

Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress delivered by Comrade President O.R. Tambo on Heroes Day, December 16, 1986 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the People's Army.

This day 25 years ago bomb blasts in several main centres rocked South Africa. Thus was born Umkhonto we Sizwe, the People's Army of our country.

By that time the demands of our people were loud, persistent and clear: All our efforts as a people, the

whole record of relentless struggle under the leadership of the African National Congress were being met with ever-increasing violence and repression by the racist State. The time had arrived when we needed to reinforce our mass political action with the hammer blows of an armed struggle.

The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe was a response to these needs and the demands of our people. December 16, 1961

accordingly marked an historic turning point in our long march to freedom. With the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe our people were now better equipped to grasp history into their own hands.

Born of the people, combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe pledged themselves in our Manifesto to complement the actions of our national liberation movement by means of organised revolutionary violence. These past- 25 years are a proud record of a risen people making their own history with their blood, sweat and tears as we live out that

commitment..

From those small beginnings Umkhonto we Sizwe has emerged today as the guarantor of our people's future and the indispensable fighting arm of our people.

Combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe, you are the flower of successive generations of our youth tempered in the crucible of battle. On behalf of the African National Congress and its allies I salute you on this the 25th

anniversary of the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Umkhonto we Sizwe was born out of a sense of the heavy

responsibility that history had thrust upon our people. We had sought by every non-violent means at our disposal to realise the liberation of our people. In pursuit of this goal, the decade of the fifties demonstrated the overwhelming commitment of the masses of our oppressed peoples to freedom. Under the leadership of the Congress Alliance headed by the African National Congress all classes and strata as well as the diverse population groups of our country steadfastly pursued this objective. Our

people mobilised as never before to challenge white

minority rule. The decade of the fifties was a decade of truly great achievements. But true to the traditions of colonialist rule and the ideology of race superiority the rulers of our country paid no heed to the demands of our people. They drowned our efforts in blood and brutality. The Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 epitomised this

reality.

The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe was our people's answer to this historic challenge from the racist rulers of South Africa. In the clarion call of our Manifesto we declared that "the time comes in the life of any nation when there remains only two choices: submit or fight" and that South

Africa's rulers had left us with no alternative but to "hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom." We knew then, as we stated in the Manifesto, that we were "striking out along a new road for the liberation of the people"; that once we took that road there would be no going back; a road that was going to necessitate total dedication, self-sacrifice and a determination that knew no surrender; a road along which the commitment not to submit but to fight would have to be transformed into the uncompromising warrior pledge - Victory or Death!

Let us cast our minds back to those days, 25 years ago, to understand the immensity of that decision and the courage of those patriots who founded and participated in the early actions of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Not since the Bambatha Uprising in 1906 had patriots taken to arms in an organised form. The people's reaction to State violence had continued down the years. With the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe^we were gathering together in an organised form all the best fighting traditions of our past in order to stride into the future along the path of the seizure of power by the

majority of the people.

We knew then that anger alone would not bring victory. We knew then that our people had been deliberately deprived of the skills of modern warfare and denied access to weaponry. We knew then that our terrain presented its own special problems which could not be answered from the classical textbooks of guerilla warfare. We knew then that despite the sweep of the African Revolution we would have to develop the armed struggle without the advantage of rear bases in the neighbouring States. We knew then that we faced a formidable foe underpinned by imperialism.

If this was the reality that confronted us with so many disadvantages how were we to move forward? Above all else,

we knew too that our strength lay in the masses; that in striking out along a new road for liberation nothing would count as much as our faith in the masses; we knew that Umkhonto we Sizwe, born of the people, had to be rooted in

the masses and strive with the people. Despite the

immensity of the odds but immersed with this faith, those early combatants took to battle. With home-made bombs and explosives taken from the enemy we blazed a glorious trail.

And what a glorious trail it has been!

