

REMARKS BY HONOURABLE PREMIER SENZO MCHUNU TO THE KWAZULU-NATAL LEGISLATURE ON THE DEBATE ON AFRICA MONTH HELD ON 28 MAY 2015

Madame Speaker
Deputy Speaker
Honourable Members

Often historical events occur that challenge us to pause and reflect; to contemplate questions about what could have been, how we got here and how we should proceed?

On 25 May 1963, the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) made up of leaders of 30 of the 32 independent African states signed a founding charter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Because of that historic gathering, we now observe the day of May 25 as Africa Day, which is a day for celebrating African unity.

The larger part of Africa at the time including Southern Africa was still under colonial rule. I would like to focus our debate on celebrating Africa month, on certain historical epochs in our story of independence, and what this independence and freedom should mean to us in this part of the world.

It has now been widely accepted to refer to Ghana's independence as a departure point in the struggle for independence and self-determination by Africans at home and the diaspora. It may not have been the first independent nation in Africa as there were others before it like Libya (1951) and Egypt (1952) in the North; and Ethiopia in the East, which had successfully fought and won its independence from a brief occupation by Italy in 1936. But the 1957 independence of Ghana became the turning point in the struggle for independence and gave the required momentum. It set in motion a new form of determination and self-belief.

Nkrumah used the independence of Ghana as a stepping stone towards the full independence of Africa and a move towards a dream of unity of the continent. Upon independence, he declared, 'Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa'. Nkrumah went beyond words and provided support to other struggles, leading to further independence of other countries under British rule. In this way, this epoch served to accelerate the decolonization project.

The second critical epoch is the independence of Portuguese colonies. In particular, this was the independence of Mozambique in 1975 and Angola in 1976. It came after another important development in 1960. British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had

made his address to Parliament in Cape Town. He spoke of the "wind of change" blowing through the continent of Africa. He warned that 'this growth of national consciousness is a political fact'.

The importance of this epoch is that it brought hope to our own course for freedom, and that of Zimbabwe and Namibia who until then remained under direct minority rule. Most importantly, Mozambique and Angola sheltered freedom fighters from Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The third critical epoch was the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, which took the level of hope to an emotional level. It brought the message home that Africa's freedom could not be complete until the last vestiges of white minority rule were defeated. In this epoch, the independence of Namibia in 1989, brought the reality of liberation to our doorstep. Between these two periods, South Africa was in turmoil. Repression of popular mass struggle was being unleashed across the country.

Finally, in 1994 we achieved our own freedom. The jubilation across Africa and the reintegration of our country back into the fold of community of nations, affirmed that Africa's liberation was our liberation and our liberation was Africa's liberation.

There is no doubt that we have something to celebrate as Africa. We have made strides in changing the narrative about Africa. This was a continent known for military dictatorships, poor governance, exploitation of our natural resources by European countries, famine across the Continent, illiteracy and endless conflicts. We had the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which on the principle of sovereignty, would not intervene in domestic matters - even in cases of genocide.

With the African Union (AU) in place, we have made progress in a number of areas thereby improving governance and observance of human rights. Yes, we still have few challenges in this regard like instability in Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. We are still confronted by the rise of terrorism and religious extremism in the form of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. However, progress is being made to advance peace and stability in the affected countries. These efforts are led and coordinated by Africans themselves through various regional bodies.

New developments are emerging in the rest of the continent. Africa that had been characterized as a dark continent, is now without doubt the frontier of development. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 7 out of 10 world's fastest growing

economies with above 7 percent annual average growth, are in Africa. These are Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia and Nigeria. The African Development Bank estimates that by 2030, most African countries will boast middle class majorities, taking consumer spending to \$2.2 trillion a year.

At the level of governance, participatory democracy has been enhanced through different spheres and structures of government thus giving power to the people to engage effectively with processes of government.

Our narrative as we celebrate our Africaness, is no longer about citing only examples of Africa's contribution to the advancement of humanity in arts, sports and literature as if we are romanticising our place in history. But it is now about our widely celebrated contribution in the fields of commerce, science, nanotechnology and entrepreneurship.

Africans have given to the world innovations like MPESA in Kenya, which has changed the game in mobile money transfer.

Without doubt, we have had radical technology advances that has changed the African narrative as we have known it, and create new markets that will propel our country and African continent to unimaginable heights.

As an illustration of our advances and future development prospects, we urge the House to recall that we have Planet 23182, which is named after Siya Xuza, a young South African from Mthatha. He is using technology to engineer an African renaissance.

