

Shakua
Kagiso

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DECEMBER 16TH, 1980 - SPEECH BY
PRESIDENT OLIVER TAMBO

December 16 1838 and December 16 1961 are two dates - 123 years apart - which symbolise the drama and passion of the history of the South African people, their past, their present, and their future.

On December 16 1838 on the banks of the Ncome River in Natal, the invading Voortrekkers perpetrated their massacre against the forces of Dingane who heroically defended themselves with spears against the endless volley of cannon and guns. To celebrate the massacre the invaders built a church and gave the Ncome the new name of "Blood River".

Since 1838 the descendents of the original invaders have celebrated and continue to celebrate December 16 as the day of the humiliation of the Black people of South Africa, the day on which, year by year, we were reminded of the rule of terror and the gun which enabled the invaders to seize our land and its riches.

On December 16 1961, militants of our newly created armed force, "Umkhonto We Sizwe" once again started the process of washing out the blood from Ncome river. With all avenues to peaceful change closed, the simultaneous attacks launched on that day against enemy installations gave notice to the world and to the racist regime, that our people's heritage, which was stolen and held by the gun, would have to be repossessed by the gun. Since 1961, December 16 has taken on a new meaning. It has become a day of renewed commitment to the struggle to end racist tyranny in our country.

On this day we recall with pride the heroes of the centuries - long wars of resistance; the countless martyrs and heroes of the liberation struggle of our times: Some have gone to the gallows. Many have been killed in detention. Countless children have been murdered in the streets of struggle. Men and women, the pride of any nation, are languishing in jail for the love of their country and their people. We recall those who have been tortured brutally, and then dragged before the law courts to be sentenced to death or long term imprisonment.

It is against this background of a sustained tryanny that men of the calibre of Bishop Ambrose Reeves and Govan Mbeki stand out in bold relief, symbolising a people's enduring and ever growing resistance to that tyranny, a people who not only remain undettered by it, but are instead inspired to greater feats of courage and determination.

We hail the growing mass political confrontations in the factories, farms, Bantustans, schools and colleges, which coupled with military actions helped to demonstrate that the balance sheet of struggle stands in favour of our cause and the prospect of a successful assault upon the racist citadel is brighter than at any time in our history.

December 16 is also a day when we embrace those in every part of the world who play such a vital role, in reinforcing and inspiring the fighting people with their material and moral support. The struggle of the people of South Africa has benefitted enormously from this support, which has come from various parts of the globe - from governments, political organisations, trade unions, youth bodies, women's movements, churches and other sections of the progressive international community.

Today, December 16 is being celebrated in every part of our land. In the public squares and town centres the racist ruling clique will be parading its armed might; and extolling its history of plunder, remembering its so-called heroes who filled our rivers and covered our streets with the blood of our people.

But the majority of the people of South Africa will be commemorating this day in the prisons, the ghettos and the factories, on the farms and in the rural labour reserves known as Bantustans. They will recall our heroes, past and present, and re-dedicate themselves with ever greater vigour to the task of utterly destroying apartheid South Africa.

On this day of Umkhonto we Sizwe the African National Congress commends its cadres standing vigilant on the battlefield of struggle.

The ANC dips its banner in respectful memory of all those who have laid down their lives in the course of our struggle. We acclaim the courage and fortitude of the thousands held in the prisons of South Africa. We acclaim also the skill and the bravery of the cadres of Umkhonto we Sizwe who lit the fires of freedom in apartheid's most prestigious and strategic installation at Sasol and the many who carry the flame throughout our country.

This year, by their actions inside South Africa, they have not only advanced our struggle towards liberation, but have contributed towards the consolidation of the victory of the people of Zimbabwe and served as a worthy ally of the people's liberation ^mary of Namibia fighting under the direction of SWAPO.

In this past year, there has been a dramatic escalation in resistance and defiance in all parts of South Africa. There is ferment across the length and breadth of the country:

In the rural areas and Bantustans the people are refusing resettlement and defiantly returning to their own homes; they are challenging the fraudulent Bantustan independence and the attempts to deprive them of their South African citizenship.