Those early exploits struck fear into the hearts of the enemy. Not since the battle of Isandhlwana in 1879 had our rulers been so shaken by our fighting formations. They

could not understand what, moved giants like Mini, Mkhabela and Khayinga to go singing defiantly to the gallows rather than trade their lives for the life of a fellow combatant by giving evidence for the State. The Minis, like many before them and many more since, emblazoned with their lives into the emblem of Umkhonto we Sizwe the uncompromising motto: Victory or Death!. Let us on the

occasion of the 25th anniversary of MK salute these heroes for their commitment to the justness of our cause and for imprinting in the history of our struggle a standard that we must live up to. Let it be recorded today that this has been our standard from the first days of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Even in those early days by what cruel twists history sought to underscore both our mistakes and the immense difficulties that our revolution faced. Within less than a year our first commander, Cde. Nelson Mandela, was captured by the enemy. Within two years of our birth the cream of our leadership was captured at Rivonia farm, brought to trial with Cde. Mandela and sentenced to life imprisonment where they remain to this day. In his statement to the court Cde. Mandela, confronted with the prospect of the gallows, defended the justness of our cause and defiantly proclaimed that for these actions "I am prepared to die". By the end of 1964, with the imprisonment of Wilton Mkwayi and others, it appeared as if the guns of MK had been silenced for all time.

Unprecedented state repression and enemy conduct which

violated every norm of humanity combined to smash our network within the country. Even the courage of our masses appeared to have cowed before the tyrant's might.

But the founders of Umkhonto we Sizwe and the leaders of our national liberation movement had already taken steps which would ensure that whatever the twists of history, our people would soldier on to victory. Thus it was that in the face of such a massive setback the only cohesive organised force of our revolution that remained at the time was the comrades who had been sent out of the country to train in politics and the art of modern warfare. We had left, our country in search of knowledge and skills denied to us in the country of our birth. We had left our homes imbued with the dream that we would surge back into South Africa to lock immediately into battle with our fascist rulers. We had left our country in the belief that when we came back with our martial skills we would be received by our leaders occupying the front trenches and guiding us into battle. And now we were faced with the imponderable prospect, of being cut off from the lifeblood of our revolution - our people.

But if our enemy reckoned that the struggle for liberation by a people could be snuffed out by victory in one battle, how wrong they were to be proved. Within the country, in the prisons, and in remote military camps situated in distant countries of our mother continent Africa we set out on the long journey of regrouping ourselves, replenishing

our courage and resolve and fighting back inch by inch to realise a dream that seemed to vanish into such a distant-future.

Looking back over those 25 years let us today accord proper place and recognition to that generation of MK we know as umgwenya who by force of circumstance and in the face of such diversity became the core for our regrouping and the torch-bearers of our revolution. With superhuman dedication to the cause of our people they held aloft our dream and lived with only one purpose in mind - to get. back into our country, to be enjoined once more in the bosom of our people whose servants we are and to pursue the revolution.

This is riot the place to record every effort, to recount

every ingenious means with which we pursued this goal. Let it be sufficient to note that we traversed many countries on foot, and by other means. Every failure to reach home

became a spur to further efforts and greater daring. We

sought to go by land, by sea and by air. We even had comrades traverse our country to reach Lesotho. Our umgwenya never gave up hope and never spared their efforts. In that phase of our history we lost many comrades, among them Cde. Flag Boshielo, member of the NEC of the African National Congress and commissar in Umkhonto we Sizwe. In Portuguese-ruled Mozambiwque we joined forces with our brothers-in-arms Freiimo to probe our way into our country. But the true epic of that period belongs to the effort we made in 1967 when as a combined force of ANC and ZAPU fighters we crossed the Zambezi into the then Rhodesia in