Africa can now boasts people like Dr Patience Mthunzi who is in biophotonics. This is a field of science that enables microscopic study of biological molecules, cells and tissue using laser. President Jacob Zuma honoured this young African woman for her pioneering work, with the Order of Mapungubwe in Bronze. She is currently doing fascinating work in the area of developing an HIV testing device that makes use of lasers to test blood samples.

Lastly, we have Dr Sandile Ngcobo from here in Pietermaritzburg who has developed the world's first digital laser. This will benefit the advancement of humanity in the fields of healthcare, manufacturing, and communications.

This is the current narrative of the African continent that has evolved over years since independence. This world of excellence in research and innovation, is but one aspect of this evolving Africa.

Whilst we celebrate the advances we have made in the field of science and technology, millions of South Africans especially those without education and skills, have lost jobs.

Millions more of young people have never worked in their lives. They hang around street corners from dawn to sunset. The South Africa of big jobs, big cars and big houses and lavish suburban lifestyles of the middle class of big deals, board directorships, and overseas holidays shaped by BEE deals, is not always a real life of the underclass. Theirs is a life of struggle to make ends meet, a struggle to find means to feed themselves and their families. Some have lost hope that their lives would change.

This is the race to the bottom and a breeding ground for intolerance of those who succeed, worse still if they are non-South African of African descent. Hopelessness leads to despair and is a potential breeding ground for social tensions and disorder.

Madame Speaker and Honourable Members

Both the Freedom Charter and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, promote the advancement of economic justice and social equality. Leading Africa in the 21st century mean that all of us, must embark on a different path that will radically address socio-economic inequalities in our society.

It means we cannot live in a state of comfort when we are still confronted by the challenge of skewed patterns of economic ownership, which is largely in the hands of the few and on the main, the beneficiaries of the pre-1994 order.

At a government level, we have passed various pieces of legislation to achieve Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). We did this in order to facilitate socio-economic emancipation of the majority who have been economically marginalized. There is now a common acceptance that the first wave of black economic empowerment has only benefitted the few among us. The middle and upper classes, are the biggest winners of government directed social transformation policies of affirmative action and BBBEE. Sadly, there are also those who remain excluded.

The view that says we must radicalise our thinking to industrialise the economy is correct. The objective should be to link potential, talent and possibility as opposed to selected few syndrome based on any subjective criteria. Neither can we make progress on emotional rhetoric espoused by some based on pseudo black advancement agenda.

We cannot transform the status quo if we continue to think that black shareholding in some companies would breed industrialists in the same mould as what the Nationalist Party did to address the poor white problem. The examples of these young South Africans and the entire wave of innovation in the Continent, ought to send a signal that achievement of economic transformation through broad-based empowerment and accompanying quest to build Black industrialists cannot only be a function of allocation of shareholding.

Madame Speaker and Honourable Members

Our challenge as we observe and celebrate this Africa month, is what is it that our generation of leaders is doing to fulfil the promise of a free Africa that is united and living in peace with itself. Our celebration of Africa Day and all other festivities we observe in the entire month of May, must move beyond historical events to a point where we tackle prevailing challenges. We need to learn more about our continent in order to understand and appreciate its diversity. A deeper level of understanding Africa, will entrench tolerance and remove feelings of resentment towards fellow Africans as manifested through acts of xenophobia.

Africa is central to South Africa's international relations policy, largely for reason to do with development, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. Because of this reality, the world expects of us to get involved in facilitating peace in any affected parts of our Continent. Therefore, whenever there is instability in the region, immigration of fellow Africans looking for refuge in our country is unavoidable.

At the level of economy, it calls on us to appreciate the link between our domestic economy and the regional economy. The starting point has to be regional scanning and assessment of own priorities, drawing from competitive advantages and building partnerships for mutual benefit with other strategic provinces in the Continent. Our future economic growth prospects must leverage on our two ports of Durban and Richards Bay, if we are to truly become a gateway to Africa.

Madame Speaker and Honourable Members

As our part of deepening our understanding of Africa and an effort to promote tolerance of our fellow African brothers and sisters, we are working on hosting public diplomacy engagement with our Minister of International Relations and Cooperation.

In conclusion, this House debate must be about how this generation of leaders takes the struggle for the eradication of poverty forward. It must be about how we decisively tackle issues of youth unemployment in our Province. It must be about how we end violence and sexual assault of women in our Province. It must be about how we unlock opportunities for entrepreneurs to thrive, thereby creating new economic opportunities and job creation.

Africa Day celebration must be about tangible progress in the advancement of humanity in our Continent. Let there be peace and stability in our Continent. Let Africa's unity and prosperity be our motivation.

I thank you.