

OR Tambo Memorial Lecture - MEC Martha Bartlett

IK Nkoane House, Auditorium

21 August 2017

Head of Department, Mr GT Pharasi

Senior Management and Staff present;

It is indeed an honour bestowed upon myself to address this Memorial Lecture, during a month that is dedicated to our Women. The agenda of women is a matter close to my heart as we remain committed to the full emancipation of women in South Africa.

We celebrate Women's Month under the theme: "The Year of OR Tambo; Women united in moving South Africa forward". This year, South Africans and the International Community celebrates the life of OR Tambo, a great and selfless leader, a visionary, a patriot, a great freedom fighter who led his people to freedom. Today, we celebrate the principles and the ideology he espoused, hail his relentless leadership which led to the demise of the apartheid regime and inspire young people as they are future leaders.

The freedom enjoyed today can be attributed to his political zeal, his vision and his unique leadership qualities which kept such a huge political movement together, keeping that extensive network of freedom fighters together, focused on achieving victory over the apartheid regime and preparing cadres of the movement to take over the running of their beloved country.

Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo was born in the village of Kantolo, Bizana, in the Mpondoland (eQawukeni), region of the Eastern Cape, on 27 October 1917. On completion of primary and secondary schooling, he went on to study at the then-named College of Fort Hare known as University of Fort Hare today, where he joined the Students Christian Association.

Tambo graduated with a B.Sc. degree in Mathematics and Physics at Fort Hare and he further enrolled for a Diploma in Higher Education. On 24 July 1951, Tambo qualified as an Attorney.

In the early 1940s, Tambo joined the African National Congress, an organization founded in 1912 that opposed white supremacy. In 1957 Tambo was elected Deputy President of the ANC.

Subsequent to the Sharpeville Massacre, on 21 March 1960, Tambo embarked on a “Mission in Exile” in order to gain international support for the South African liberation movement.

During 1963 and 1964, Tambo made a number of high profile speeches to present the ANC to the world, the most prominent being one made to the UN in October 1963. This speech inspired the UN Resolution 18 of 11 October, 1963 calling on the South African government to release all political prisoners.

As a President of the ANC, OR Tambo was afforded, an international status equivalent to a Head of State during the liberation struggle. He mobilised the international community to support South Africa to fight against apartheid and he was at the forefront in establishing ANC offices in different countries.

He engineered one of the most sophisticated liberation struggles that saw a co-ordinated expression of the mass movement, underground units, armed struggle and international solidarity. For many decades, he was in the forefront in providing leadership for both the external and internal structures of the liberation movement against apartheid oppression and repression.

OR Tambo is respected throughout the world as an embodiment of the highest values. He is recognised as an eminent leader who succeeded in mobilizing his people and the international community to the national cause of South Africa and to the international cause of fighting racism, xenophobia and the consolidation of an international human rights movement.

As the major driving force behind the unity of the progressive forces in South Africa, he advocated for radical political changes in South Africa through a revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid regime and the reactionary Bantustan political systems.

The agenda led by OR Tambo reinforced struggles against racism, colonialism and oppression which were fought elsewhere in the world and his efforts also determined the balance of political and economic forces within the global political and economic order.

He was an intellectual of note, who reinforced continuing discursive engagement, analytical description of the different phases of the liberation struggle and provided clearer understanding of the advances and political achievements of the liberation movement.

Layers of political, military, cultural and economic leaders under the tutelage of OR Tambo were developed to occupy strategic leadership positions, and they are still inspired by the teachings and influence of this great African leader.

Indeed he is an inspiration to all of us. Today, as a Departmental official, we must ask ourselves, what is it that I can draw from the life of OR Tambo to bring change in the lives of the people we serve??

He was a humble servant of the people, an empowering leader and democrat. He was a man of integrity, a persuader and a skilled diplomat. He had the ability to give and also take advice and draw strength from others.

OR Tambo was very mindful of the rights of women. He commissioned a Code of Conduct to ensure that women's rights were respected and upheld by all.

He was also an exceptionally good listener and would listen to all points of views before he could take any critical decision.

He would require of us to be steadfast on principle and to display discipline at all time.

He would remind us that our responsibility is to give our people hope and direction during the most difficult periods.

Most importantly, he would urge us to continue with the fundamental transformation of our country and to work for economic freedom more vigorously now that political freedom has been achieved.

For as long as there are people who still live in shacks, children who are being taught in inappropriate schools, families with no access to quality health care and children who go to bed hungry, youth with no money to study beyond matric, we can never rest.

The legacy of OR Tambo, must be manifested in our daily endeavours to create a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

I thank you!