order to hack a path home and for our brothers to entrench themselves in their mother country. That daring effort is known as the Wankie Campaign in which our combatants fought gloriously against the combined racist South African and Smith forces. How the enemy forces were rendered panic-stricken by the relentless courage of our combined forces who, on the banks of the Zambezi, before they marched into the hostile territory of Rhodesia, were named, in memory of our great leader, the late President-General of the African National Congress, Chief Albert Lutuli, and who are known since then and for all posterity as, the Lutuli Detachment. In battle after battle the racist forces were overwhelmed by the courage and firepower of our gallant fighters. In instance after instance the cowardly enemy broke ranks and fled, abandoning their weapons, their injured and their dead. Many members of that indomitable detachment fell in battle in Wankie and on the Eastern front. Their names are inscribed in the roll-call of honour of our revolution. On this day, every year, we pay special tribute to those illustrious combatants who fell on the sacred fields of Zimbabwe with the warrior cry "Victory or Death " on their lips; immortal fighters such as Peter Mhlongo, Delmas Sibanyoni, James Masimini and Basil February who in several battles refused to retreat, fought the enemy to the last bullet; heroes such as Patrick Molaoa, President of the African National Congress Youth League, Michael Poo, Andries Motsepe, Jack Simelane and Gandhi Hlekane, all of whom gave their lives in the noble cause of our revolution.

Why do we recall these exploits? Surely it cannot be simply to record the difficulties we faced and the endurance and courage we showed. More. In the unfolding of our revolution it became the sacred duty of Umkhonto we Sizwe to revive the spirit of revolt amongst our people, to kindle the

embers so that the flame of revolution would once more flare up. How Wankie revived the spirits of our people

inside our country, restored courage in the face of repression and revitalised the revolution! That indelible page in the history of our struggle is written in the annals of the Lutuli Detachment. That role of Umkhonto we Sizwe has been emulated over and over again. Let us on this occasion salute the Lutuli Detachment whose members lie buried in many countries, whose members languish in prison and whose members even today serve in our front ranks. If the revolution survived those dark days, it survived to a significant extent because of our Lutuli Detachment.

At the same time our comrades who were incarcerated in the fascist prisons turned prison into a battleground. Cut off from the masses, they waged campaign after campaign and their invincible spirit flowed out of the prisons to inspire our people.

The flame held aloft- by the Lutuli Detachment^ and the spirit that continuously surged from the prisons where our leaders and fighters have been held in captivity, inspired

and merged with the revival of the fighting capacity of our

people inside South Africa. Activists who had been cut off by wave after wave of repression and activists re-emerging from the fascist prisons joined forces with a new

generation of freedom fighters and set about organising

the masses. The wave of strikes waged by our workers in 1973 became the precursor to the Soweto explosion of 1976 that shook our country. From then on our revolution caught alight with renewed intensity and our people have surged ahead in united mass action such as never before seen in the history of our struggle.

The imperative of the armed struggle as the key component of our revolutionary way forward which underlay the

formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961 was burned into the minds of our Soweto generation by the savage massacres perpetrated by the racist soldiers and police! The brutal gunning down of 13 year old Hector Petersen turned the

protesting youth of 1976 into the warriors who flowed into the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe, giving fresh impetus to our armed activities. Almost overnight the Soweto generation finally enabled us to breach the barriers by which the enemy had sought to separate us from the masses. The enemy which by design and fortuity had deprived us of the

generation of the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies now unwittingly threw into the ranks of the revolution an army of youth whose anger and courage knew no bounds. Within the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe and under the tutelage of tje umgwenya they proudly absorbed the heritage of struggle that resides in the various formations of our national

liberation movement and were awarded the title of the June

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16 Detachment. They were to be rapidly joined by the Moncada Detachment who have been followed by detachment after detachment swelling the ranks of our revolutionary people's army .

And what glorious pages they are writing!

In the decade since the Soweto Uprising Umkhonto we Sizwe has become entrenched inside our country. Combat operations have dramatically increased in number, in daring, audacity and sophistication. Our combatants, by our operations, have wrenched away the mask of invincibility that the enemy sought to wear. Inspiration and hope and the certainty of victory today surge through the veins of the masses of our people.

