

**Keynote Address by the Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal Willies
Mchunu**

Nelson Mandela Day Capture Site

18 July 2018

Programme Director

Members of the Executive Council

Members of Parliament

Mayors Present

Councilors

Religious Leaders

Traditional Leaders

Honored Guests

First and foremost I wish to express my appreciation to all of you on behalf of the provincial government. We thank you for setting aside time to

The history of the people of South Africa and their struggle against colonization and oppression will be written by authors and researchers for centuries to come.

For most of the people in the world the name “South Africa” is synonymous to the name of Nelson Mandela—the revered Madiba of our times. We all belong to a generation that will count itself blessed and most fortunate to have lived during the lifetime of Madiba.

98 years ago in Qunu, on 18 July 1918 to be exact, on the south-eastern coast of South Africa, a son was born to Henry Mgadla Mandela, Chief Councillor to King Dalindyebo of AbaThembu. A son that would grow to become an international icon, easily recognized, loved and revered in all corners of the globe.

This is the man whose sacrifices, resilience and commitment to human liberty saw him spend almost two thirds of his life fighting for freedom, one third of which was in prison.

He and his comrades had been prepared for the death sentence to be imposed during their infamous Rivonia Treason Trial by the Apartheid regime; in which event they had instructed their lawyers not to lodge an appeal. They were prepared to die to see South Africa free and they lived to see the dawn of the democratic dispensation.

The story of South African people continues to inspire many people under similar conditions and always gives hope to many who seek to improve the conditions under which they live. Their hope is provided by the triumph of the most scorned, oppressed and downtrodden who challenged the most sophisticated and feared regime in the whole continent of Africa –and won!

The leadership Mandela gave to the toiling masses of South Africa and the inspiration that shook the greatest powers in the world and yet touched the poorest and powerless through his compassion and quest for peace and reconciliation with his former captors has made Madiba a legend of mythological proportions, whose spirit is invoked to fill the hearts of people by the mere mention of his name.

Yet Madiba was one out of many leaders that served with him, suffered like him and endured the pain and the yoke of oppression and collectively took responsibility for pioneering the path to a free and democratic state.

Together with his comrades they represented the will of our people and their desire to be free and walked the same path with many lesser known heroes whose contribution was nevertheless of equally significant proportion.

It is not possible to talk about Madiba and the revolution that took place in our country without remembering the contribution of his co-accused, leaders such as Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Wilton Mkwayi, Raymond Mhlaba, and others who were tried and sentenced with him. Nor is it possible to leave out many who served our struggle and left an indelible mark during their lifetime, such as Lilian Ngoyi, Charlotte Maxeke, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Joe Modise, Johnny Makhathini, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, Dr Monty Naicker, T. T. Nkobi, Dan Tloome, Moses Kotane, Bram Fischer, Chris Hani and many more. These heroes are not just names but are people whose lives represent chapters in the book about the people of our country and the struggle for human dignity.

Madiba is amongst a long line of the Presidents of the African National Congress who led the struggle for freedom of the people of South Africa. Each one of them highly revered and highly dedicated democrats and fearless campaigners for human rights.

Such luminaries include the current President Jacob Zuma, the former President Thabo Mbeki, the much loved and respected Oliver Reginald Tambo (who led the ANC for effectively thirty years when it was outlawed till it was unbanned); including Chief Albert Luthuli (who presided over the ANC at the time of rising militancy and steered the path for peace to become the first Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in the African Continent); the Reverend Mahabane, Dr Pixley Seme, and others.

This long list of leaders of our people who served as leaders of our struggle for freedom served after the founding President General of the African National Congress elected on the 8th of January 1912,

Dr John Langalibalele Dube.....

This was the pioneer!

The Pathfinder!

I-Vulandlela!

I-ngqalabutho!

It is not surprising that our beloved Tata Madiba chose oHlange in Inanda to cast his vote in the first democratic elections in 1994. After voting he went to the grave of the President Dr John Langalibalele Dube - took a military salute and declared: "Mr President I am here to report that now South Africa is free!"

For all South Africans, the story of their freedom is symbolized by this picture of the former Commander-in-Chief of the Military wing of the ANC called uMkhonto WeSizwe reporting to his departed leader of the Revolution, that his mission had at last been accomplished.

Today we are here to re-enact Madiba's journey to a prosperous and non-racial country. We are here to draw inspiration as we ourselves start embark on a journey of creating a stronger KZN economically and socially.

But more importantly, the message that we want to convey to the people of this province irrespective of colour, class, political persuasions and religious preferences is that we must all join hands and strengthen this freedom and democracy.

As we welcome delegates to the 21st International Aids Conference which starts this evening, our message to the world is that the people of KwaZulu-Natal will remain united in the fight against HIV and Aids .

We recall that in 2000 Madiba captured the attention of the world during the International AIDS Conference held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre.

