

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY HONOURABLE SENZO MCHUNU, THE PREMIER OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL ON THE OCCASION TO CELEBRATE AND HONOUR  
PROFESSOR JOSEPH SHABALALA AND THE LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO**

**VENUE: DURBAN ICC**

**DATE: 12 NOVEMBER 2015**

We are here tonight because – as the Office of the Premier – we felt it was important that we pay tribute to a living legend, Professor Joseph Shabalala. From the moment he announced his retirement about 11 months ago – it was our fervent hope that a day would come when we would engage the family of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo and that of Mshengu so that we table our request to them. It is for this reason that we are utterly thrilled that this day has finally come when this dream is realized.

But this is how I would like to pay my respects to Prof Shabalala:-

Dear Mshengu Shabalala,

You were born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1940 eMnambithi.

Your parent's names were Jonathan Mlungwana and Nomandla Elina Shabalala.

They raised you and your six siblings on a white-owned farm called Tugela.

You lost both your parents in the late forties – and as to be expected from the eldest son, you had to take care of your siblings when this mishap befell your family.

You left Ladysmith in search for work in Durban.

It was during this time that you were spotted by a well-known group, the Durban Choir when you delighted audiences with your smooth guitar playing and your velvety soprano voice.

You could not see eye to eye with this group when attempts to teach it a different and smoother way of singing. This way of singing would work particularly well for your new composition ***Nomathemba***.

It was a series of dreams that you had in your sleep that led you to leave this group and form the ***Ladysmith Black Mambazo***.

You had among your mentors, Galiyane Hlatshwayo and Dr Huskison who helped shape and hone your skill as a lead singer and a formidable leader. Your first recording was with the then Radio Bantu now Ukhozi FM back in 1970. This was followed, two years later by a recording contract with Gallo Music, with West Nkosi as your producer.

That was when we began to hear your velvety solid voice accompanied by the well-rounded and polished voices of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo. This was only but the beginning. You were soon to serenade people from across the racial divide.

***I was young but I could certainly appreciate the beauty when I heard it!***

I am reminded in particular of your earlier tune *Buya Dudu Wam'*. The passion in that performance was immeasurable – but such was the case with your later compositions and recordings. And this grew better and more captivating.

**Mshengu, you have lived true to your name – Bhekizizwe!**

Your talent appealed to many and led to collaborations with music heavyweights such as Paul Simon, Ray Phiri, PJ Powers and many other legends...

You have used your vocal talent to raise issues of critical importance to the lives of ordinary people across race, colour, religion and social origin.

We are honouring and celebrating your life at a time when our country has, in a very short space of time, gone through a handful **storms and turbulences** that if not properly managed, may breed a sense of hopelessness.

In our various communities, we are confronted by a number of social ills that are tearing families apart, and leaving many of our fellow countrymen and countrywomen in a state of destitution.

It is in such moments that we look to people like you for wisdom.

How can we forget that at the height of our ugly past, you and Ladysmith Black Mambazo gave us melodies that brought our moment of darkness to sharper focus?

In your song titled “Homeless”, you said very deep and profound words.

As we seek to weather the storms we are going through as a country, allow me to quote and paraphrase your words: **“Strong wind destroy our homes. Many dead, tonight it could be you...Strong wind, strong wind. Many dead, tonight it could be you! We are homeless, homeless. We are moonlight sleeping on a midnight lake. We are homeless. Somebody cry why, why, why?”**

I quote these words not because I think we are in a state that is paralyzed to such an extent that we cannot find our way out of. However, I do this only to highlight that our journey to where we are to date, has always been characterized by different challenges – some natural and yet others human-made.

This was the case when we were confronted by acts of xenophobia in our Province, earlier in the year. You again showed the way, by reaching out to your fellow African music great – Salif Keita of Mali, to produce a song that will promote peace, unity and Ubuntu. We are happy that our partnership took the struggle for common humanity forward.

At times, challenges may seem too big to overcome. Throughout history of human existence, we learn of many examples that nothing is impossible. Your profound achievements, have shown us that it is possible to overcome any adversity.

You have demonstrated to the world what the audacity of hope means.

You took your experiences and those of millions of people born into poverty and underdevelopment, onto an international stage. You used the power of melody to bridge human made racial divisions and geography of first and third worlds.

You have shown the world that no challenge – no matter how complex it could appear to be, cannot be overcome. Through that belief, you did not only raise our national consciousness, but you equally raised our spirit.

In the process, you strengthened our resolve to attain freedom and an undying desire to build a different society that is based on values of caring for those who are vulnerable. Through that song – “Homeless” – you called on all of humanity, to reach deeper into those values that define what caring for other’s human condition entails.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo continues to produce music of profound quality. It continues to be nominated for prestigious awards like Africa Music Awards and Grammy Awards, way beyond your retirement. It is now into three generations. That can only be summed up, as the POWER OF VISION!

So today we say to you, this gesture cannot equal any precious stones like gold and diamonds, but it is informed by love and appreciation of what you have done for our province and our country. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We know that this journey started out of a dream from your grandmother. I imagine this was quite daunting. But we are grateful that you listened to your late grandmother and followed her advice. And it is because of that, that today we can gather here and celebrate your life and the great achievements of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

Thank you for sharing you for sharing your life with us.

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