The catalogue of achievements is studded with the brilliant attacks on Sasol, the military headquarters at Voortrekkerhoogte, the nuclear power station at Koeberg, the bomb blast outside the headquarters in Pretoria of the racist South African Air Force, the attacks on enemy

communications, the limpet- and landmine attacks inside the

borders and deep within the country. Umkhonto we Sizwe

combatants, merging with the combat groups that are

springing up all over in the townships, have made grenade attacks an everyday event. Even John Vorster Square, the headquarters of the hated Security Police, has reverberated from the explosion of the limpet mine. At last, enemy

soldiers and police walk fearfully in our townships and they are learning that they cannot escape death as they have been led to believe.

We have a long road ahead and many obstacles to overcome but we can justly say that there is no target that is impervious to our combatants, there is no area of our country beyond our reach and that the oppressor and his army will be conquered.

In this decade of mass revolt the traditions of the Minis have been relived by the Solomom Mahlarigus, the Jerry Mosololis, the Marcus Motaungs and the Simon Mogoeranes who have proudly faced Pretoria's hangmen living up to our pledge "Victory or Death". On this day we solemnly recall those warriors who fell at Matola, Maseru and elsewhere such as Motso Mogabudi, Mduduzi Guma, Krish Rabilal, Zwelakhe Nyanda, Nomkhosi Mini (daughter of Vuyisile), David Skosana, Titus Jobo and Harold Dantile (Morris). The spirit of the Patrick Molaoas and Basil Februarys who fell in Rhodesia has been relived by combatants who have fought it out to the last bullet or handgrenade, comrades such as the Silverton heroes, Thami Makhuba, Wilfred Madela and Farii Mafoko, Linda Jubane -'the lion of Chiawelo' Khuduga Molokwane, the Dobsonville schoolteacher, and Clifford Brown.

We recall and salute Richard Molokoane (Barney), one of our most outstanding field commanders who died with Victor

Khayiyane and Vincent Sekete during a daring bid to attack Sasol once again with rockets, Linda Khuzwayo, who fell in Ingwavuma, Livingstone Giza, Vincent Tshabalala, Lukas Njongwe, Eldridge Yakiti, Jerry Nene, Clement Molapo and Samuel Segola, and many more, courageous combatants to the last- who were prepared to welcome death in order that our people should be victorious in the end. They have been immortalised by our revolution, their deaths gave meaning to life, their deeds shall inspire our army and our people for all time and their spears have been picked up by others.

Only if we place Soweto and the decade since into historical perspective are we able to see that these events have an added dimension of significance. Between the Rivonia arrests and the Soweto Uprising it can be said that the question as to how to advance revolutionary warfare without safe rear bases in the neighbouring States appeared to elude practical answers. The renewed actions of Umkhonto we Sizwe on a sustained basis and the continuous upsurge of the masses provided the answer to this question and showed that our bases would of necessity have to be located among our people. Along this path our theory and practice of revolutionary warfare came to be properly understood in terms of People's War.

The special significance of these lessons has been the growth in understanding as to how the masses should be mobilised to fulfil this perspective. Accordingly, we have

had to elaborate on concrete programmes that would enable the masses to be transformed into political revolutionary bases. It has also meant that we have had to develop a deep and thorough-going understanding of the inter-relationships between the four pillars of our struggle which we have characterised as the building of the underground network of our movement, the mass action of our people, the expansion of Umkhonto we Sizwe inside South Africa and the further

mobilisation of the international community aimed at the total isolation of the apartheid regime.

MK has[^]and continues to play a crucial role in the

development of our masses into political revolutionary

bases. By its heroism and tenacity combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe have won not only the respect of our peoples but their willingness to engage themselves in the armed struggle. Without the all-round active participation of the masses we cannot develop People's War in the fullest sense.

The revolt of the masses of our people has become a tidal wave which no amount of repression and violence on the part of the racist state is any longer capable of containing. The State of Emergency - martial law in reality - has become a permanent instrument for the racists' uncertain survival. The masses have made our country ungovernable for the regime and rendered apartheid unworkable.

How far then are we from truly realising People's War?

