

MAGOGOISM

A tribute and a call to action

Honoured guests, Comrades, and especially the children of uMagogo,

We gather here today to celebrate a life well lived. We gather to give thanks at three levels:

Firstly we gather to say thank you to uMagogo for leaving us such a wonderful legacy. We also gather here to thank the people of Swaziland again for their support, solidarity and hospitality given to thousands of exiles who were forced to flee from the country of their birth, South Africa in the dark days of apartheid.

But a very special word of thanks must go to the Masilela and Kekana families for giving us such a gentle giant of a woman and also for consistently sharing your home and uMagogo's heart with us.

We gather here today exactly one week after we laid to rest uMama Sisulu, that great Liberation Struggle icon, a leader whose legacy we treasure dearly.

Today we gather again to pay tribute (as indeed we do and should do every year) to uMagogo Rebecca Makgomo Masilela, another mother whose legacy we treasure dearly.

As we stood over MaSisulu's graveside last week, it hit home to me that we are now the frontline generation and it scared the living daylights out of me. It occurred to me that the things that we admire most about MaSisulu, the things we will sorely miss her for, can only be passed on if WE, this generation choose to own it and to pass it on.

So, as I stand here today to celebrate and remember what it is that we treasure about uMagogo, I am reminded again that the legacy of our Mothers can only live on through us. Scary? Yes! But we are their children and they have taught us well. So, between us, we should be able to pick up the baton and run the race.

I believe we are a lucky generation.

We are old enough to have lived through the era of colonialism, imperialism and apartheid. So we have firsthand knowledge of just how devastating the consequences of dispossession, discrimination and legalised racism are and why we should eradicate its last vestiges and why we should never ever allow it to happen in our name or on our watch. And, painful as it was, the knowledge is invaluable and we must not allow our knowledge and memories of it to become blunted as we become materially better off as individuals.

Our generation is old enough to be part of the generation who can say, we obeyed that clarion call to submit or to fight. We stood up and fought apartheid and we were victorious. So, like uMagogo, I can say with pride and honesty, I carry the scars inflicted on me, my family and my community through years of prison, detention, torture, I carry those scars as my badge of honour.

We are a generation who is lucky to be alive, to have survived the brutality. So today we should also honour the many who did not – murdered, killed in detention, buried in shallow graves. We are painfully mindful of those like Simphiwe Mthimkulu, Neil Aggett, Chris Hani, Stanza Bopape, Steve Bantu Biko and many, many like them who paid the ultimate price for our Freedom.

But we are also a generation who are still young enough to be part of building a very different future. This is a huge privilege and it excites me greatly. But this privilege also implies responsibilities. It is our generation that has to shape what a post colonial, post apartheid Africa will look like. This is a terrifying thought, because our Elders are leaving us one by one. Slowly but surely WE have to pick up the baton. WE have to provide leadership. WE are now the Frontline Generation.

So, today I want to engage with you to get us all thinking about what legacy WE will leave behind. As we gather here today to celebrate a life so well lived, a mother whose heart and home was so filled with love, compassion and courage, we should know that the best tribute we can pay to our great mothers and fathers will be to live our lives in such a manner that we emulate them and that we leave our countries, our continent and indeed the world in an even better shape than they left it. As clichéd as it sounds, WE need to be the change we want to see.

Having lived through quite a few things, we are “People of a certain Age”. And “People of a Certain Age” (in every generation) tend to look at the next generation with great judgement and criticism. We spend a lot of time bemoaning their behaviour, their music, their clothes, their values, etc. I suspect that if we debated the veracity of this we could be here next month. But I DO want to challenge all of us by asking the question: Whose children are these unruly youths? Ought we not to take more responsibility to shape what the next generation will turn out to be. Are we not mainly who we are because of how we were brought up? Were we not shaped, moulded to become the upright citizens we consider ourselves to be through the support, the discipline and the examples of those who walked before us? Let us step up to the plate and shoulder our responsibilities to grow the next generation.

There is no doubt that the country of uMagogo's birth is indeed a better place today and we are grateful that our Mother lived long enough to usher in democracy and to see how her well brought up children and grandchildren are using the new opportunities presented to them under democracy. Today South Africa is considered to be a leading nation globally. We can be proud that we are invited to join many prestigious fora, unheard of and inaccessible to developing nations in the past. Our country's voice is listened to carefully in the multilateral fora.

Our economy is well run and by qualified people like those in the Masilela clan of whom we are immensely proud! Our constitution is universally acclaimed as a benchmark for the world. Our judicial system is held in high regard in South Africa and the world. We adhere to the rule of law. Our democracy is underpinned by regular free and fair elections that run better and better every time, thanks largely to three very smart women who must make uMagogo smile every time – uMama Dr Brigalia Bam Chairperson, uMama Thoko Mpulwana, Deputy Chairperson, sis Advocate Pansy Tlakula, CEO of the Independent Electoral Commission.