The growing political consciousness of the workers has been manifested in a prolonged succession of strikes sweeping across apartheid's industrial heartland - strikes that have evoked a corresponding response in solidarity from the Black community. In some cases nationwide boycotts of the products of factories involved have been supported by consumers and shopkeepers. In the recent strike by black journalists, traders have withdrawn their advertising from the papers affected.

The schools and colleges set up as centres of inferior education for Blacks have become an arena of bitter struggle by students who have embarked on boycotts and demonstrations protesting the inferior status of the Black majority and demanding an equal status for all South Africans in a single undivided state under a government of the people of South Africa.

The presence of armed cadres of the ANC in their midst and their conduct in combat has given the people new confidence. There is open and public support for the ANC notwithstanding the severe repercussions that follow. The "concessions", "new dispensations", "reforms", "changes" introduced by the regime are rejected and countered with demands for a government of the majority and the release of the people's imprisoned leaders.

The revolutionary upsurge in South Africa has taken place against a backdrop of a transformed southern Africa! After years of bitter struggle, the people of Zimbabwe have succeeded in respossessing their country, ejecting the usurpers of power and installing a democratically elected government in Salisbury. As a result the borders of racist rule in Southern Africa have again shrunk dramatically, and a besieged Pretoria^{now} faces the final onslaught from the Namibian and South African people.

This escalating pressure, this groundswell of protest and resistance, this determined and multi-pronged assault upon the structures and the daily application of apartheid is the change in our country that is inevitably corroding the apartheid system and compelling the oppressor to seek new methods of survival.

It is in response to this force that Botha, Koornhof, and Malan have put forward their so-called changes and reforms. There is no miraculous conversion, no sudden recognition of a people's right to self-determination, no spontaneous desire for a free and just society. Instead what we are witnessing are the defensive manoeuvres of a system frenzied by the growing evidence of opposition and of its vulnerability. Every new adaptation is designed to preserve apartheid, every alleged reform is for the purpose of protecting the system, not destroying it.

As always when faced with determined opposition from the people, the Pretoria regime has embarked on a new phase of its old strategy: it talks of reform yet takes repressive action. It is a policy not unique to South Africa, but common to all tyrants and aptly described by Amilcar Cabral as a "policy of blood and smiles".

Much is made in the regime's propaganda of the smiles but the people of South Africa live with the harsh and brutal reality of the blood. Armed police are still deployed against the children. The killing of students continues. The totals mount up, but because the areas are isolated, there is no count; there is no publicity. When the protests continue, the schools are closed.

The terror in the streets is accompanied by administrative and legal terror - more detentions, more arrests, more bans against individuals and organisations - torture during interrogation and assaults on prisoners, harsher sentences including the death penalty and murder of prisoners of war. And yet, the struggle continues and grows.

While the regime talks of internal reform and friendly relations with its neighbours the entire state apparatus and the white community are militarised. More and more weapons are added to the armoury everyday, and are paraded through the streets in a show of force. The aggression against Angola continues unabated - the bombing of refugees and civilians, and armed incursions across international boundaries to terrorise innocent villagers. The attempts to destabilise the People's Republic of Mozambique persist. The newly independent state of Zimbabwe is threatened; dissident elements are trained and armed in an effort to prevent the consolidation of the victory of the Zimbabwean people.

Under cover of such slogans as "apartheid is dead", and exhortations that "we must adapt or die", there is a vigorous attempt to entrench apartheid and tighten its stranglehold: The process of bantustanisation moves inexhorably on. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to be moved from one part of the country to another, from impoverishment to utter destitution. The products of our fertile lands stock the supermarkets of Europe, but for our people there is malnutrition and starvation on a scale we have never seen before in either the urban or rural areas of South Africa.

Despite the high price of gold and claims of a booming economy, among a population half the size of Britain, black unemployment is well over 2 million and is growing. Capital intensive industry is more profitable, and in South Africa black lives and labour are cheap.

The alleged reforms that have been introduced can best be characterised as giving an inch and taking away a mile - and even the inch is conditional.

The much vaunted labour reforms were designed first and foremost to meet the changing labour needs of the apartheid economy and to control that labour more efficiently. Some Black workers have been given a limited right to organise in trade unions, but any attempt to organise or deal with issues outside that narrowly defined legal right is subject to harsh and severe penalties.