In our daily lives our people have abundantly demonstrated that apartheid has become intolerable. At the level of united mass action our people are surging ahead. Every organised formation of our people - our workers, our women, our rural people, our youth and students, the township residents, religious congregations and leaders, our teachers and those in various professions, our progressive whites - are beginning to act in concert.

Revolutionary violence has become part, of the arsenal of our people. It is imperative that all classes and strata, especially our workers and the rural population, should become part of the combat forces of our revolution. Our youth should not be left to shoulder this burden alone. This is the true significance of our call to the people: Every patriot a combatant - every combatant, a patriot!

We are witnessing today the masses steadily taking to arms; we are in the midst of death-defying deeds where combat, groups supported by the people are erecting barricades, stringing barbed wire across roads, digging defence trenches, driving enemy forces into death traps, raining petrol bombs against armoured vehicles, arming themselves by dispossessing the enemy of his weapons, ridding our townships of informers and collaborators, eliminating enemy personnel.

The full majesty of these actions lies in the determination of our people to lock in battle with the enemy forces and

annihilate them physically.

MK units are today being welcomed and their leadership and guidance sought by our people. Side by side with this development, township after township is building the foundations of People's Power which are transforming them into fortresses of the revolution.

Through centuries of white domination our people have learnt how to die for a future. Today even our eight-year old children in the townships defiantly pit. their strength against the might, of the racist soldiers and police. The cream of our youth have begun to mobilise themselves into mass combat groups determined to ensure that the regime will never again restore its control over the lives and destiny of our people. The enemy forces are being compelled to recognise that the only cause that- they have to defend is the survival of a dying order; that even in death they can only die for the past and not for the future - they therefore only defend a cause already lost whose path is increasing demoralization. It is only in this framework that, we who know how to die for the future can understand the majesty of our young lions who have taken to war and side by side with Umkhonto we Sizwe moved our masses to make People's War a reality. As a tribute to these heroic- young lions who are daily losing ther lives it is appropriate that we in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the People's Army, should on this 25th anniversary of our foundation pledge ourselves that they shall not die in vain. And that

our revolution in its triumph shall rebuild for them the childhood that they have lost..

At this moment., as we reach into the high tide of our revolution, let us remind ourselves that we face a vicious

and inhuman foe. Our enemy is now committed irrevocably to a course aimed at. destroying the mass resistance of our people to the extent of perpetrating genocide. It. has marshalled all its power to destroy Umkhonto we Sizwe, the African National Congress and its allies, within and outside our country. It has firmly set its course on marauding the independent, states of Southern Africa in pursuit of reducing them to abject client states. It has exposed itself as a cancer in the body politic of our beloved continent and a threat to world peace. It has left independent Africa with no choice but to share trenches with us in the front line of battle.

We cannot let this day pass without paying homage to that

great son of Africa, our comrade-in-arms, the late President Samora Machel of Mozambique, cruelly murdered by the Pretoria regime. His life and his death symbolise the close unity in struggle of our peoples. MK combatants trained together with him and other Frelimo comrades; for years we shared the same military camps; at times we even shared the same trenches on Mozambiquan soil before its liberation. And he lost his life on South African soil at the hands of our common enemy. We pledge to bring his murderers to account!

In tribute to the independent states of Southern Africa and other states in the far-flung corners of our continent who have enabled us to become the force that we are, and at this moment when the racist army with the support, tacit or otherwise, of imperialism are threatening their independence and sovereignty we make this pledge: We have

always shared the common and noble ideal of freeing our continent of colonialism and racism. As we in Umkhonto we Sizwe tenaciously pursue the enemy in his den, wherever we find you, our friends and brothers, threatened, we shall unhesitatingly stand shoulder to shoulder with you in defence of your independence against this common enemy. We salute the independent States of Southern Africa fighting to preserve their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity!

We pledge our unity in battle with the heroic fighting people of Namibia under the leadership of SWAPO and its armed wing PLAN!

At this critical moment in our history we need to be ever-vigilant- against every manœuvre not only to

annihilate our movement but. to deflect our people from the realisation of our goals.

