to be associated with. This is true of my time in public service and in the private sector. I have used my core skillset and adapted that to areas outside of my traditional comfort zone. What I have come to realise is that the core skillset (one's education and experience) can be taken anywhere and put to good use. This is a theme that I see as a future trend. Flexibility will be the name of the game; the

ability of people to work across different fields. People grow through being exposed to new challenges. Flexibility will not only protect individuals against job losses, but will improve the level of skill in the economy as a whole.

This is a very important time for our Southern African region. We have been honoured to host the Soccer World Cup (and are putting on a really good show for the rest of the world to see) it is also a time when we are coming out of a recession and need to prove our mettle. We need to think about what we as a developing region can offer the continent and the rest of the world. We need to think about our natural resources (which includes our people) and how we can use these to maximum effect.

It all comes back to the quality of our people and the quality of our leaders. Leaders come in all shapes and forms. One our leader was uMagogo. I welcome you to stand up and cheer in the honour of this gallant woman, Rebecca Makgomo Masilela - uMagogo.

Maria Ramos”