

**South African heroes & and the African Leadership unveiling  
28 March 2002**

**Unveiling of four stalwarts' statues at Eskom: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko**

To travellers on a long and difficult road, the significant events on that journey are not always easy to discern. Sometimes it is hard to recognise that you have passed a particularly noteworthy obstacle, or reached a propitious stage in the trip.

In my mind, however, today will be remembered as one such milestone. Today we are gathered together to record two events of special significance - two more indicators in the growing constellation of signals that this century will be the century of Africa. In a way, both events are responses to calls that have emanated from the leadership of our country. The first event has close associations with our past, and with African symbolism, while the second has its focus on the future, and is unmistakably strategic in nature.

Not long ago, President Mbeki asked the question: where are the symbols of Africa? Where are those visible manifestations that embody our peoples, our African spirit? The symbols that can epitomise all that is good and praiseworthy about Africa - those noble and fearless men and women who have earned our respect and our love. We need symbols of these great people that can be reproduced, publicised, and serve as rallying points for all Africans. Symbols that can reawaken our pride and our resolve to place Africa at its rightful place among the nations of the world.

Well, mister President, Eskom has heard your call. We have applied our minds to this challenge and have produced an answer. We have commissioned likenesses of some great African leaders - icons of the struggle against tyranny and oppression - that will serve to inspire us in the future. We have here statues, busts of the great O.R. Tambo, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, Steve Bantu Biko and Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela. We have not created the essence of these symbols; they already occupy a special place in the hearts and minds of all loyal South Africans. We have merely caused them to be captured in a tangible medium as visible reminders of the sacrifice and the achievements of these great African leaders.

Four stalwarts: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko, the youngest of them. They stand out as four bright road signs standing out in bold relief that give organic meaning to the political struggle of South Africa's black people. They might appear from a close distance and to the naked eye to point to different goals. But if we remember that superficial perceptions all too often mislead, we cannot, as intelligent participants and/or observers, help but reorganise internally those appearances into the organic meaning we have referred to.

Alongside that road to freedom we observe the divergent philosophies of these luminaries about the collective mission of the people and their individual historical roles in it. The ANC carved out the highway from the beginning of organised politics as we know it today. The other leaders branched off, in an attempt to redefine the people's priorities, major objectives, expectations, capacities and sense of themselves as a deprived downtrodden majority - all in relation to the ruling class's own political game, but also proactively.

Nelson Mandela's own portrait of a people in struggle against savage white rule has shown us changing, revolving tints, revisions, angles of vision; the frame has in time taken on a shape determined by the content; several times it has itself determined the picture within. Always there has been a controlling centre, the controlling Vision Splendid around which the four have orbited.

Our history shows Mandela struggling with the new shape the ANC has taken since its earlier days. Back then the pioneers' vision was informed by the huge wave of nationalism overtaking events in most of Africa under European rule. But he stepped in at a time when the general dominant mood of African politics was that of pleading and attempts to show ourselves enlightened and therefore qualified for gradual self-rule under colonial supervision. Kenya's Mau Mau uprising displayed admirable courage in its leaders' attempt at a forceful take-over of their ancestral lands.

Mandela and Tambo (for the ANC) led the soldiering on to the idea of a non-racial movement, one from Robben Island, the other from exile. Then on to the brutal, blistering eighties, the armed struggle. By then, Tambo had been dispatched as the trusted emissary to the world, considered at the same time as the personification of reason and diplomacy.

Fathered institutionally by the ANC, Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko, the other two luminaries, movers and shakers, each in his generation, had his vision of what the people needed to mobilise Black Power, sense of self; to educate their imagination, make it aware of the larger Africa, organise it around the concepts of Black self-reliance, cultural being and self-determination. Neither of them imagined that the struggle could be steered solely by black Africans, but rather determined largely by the black majority group ("Coloured" and Indian included). Mandela and Tambo, too, developed through these phases of redefinition. Sobukwe's early Africanism tended to be almost exclusive, but in no time his wisdom led him to realise that Africans should be all those on the continent who were loyal to their country to the point that they could merge with it and the rest of the continent; they must embrace and adopt the civilised codes of organic co-existence in their native or adopted land. "Organic" in the sense that living together should mean much more than a mere racial mix. The terms racial, racialism, racism would eventually be rare in common discourse. When used, it must be with a constructive or correctional connotation.