The forces of reaction and counter-revolution have already spelled out their strategy. Faced with the reality of our strength, they seek to entice us with the possibilities of

peaceful change by demanding of the African National Congress that we renounce violence, that we abandon the alliance with the South African Communist Party and that we sever our relations with the socialist- countries, in

particular with the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and Cuba.

What do these demands amount to? What is the fundamental lesson that comes out of 25 years of existence of Umkhonto we Sizwe?

Our people have only been taken seriously whether in Pretoria, London, Washington or Bonn because of our armed activity! Combatants of MK, you are the guarantors of our future; without you our people and the leader of our revolution, the African National Congress, would be a voice without force. Our history has taught us that people's power cannot come through a change of heart from the rulers.

Those who ask us to desert our allies ask us to forget the enduring bonds that we have developed together in the trenches. The South African Communist Party in particular is inextricably woven into the fabric of our struggle and by its commitment and actions earned itself the honourable place of being a worthy and indispensable component of the national liberation movement. As for the socialist countries, let- it be said unequivocally that, they have proved by word and deed that they are true friends of our

people's cause; that without then? and other friends Umkhonto and our national liberation movement headed by the African National Congress would riot, have become the force that we are today.

On this historic occasion let us pledge ourselves once more to the unity of our struggle; commit ourselves again to defend the Alliance and always uphold the fraternal bonds that unite us with the socialist countries, those western countries which have unreservedly aligned themselves with our just struggle and the democratic and peace-loving forces throughout the world.

Let us repeat we shall never allow Umkhonto we Sizwe to be emasculated! When we took to the road of armed struggle those 25 years ago we knew that there would be no turning back. Our leaders in prison have repeatedly been offered their release if only they would renounce so-called violence. Our commander Nelson Mandela firmly thrust aside these overtures by getting to the heart of the matter. All the violence in our situation emanates from the racist regime. It is the racists who have to renounce violence, not. us.

When we resorted to the armed struggle we said in our manifesto that this choice is not ours, it has been forced on us by the violence of the apartheid state. Until our people have won their freedom there can be no turning back.

It was not, by accident that we launched MK on December 16-
White South Africa observes that day as the triumph of
their military might, over our people. The violence that
they celebrate is the violence of a minority aimed at
subjugating the majority of the people of our country; the
violence of white over black. In reality it is a
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celebration of injustice and inhumanity of man against man.

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We chose that day to show how different we were: to show
that the path that had been forced upon us was in pursuit
of the establishment of justice and humanity for all the
people of our country - black and white. The racists
celebrate December 16 in the name of a false god -a
celebration of war in pursuit, of an unjust cause. We
celebrate December 16, our Heroes Day, to underline our
commitment that, we are waging a just war in pursuit of
freedom, democracy and peace.

The racist regime is today trapped in an irreversible
crisis and our road to victory is open. We shall have to
face many obstacles. The history of these 25 years of
Umkhonto we Sizwe proves that there is no obstacle which we
cannot overcome.

In the course of this long march we have scored great-
achievements. We have also made many mistakes but we are
where we are today because we have always had the capacity
to learn from our mistakes as well as from our
achievements; to learn from our people as they learn from
us.

We are born of the people. As long as we remain part of the people and move ahead with the people victory is certain. Conditions have now matured in our country for us, together with our people, to mount an all-round offensive in order to advance to People's Power.

It is within this context that I now present you, our glorious People's Army, with your Battle Orders of the day:

I order:

- * train, arm and lead our people into battle;
- * defend our people in town and countryside;
- * sever the enemy's lines of communication and power;
- * disperse and immobilise the enemy forces;
- * destroy the enemy's economic resources;
- * attack the enemy on all fronts and annihilate his forces;
- * make People's War flourish in all its dimensions in every part, of our country.

Victory or Death, we shall win!

Forward to People's Power!

Long Live the Alliance of our People!

Long Live Umkhonto we Sizwe!

Long Live the African National Congress!

Amandla Ngawethu!

Maatla ke Arona!

All Power to the People
Mayihlome ke nako!