

**SOUTH AFRICA : THE ROAD AHEAD  
AN ADDRESS TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE  
BUREAU OF TSONGA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE  
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May I start by expressing my sincerest gratitude to the Chairman, Prof. CTD Marivate and the Executive Committee of the Bureau of Tsonga Language and Culture for inviting me to address this conference. I feel honoured. In giving the background to the Bureau Prof. Marivate pointed out that the main purpose of the Bureau is to inculcate among the Tsonga love and respect for their cultural heritage on the one hand, and on the other hand, to broaden their horizons so as to help them live intelligently in this multiracial and multi-ethnic country - South Africa.

I was also furnished with the following guidelines as potential topics on which to address this conference:

*The danger of over-promoting one's own culture in a multinational society.*

*The Tsonga/Shangaan ethnic group in relation to the rest of the other ethnic groups of the Republic of South Africa.*

*The part the Tsonga/Shangaan people can play in South Africa's search for a new road ahead.*

*The role a cultural movement like the Bureau of Tsonga Language and Culture can play in general nation building.*

*Modern political trends and the Tsonga people.*

*South Africa - the Road Ahead.*

I must commend the Bureau's Executive for the breadth and depth of vision manifest in these guidelines.

For reasons that will become clear during the course of my address I chose the last guideline: **SOUTH AFRICA : THE ROAD AHEAD**. Some of the ideas shared under this theme will reflect on the guidelines outlined above.

**THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

Language and Culture are arguably two of the most important assets of human life. Language as spoken, written or sung is indispensable to civilized human existence. Culture, broadly defined as patterns or designs for living developed and refined by man as a member of an organized community, is also central to human civilization as we know it today. Culture is one of the essential aspects that separate and elevates man from the animal kingdom.

Civilization, and by direct implication, progress and development are impossible without language and culture. So, this body, the Bureau of Tsonga Language and Culture, is a custodian of crucial conveyors of civilization and human advancement.

### **SOUTH AFRICA – EVEN THE WORLD, IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD**

Martin Luther King Jnr tells a story of a famous novelist who died some years ago. Among this novelist's papers was found a list of suggested plots for future stories, the most prominently underscored being the following:

“A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together”.

This is the great new challenge to mankind, We have inherited a large house, a great “world house” in which we have to live together -Shangaans, Zulus, Tswanas, Xhosas, Afrikaners, black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu - a large family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interests, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with one another in peace.

However deeply Black South Africans of all ethnic groupings are caught in the struggle to be at last at home in our homeland of South Africa we cannot ignore the larger world house in which we are also dwellers.

Equality with Whites will not solve the problems of either Whites or Blacks if it means equality in a country stricken by poverty and steeped in pervasive ignorance, and in a universe doomed to extinction by war.

All South Africans, Black, White, Coloured and Asian, are neighbours. As South Africans we are in turn neighbours with all other inhabitants of the globe. This world-wide neighbourhood has been brought into being mainly as a result of the modern scientific and technological revolutions. Today's world is vastly different from the world of just a hundred years ago. Think for a moment about the incandescent lamp, TV, the telephone, computers, aeroplanes, space shuttles, the phenomenal discoveries in the field of medicine, the terrifying weapons of warfare with potential to wipe humanity off the face of the earth in a matter of minutes, etc. Most of these new inventions, these new ideas, these sometimes fascinating and sometimes frightening developments came about within the past eighty years, sometimes with agonizing slowness, more characteristically with bewildering speed, but always with great significance for our future.

The years ahead will see a continuation of the same dramatic developments.

Along with the scientific and technological revolution, we have also witnessed a world-wide freedom revolution over the last few decades. The current revolutionary upsurge of Black South Africans stems from a deep and passionate determination to make freedom and equality a reality here and now. In a sense the present civil strife in South Africa is a special South African phenomenon which must be understood in the light of South Africa's Apartheid history and dealt with in terms of the South African situation. But on another and more important level, what is happening in South Africa today is a significant part of a world development.

We live in an age, said the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, “when civilization is shifting its basic outlook, a major turning point in history where the pre-suppositions on which society is structured are being analysed, sharply challenged, and profoundly changed.”

What we are witnessing now is a freedom explosion, the realization of “an idea whose time has come,” to use Victor Hugo’s phrase. The deep rumbling of dissatisfaction that we hear today is the thunder of dispossessed masses, rising from dungeons of oppression to the bright hills of freedom. The great masses of people are determined to end racial exploitation and the exploitation of their land. Having risen they are moving towards their goal like a tidal wave. If we listen, you and I can hear them rumbling in every village street, in the townships, students in the schools and universities, in the churches and at political meetings.

The underlying theme of the demands is one: **RESTORE OUR HUMAN DIGNITY - WE WANT TO BE FREE!!**

For several centuries the direction of history flowed from Western Europe out into the rest of the world in “conquests” of various kinds. That epoch, the era of colonialism, is at an end. East is moving west. Africa insists on nonalignment. The earth is being redistributed. Yes, we are “shifting our basic outlooks.”