We have to acknowledge that Sobukwe had been the direct heir of the African consciousness defined by the Youth League's Anton Lembede and Peter Mda in the late 1940s and into the 1950s: high-powered thinkers on Africanism way beyond their peers. They and Sobukwe, their contemporary, shared ideas abundantly. The informed inspiration for the whole succession of leadership in the ANC, needless to say, goes back to the founders such as John Dube, Sol Plaatje, Pixley Seme. Naturally, the major concerns of these founders and their peers had to do with the unification of South African ethnic groups, fundamental imperatives for nation building. Biko's razor-sharp intellect would have led him through his reading of this history. Add to it his reading of the literature of Black Power, Black Consciousness, and the African-Americans' campaign for civil rights in the US of the 1950s and 1960s. Thus his concept of Black Consciousness evolved - a composite body of knowledge spanning generations and enriched by his own insights.

All the four men modified their stance in their definitions of who or what they perceived the African to be: from non-European through African to Black Consciousness. Each has

left an enduring legacy of the intellect, among other things.

They were all highly learned. They all honoured the paramountcy of reason and its luminous energy. Guided by their distinctive understanding of non-violence, Sobukwe would plead during the anti-pass campaign of 1960: “No bail, no defence, no fine.” Mandela would demolish the faked significance that undemocratic power sought to legitimise the court trying him and colleagues at Rivonia. All experienced the harrowing silence and loneliness of imprisonment.

The lessons of their endeavours and endurance as visionaries and leaders will forever be celebrated. Without, we hope, bringing to the discourse our petty and undignified sectional rivalries and biases, the likes of which we all too often witness today.

I hasten to add that these are not the symbols of Eskom. We have great people like H.J. van der Bijl and many others, some of whom are possibly among us today, possibly to be identified in the future. We will honour those symbols on a suitable occasion, but today belongs to our African heroes, the leaders of whom all Africa can be proud.

I turn now to the second focus of today’s gathering. This too is a response to a call by our national leadership, We at Eskom have taken the initiative to research and develop a school, an institution of African leadership. For more than two years we have studied, researched, analysed, captured and recorded all the available principles and characteristics of leadership, with particular reference to Africa. We have gathered considerable amounts of written material from all over the world. We have consulted and interviewed many notable African authorities and philosophical thinkers, trying by all means to uncover and capture the great oral tradition that will inform our task.

Already we have amassed a formidable body of reference material on African culture, history, philosophy and values. These aspects of African life have increasingly shown themselves to be intricately bound up with the concept of African leadership. Our work is being conducted in three broad phases: phase one is the collation, study and literary analysis of the oral and written aspects of our topic. And linked to that is the tradition, which portrays African leadership as being entrenched in philosophical thought and customs.

Phase two is the consultation with, and interviewing of, those people who have shown themselves as insightful thinkers, contributors to our library of knowledge, both here and abroad. This is a wide field, which will not be covered in the short term. In all probability this phase will continue for many years because we want all streams of thought, all shades of opinion, to be represented. Even as the great African tradition recognises the role of the praise singer and of the vituperator, we want all sides of the argument to be accorded a fair and equal hearing.

Phase three is here, inside Eskom. But not only Eskom - we want to gain the benefit of the manifestations of leadership in all African organisations, public and private. We need to know how all the communities - all the ethnic roots - that make up this vast continent experience leadership in an African context.

With these three phases of endeavour, we believe we can establish a sound and solid basis

for an Institution of African Leadership. We plan to trigger processes that will produce implementable strategies. This will not be an academic exercise only; it will seek to practically influence leadership both positively and effectively, building an edifice that will guide and shape the future.

Today we occupy a position that spans two worlds - the past, with all that is good and bad in it, and the future, with all the promise and the challenges it holds. We can play a pivotal role in ensuring that the best of the past is not lost, but is carried forward and developed into a structure of lasting pride, a structure of leadership that will underpin the century of Africa.

Clearly, this is work in progress. It is not a project that can be completed quickly or easily. The tradition of African leadership has been growing over centuries, and will no doubt continue to develop far beyond our children and our grandchildren. But I am proud that the honour has fallen to me to announce the formation of this historic enterprise. Long may it live and grow, to the greater success of all Africa.