As we saw when Johannesburg's municipal workers went on strike, thousands were simply loaded onto lorries and removed from the urban areas to the bantustans, new workers were brought in and the leaders of the trade union concerned were charged with sabotage. That is the reality of workers rights under apartheid's labour reforms.

Most recently, there was the dramatic announcement that 60 discriminatory laws were to be abolished, including the hated pass laws. Our experience of apartheid indicates that the Black people of South Africa will be worse off at the end of this exercise than they were before it began. The...

Black Community Development Bill bears out this assessment.

Recent reforms. Recent reforms. Recent reforms.

Recent reforms. Recent reforms. Recent reforms.

Lest there still be any misunderstanding or illusion about the nature of the reforms and changes in South Africa, let me remind you, that this legislation is not the brainchild of the so called hardcore verkrampste nationalists. The Minister who is to introduce the legislation is Piet Koornhof - the self-proclaimed prophet of reform and change, the man who masquerades as the friend and protector of the Black people and as the most prominent feature of apartheid.

Attempts are being made to improve the long term profitability of apartheid. The system is being adapted, apartheid is being modernised, apartheid is being made more efficient. But, apartheid is not, I repeat, not being changed in its essence.

For at the core of the apartheid system is the exclusion of the majority from political and economic power in our country. We make no demand for amendments or improvements to the apartheid system. The repeal of a thousand discriminatory laws means nothing if power remains in the hands of the white minority. The rejection of slavery is not conditional upon the kindness or otherwise of the slave driver.

In the uprising of 1976 and since, including the current boycott of schools, the protest by the students has not been simply about the use of Afrikaans the provision of books or type of education. Nor in the recent rent and transport protests are the people protesting only about the increasing cost of living and low wages. Underlying the current upsurge is the demand for the transfer of power to the people of South Africa as a whole - ^{the} removal of the minority regime and the establishment of a government deriving authority from the majority of the population and elected on the basis of one person one vote.

The constitution which operates in South Africa today entrenches racism, discrimination and exploitation. It excludes the majority from making laws and executing the. The institutions that have been created secure the maintenance in power of the white minority and close all doors to the majority, as well as all avenues of bringing about change within the system.

This is why the liberation struggle is not concerned ~~in~~ with seeking to apply the present laws of South Africa fairly, with ~~in~~ obtaining and enforcing constitutional rights. The constitution is itself the source and confirmation of our exclusion from power. Thus the liberation struggle of the South African people must encompass the overthrow of the constitution, the system that devised it and the institutions it has created.

~~Liberation involves the transfer of power to the people of South Africa so that they can exercise control over the land, the resources and wealth of our country. It means that the people can then collectively shape the society they desire, create the institutions and structures that are required for that society, and decide who and how these institutions should be operated.~~

~~It is only in bringing about this fundamental change, total change, revolutionary change that liberation will have meaning for the people of South Africa.~~

Such a change can only come about as a result of mass action by the people of South Africa. Those who have created and now operate the oppressive system cannot be the agents for overthrowing it. Clearly it is in the interest of every member of the regime to retain power in the hands of the minority and to resist change.

The violence of apartheid, the brutality of repression mean that change cannot be peaceful. To decry the necessity for armed struggle is to call for and support the continuation of apartheid.

To say, that armed struggle is necessary for the liberation of South Africa does not mean that the African National Congress has devoted itself exclusively to military organisation and actions. Armed struggle is a vital and essential ingredient of the liberation struggle, but it is not the totality of it.

The ANC is, and has always been the spearhead of political action in South Africa. Banning the ANC and imprisoning the leaders did not remove it from the political arena as our enemies had hoped it would. The political function of the ANC has always been two-fold: to politicise and mobilise the masses as well as to give expression to their aspirations. This has not changed.

Today there can be no doubt that the African National Congress is central to both the political debate and political action in South Africa

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The aspirations of the people of South Africa are embodied in the Freedom Charter adopted by the only national representative gathering ever held in our country. This year, the Freedom Charter has, 25 years after its adoption, been once again acclaimed by our people. Despite banning and police harassment it has been put forward by various groups throughout the country as the summation of their demands - their vision of a free South Africa.

To implement the Freedom Charter we first have to destroy apartheid - for freedom, equality, justice are the foundations upon which a free South Africa must be based, and freedom, equality justice are the very antithesis of apartheid.