What is happening now should not surprise any student of history. Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The desire for freedom eventually manifests itself. The Bible tells the fascinating story of how Moses stood in Pharaoh’s court centuries ago and cried, “Let my people go.” This was an introductory chapter in a continuing story. The present struggle in South Africa is a later chapter in the same story. Something within has reminded the Black South African of his birthright of freedom, and, something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the spirit of the times, and he is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice.

Nothing could be more tragic than for the Shangaans/Tsongas huddled together into the plots collectively and euphemistically called Gazankulu, to live in these times of change and fail to achieve the new mental outlooks that the new situation demands.

One of the major liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of the status quo and a great many who simply choose to be indifferent. But today our very survival rests on our ability to remain awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change. The huge house in which we live demands that we transform this world-wide neighbourhood into a world-wide brotherhood. Together we must learn to live as brothers or together we will be forced to perish as fools, proclaim Martin Luther King Junior.

### **RESOLVING THE DILEMMA OF BEING A BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN IN THESE TIMES OF CHANGE**

Having reflected on our bona fide status as members of the South African community and by extension as citizens of the world community, let us now address some of the challenges

inherent in the fact of being a Black South African today.

How do we resolve the dilemma of being a Black South African with its legacy of dispossession, being discriminated against and oppressed, servitude, etc'?

One positive response to resolving our dilemma is to develop a rugged sense of somebodyness. The tragic legacy of having been conquered, colonized and oppressed was the instilling in the Black South African a disastrous sense of his own worthlessness. To overcome this terrible feeling of being less than human, the Black South African must assert for all to hear and see a majestic sense of his worth. There is such a thing as a decolonised mind. We must no longer allow the outer chains of an oppressive society to shackle our minds. With courage and fearlessness we must set out 'daringly to stabilize our minds. This alone will give us a confirmation of our roots and a validation of our worth. This sense of somebodyness means the utter refusal to be ashamed of being Shangaan and Black.

A second important step that the Black South African must take is to work passionately for group identity. This does not mean group isolation or group exclusivity. It means the kind of group consciousness that Blacks need in order to participate more meaningfully at all levels of the life of our nation.

The kind of group unity referred to here necessarily involves growing trust and reconciliation. One of the most significant challenges facing the Black South African is respect for himself and for other Blacks. He ends up with an ambivalence toward his own kind. To overcome this disabling conflict, it will be essential for the South African Black to find a new self-image. Only by being reconciled to ourselves will we be able to build upon the resources we already have at our disposal. Too many Blacks are jealous of other Black people's successes and progress. The various ethnic groups are warring against each other for squalid little plots oblivious of who in fact has the land. The Pharaohs had a favourite and effective strategy to keep their slaves in bondage: keep them fighting among themselves. But when slaves unite, the Red Seas of history open and the Egypts of slavery crumble.

As I see it, the South African racial revolution is a revolution to "get in" rather than to overthrow. We want our fair and proportionate share of the South African economy, the educational system and the socio-political opportunities. This goal itself suggests that political socio-economic changes in South Africa must be constructive and preferably non-violent. If one is in search of a better job it does not help to burn down the factory. If one needs better education, physically assaulting the educators and burning down buildings will not help much. If housing is the goal, only building and construction will produce that end. To destroy anything, person or property, cannot bring us closer to the goal that we seek.

All these challenges remind us that there is a need for a radical restructuring of the architecture of South African Society. For its very survival's sake, South Africa must re-examine old presuppositions and release itself from many things that for centuries have been held sacred. For the evils of Apartheid, racism, poverty and militarism to die, a new set of values must be born. Our economy must become more person-centred than property - and profit-centred. Our educational system must focus on developing human potential regardless of race. Land must be equally accessible to all South Africans. Common citizenship must mean uniform and equal franchise for all South Africans regardless of race, sex, colour or creed and that means one person one vote. The central government

must depend more on its moral power than on its military power.

This is essentially the challenge. If we will dare to meet it honestly, historians in future years will have to say there lived a great people - a black people among whom there were Shangaans/Tsongas - who bore their burdens of oppression in the heat of many years and who, through tenacity and creative commitment injected new meaning into the veins of South African life.

### **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE POST-APARTHEID ERA**

I take it that we are by now all convinced that Apartheid is on its death-bed, terminally sick. The only thing uncertain is how costly its architects, exponents and custodians will make its funeral.

The imminent death of Apartheid poses a new set of challenges to South Africans. Are we prepared or genuinely preparing for full participation in the various walks of South African national life?

*Do we have in our midst sound and solid educationists who will be able to rise above planning and dispensing tribal education to the realm of planning and providing effective and useful education for a non-racial South Africa?*

*Do we have or are we breeding scientists of a high enough calibre to participate without a sense of inferiority in the world neighbourhood discussed above? What of technologists and engineers?*

*Are there enough black economists, industrialists and well qualified managers to help run the South African economy, thereby ensuring effective, black participation in the main stream of this economy?*

*How does black expertise stack up in the Agricultural sector, the health sector, the legal sector and other sectors?*

*We dare not be caught napping.*