We must never underestimate what it means to have regular, free and fair elections where we can elect or remove leaders who constitute our parliament and government at various levels. We must have the right to decide who should lead us and we must insist that they remain faithful to the Constitution and The Bill of Rights that is the foundation of our pact as South Africans to live our lives as equals, as a nation regardless of race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, disability, class or creed.

Democracy is not a very complicated thing. It quite simply means that the right of every man or woman to elect and to be elected through a democratic process must be respected and cannot be proscribed. Not allowing this means your country and its system of governance is not sustainable in all respects: politically, socially, economically. Our history in South Africa should teach us that. The

events in North Africa, the Middle East and should teach us that. Citizens are refusing to accept that they cannot have this basic right.

What I found particularly striking about the events up North was the many people flying their national flag. The (largely) young people who took to the streets were at pains to state how much they loved their countries and that they did not want to leave their countries; they wanted to build a better future at home; they wanted to build a country they could be proud to claim citizenship of.

Recently in South Africa, we have seen a number of demonstrations where citizens have displayed their unhappiness and their anger at the fact that 17 years after democracy, they still did not have access to basic goods and services. And we who live in our comfortable homes, who drive nice cars, have food on our tables every day and whose children get the best education, we should not sleep easily with so much poverty around us.

So I want to make an appeal to all of us who lead in the public or private sectors, to look for, to listen, to learn and to respect the voices who are calling for more improvement in our democracies. As South Africans, we should take courage from the massive improvements we already have been able to bring about through democracy. Lets us take courage and acknowledge there is still much work and improved democracy can only be better for us.

But we must also be mindful of how South Africans have been challenged to embrace the other side of the coin. Democratic rights can only exist where people embrace responsibility. I want to raise, this notion of “service delivery”. I believe it is a demeaning, disempowering and patronising term. Governments must be held accountable for spending our taxpayer’s monies wisely and equitably. But there are many things that an active citizenry can and must do to ensure growth and development in our society and I believe we are not doing those things because we and our government have been caught in this unhealthy notion of citizens passively sitting waiting for all changes in their lives to be triggered and delivered by a Father Christmas called government. So, my message is to again say “VUKUZENZELE!” And the event of this weekend is a great example of this.

I want to make an appeal that those of us who have been beneficiaries of change and who have managed to seize the opportunities presented by democracy, to please LIFT AS WE RISE. We need to plough back. It is amazing how easy it is to make a difference.

I also want to ask that we assert and live by the values that uMagogo lived by. I want to use a word from our former First Lady Sis' Zanele Mbeki - “enoughness”. I am sure it is grammatically very dodgy, but its essence is so profound. Our generation have to learn and teach that the essence of our lives cannot be about chasing more and more money and material things only, even at the expense of others. We have to take a stand against the crass materialism we sometimes see around us. To be a winning nation and continent, we have to bring up a generation of young people who are ambitious, highly inspirational and who are go-getters. But we have to bring them up to understand that no one is an island. One cannot prosper in a sea of poverty and deprivation. Things WILL come back to bite you. Success allows you to claim back power. Use that power to make a difference. Our Mothers did. You built us and gave us the tools to succeed.

I want to now bring praise to our parents for their embracing their responsibilities to build our families. Home was a place where values were learnt, protected and passed on. I believe that many of our social ills today are a consequence of the breakdown to a large measure of the family as a social unit. Many of us are bringing up children today. I appeal to you as husbands and wives, build your own relationships with love, care and respect for one another and for your children. You set an example to your children for how they will live their lives and their relationships. Also children who

have loving, stable homes are confident and have high self esteem. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviour like early or risky sex, substance abuse or violence (as perpetrators and allowing themselves to be in abusive relationships). They will become great citizens.

Today, Africa is recognised as the continent with the greatest potential to grow. We have so much in our favour. Will we grasp the opportunity? Will we be bold enough to stand up for and embrace democracy? Will we take care to ensure shared growth and to eradicate inequality? Will we be forward looking enough to act to stop the devastation we wreak because of bad environmental practices? Are we prepared to stand against corruption in the public and private sectors? Are we visionary enough to see the obvious benefits of releasing the full potential of another 50% of our population made up of women and girl children in our quest to grow and prosper? Are we ready to change our lives so that we can lead the young to live a life free of HIV and AIDS?

Are we ready to be the change we want to see in the world?

For the sake of the memories of our parents, I want to ask you to say a resounding YES! To all of the above.

Let us not be uncertain about how history will judge us. Let us make sure we know what the verdict will be. Let us write our own script now. Then we can go in peace like uMagogo and MaSisulu, because we will then know that we do not have to worry about the future.

Africa is calling. Let us not fail her.

I thank you.

Cheryl Carolus
Kwa Magogo
Swaziland
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