Mandela used his influence to unite more than 12 000 delegates who had been arguing with no hope of reaching consensus on a number of fronts. He said never ending arguments were distracting attention "from the real life-and-death issues we are confronted with as a country, a region, a continent and a world".

He further noted: "That dispute must be put on the back burner, he said. Nobody was totally in the right or in the wrong."

The 21st International AIDS Conference presents a wonderful opportunity to unleash a new leadership that will champion the global fight against this pandemic.

The global agenda can only be influenced by dedicated leaders who lead from the front. The primary responsibility of such leaders should be to make a positive impact in their communities. Importantly, what distinguishes these leaders from others is that they must a sense of urgency.

We anticipate ground-breaking decisions that will generate hope and optimism about the future fight against HIV and AIDS.

We wish Durban to be a world landmark for a decisive action and a global giant leap from the 20th International Aids Conference held in Melbourne.

We want Durban to be remembered positively such as its role in the World Conference Against Racism, Non Aligned Movement Summit, the formation of the African Union, BRICS Summit, CORP 17 and many other international conferences

Programme Director, as we play-host to this 21st International Aids Conference it is important to reflect on the progress KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government has made in the fight against HIV and Aids.

Although the groundwork started in 2001 shortly after hosting the International Aids Conference, the turning point was during the previous term of office of government, between 2009 and 2014.

On the 9th October 2009 the provincial government convened a conference of leaders of KwaZulu-Natal to discuss solutions and to form a Partnership to fight the scourge of TB, HIV and AIDS.

Government invited elected leaders from all political parties, in provincial and local government, traditional, religious leaders and those in civil society to plan and agree on the way forward to turn the situation around.

At this Partnership Conference, KZN launched the rollout of an integrated response in the form of a Sukuma Sakhe, a Flagship Programme at Ward levels across all municipalities.

Government advocated for communities to create a ward based grassroots response involving all sectors of the community and acting together outside party political and partisan interests to save our people from this pandemic.

The provincial cabinet emphasized the importance of uniformity and visible leadership at all levels as it was becoming evident that HIV was continuing to threaten the social fabric of our societies.

Epidemiological data in 2009 showed that the total number of those infected in Sub-Saharan Africa was 28 million. Although medical journals and various reports indicated signs that prevention measures, treatment, and care were beginning to slow its spread, the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa showed no sign of slowing down. Alarmingly, KwaZulu-Natal was identified as a major contributor in terms of new HIV infections.

These challenges called for leaders to lead with a sense of purpose. In all public platforms as members of the executive council we stressed that leaders should work together to mobilise communities for a behavioural change.

There was an appeal to churches and religious fraternity to work much closer with provincial government in helping our community to heal and foster behavioural change to defeat social ills.

Amakhosi and traditional leaders were identified as having a pivotal role to play in the stabilization of our community. The provincial government took a decision to work closely with the House of Traditional Leaders and individual Amakhosi to intensify the fight.

A message was communicated emphasizing the need to extend a support to those infected and for communities to help them to access the medication that government made available free of charge.

Critically, in all public platforms members of the provincial cabinet repeated a strong message for the elimination of the stigma associated with being HIV positive. Through the partnership with civil society including the Treatment Action Campaign government encouraged people to take medication to completion. We created compassion net that we wanted to make the people of this province want to live and not give up because of discrimination and the lack of hope.

On World AIDS Day in 2009, the President of the Republic His Excellency J.G Zuma announced drastic measures to expand the availability of Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ARV), combining treatment for TB and ARV's in one facility and increasing the CD4 count for treatment initiation from 250 to 350.

The following year in 2010, KwaZulu-Natal provincial government committed itself to the implementation of these new provisions by the beginning of that financial year in April. Government welcomed budgetary allocations destined for the strengthening of the treatment programme through the Provincial HIV and AIDS Council, now known as Provincial Council on AIDS.

To be more effective, the provincial cabinet agreed that the volunteer programmes should be standardized and coordinated to create a cadre that will work in the community, promote positive human values and behavioural changes that will result in the reduction of social ills.

A multi-sectoral team of relevant departments was constituted to oversee the process. Community education was undertaken to empower communities to live healthier and safer lives, to prevent abuse, crime, diseases and create caring society. Mobilization programmes were developed targeted at the youth using culture, sports peer education through trained youth.

It was also agreed that the home-based care-givers and community health workers must be standardized and integrated and managed jointly to avoid duplication and asymmetrical conditions of service.

Although there are challenges ahead, it is encouraging to note that the province runs the biggest ART treatment programme the world has ever seen. Besides providing the largest treatment programme, the province has reduced mother to child transmission of HIV to a point where we can confidently say HIV positive mother are giving birth to HIV negative babies.

I want to pay tribute to the health professionals and all categories of staff in the department for ensuring access to quality healthcare for those affected by the pandemic. I also want to express my appreciation to the civic society for the commitment to working with government in the fight against this pandemic.

We wish for this partnership to grow from strength to strength as we continue with our fight against the pandemic.

With those few words...I thank you.