The change we want cannot come from seeking concessions from our oppressors, for that is to recognise their right to control our lives. The change we seek cannot come from treating the symptoms of apartheid, it can only come from overthrowing, annihilating the vicious system in its entirety.

~~Liberation requires the transfer of power to the people of South Africa as a whole - the removal of the minority regime and the establishment of a government deriving authority from the majority of the population and elected on the basis of one person one vote.~~

We are not involved in a mere struggle for civil rights, we must strive for liberation. Liberation involves the transfer of power to the people of South Africa in order that they can exercise control over the land, the resources and wealth of our country. It means that the people can then collectively shape the society they desire, create the institutions and structures that are required for that society, and decide who and how these institutions should be operated.

It is only in bringing about this fundamental change - total change, revolutionary change, that liberation will have meaning for the people of South Africa.

It is precisely this objective that the ANC has set itself, and in the pursuit of which it is intensifying the assault upon the forces of racist reaction in South Africa by every means at its disposal and on all fronts.

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The victory of our people is certain, but there still lies ahead of us a long and bitter struggle, more sacrifice, more suffering. The task before us can be made lighter, the dark period ahead made shorter, by determined and sustained action by the international community.

The international community can most effectively assist the liberation struggle by totally isolating apartheid South Africa. However, action at the United Nations has been thwarted by apartheid's traditional allies and collaborators. Not only have they provided political protection and prevented mandatory action under Chapter 7, but they have assisted the regime to procure the most modern and technologically advanced weapon systems in

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violation of the arms embargo.

There are renewed attempts to bring the regime back into the international community; to end its isolation and to incorporate it more fully into the strategic planning of the western powers. Those who are advocating such policies bear a heavy responsibility - the more gravely so because they are advocating re-opening the channels by which nuclear technology and materials have flowed to South Africa.

The liberation movement depends upon its friends and progressive forces within these countries to expose these manoeuvres and to mobilise public opinion to prevent any attempt to bring apartheid in from the cold.

The use of veto powers, has delayed and prevented effective action ^{by} ~~at~~ the Security Council. However progressive countries, have not waited for U.N. action - they have acted unilaterally to impose embargoes upon relations with South Africa.

The ANC welcomes the ^{attempts} ~~action~~ by Parliamentarians and progressive forces in Western Europe, particularly in Holland, to impose an embargo on the supply and transport of oil. Within the overall context of comprehensive economic sanctions, we regard the oil embargo as of crucial importance; for any demunition in the regime's fuel supplies directly affects its aggressive capacity in southern Africa and its repressive capacity against our people.

The 1979, Summit of the OAU unanimously called upon all states to impose an oil embargo - we hope that in this coming year, the Parliaments of Western Europe will each take action to comply with this call from the OAU.

The response of the international community to the demands by our people for the release of their leaders and all South African political prisoners, remains of crucial importance. International action for the release of Nelson Mandela has complemented and reinforced the mass national campaign that has gripped the whole of our country.

We should underline tonight that as the struggle continues to intensify, more demands will be made on our supporters to defend our combatants captured by the racist enemy. In this respect we have made a call for a massive campaign to be launched to stop the execution of the Pretoria 3, sentenced to death in the so-called "Silverton Trial", and through this action to raise in all forums the demand for P.O.W. status, according to the Geneva conventions, for those of our freedom fighters captured by the South African regime. We are confident that you will respond to this challenge.

These friends of South Africa have interposed themselves between South Africa and the rest of the world community, in its efforts to bring to an end the illegal occupation of Namibia. They have provided support to the regime in its defiance of UN resolutions and its prevarications in implementing the UN plan. ^{By this act} ~~They~~ they have contributed directly ~~to prolonging the suffering of the Namibian and Angolan people~~ to the regime's campaign of murder and

destruction in Namibia and Angola.

It is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the Namibian and Angolan people are protected.

And ^{urgent} action must be taken ~~to put an end to~~ to put an end to South African aggression and occupation.

SWAPO and the people of Namibia have the full support of the ANC and the vast majority of the South African people.

We share with them, as we do with the people of Palestine and West Sahara and other victims of colonialism, fascism and racist domination, the common objective of liberating our peoples and countries, and contributing to the achievement of progress and peace in the world.

Our conviction in the certainty of victory is unshakable.