

16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture
Remarks by
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CEO
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Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Please allow me to begin by acknowledging the Board of Trustees of the Steve Biko Foundation represented by:

- Mr. Nkosinathi Biko, founder, and former Chief Executive Officer;
- Mr. Ishamel Mkhabela, Chairperson;
- Mr. Millard Arnold;
- Mrs. Ntsiki Biko;
- Mr. Murphy Morobe;
- And Professor Ben Khoapa.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Vice-Chancellor Makhanya, Professor Fikeni, and all of the colleagues at UNISA, for so firmly embracing the legacy of Steve Biko, and the Foundation, as we have worked to develop and deepen this partnership since 2014.

Historically, one of the most common requests from SBF constituents was for the lecture to travel outside of the Western Cape; by becoming part of the UNISA family—the largest tertiary institution in Africa—we at SBF are pleased that through the university’s extensive network of campuses, over time, the Lecture will have the opportunity travel to communities the length and breadth of South Africa; and even as far as Addis Ababa.

With that said, please know, Vice Chancellor, that we are delighted that tonight as we embark on this new partnership, we do so in the nation’s capital: where 38 years ago, just a few kilometers away, Biko died in detention. Our gathering here tonight, nearly four decades later, is evidence of Biko’s prophetic words, that, *“it is better to die for an idea that will live, than to live for an idea that will die.”*

This evening, as we consider the contemporary relevance of Biko’s legacy, I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to President Chissano, for honoring our invitation to deliver this, the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture.

Some of you will recall, that this is not the first time President Chissano has joined us at the Foundation. It was in 2007, that His Excellency participated in *Consciousness, Agency & the African Development Agenda*, a conference that was part of Biko 30:30, the campaign commemorating three decades since Biko’s death.

Yet, I was fortunate enough to have worked with President Chissano even earlier on. It was during my first job out of university, in the city of Boston, where a number of former African Heads of State convened to reflect on issues of social, economic and political development.

As I had worked with President Chissano's office before, when he came to South Africa in 2007, one of my tasks was to brief him on the program. But for some reason, I was particularly nervous. So, I put on what was my favorite suit at the time...a somewhat shiny—and I came to find out—slippery, outfit, and went to the meeting place to wait in the corridor until my appointment. As the door to the main room began to open, I tried to jump up from my seat in an effort to appear cool, calm and efficient. But rather than gracefully getting up as I intended, I somehow slid off of my chair and may—or may not have—spent a few moments on the floor.

At the time, I convinced myself that no one noticed, and if they didn't I really am exposing myself tonight. Part of the reason, I was able to maintain some dignity, was that in classic Chissano style, His Excellency did not blink, when a somewhat shaky young woman walked into his office.

But more that, President Chissano actually took me seriously, as a young, African professional, trying to make whatever contribution I could—despite my slippery suit.

In that moment, President Chissano perhaps does not know, but he instilled a lot of confidence in me: that when you fall down (literally in this case), you pick yourself back up and you keep on moving; that despite the missteps and mistakes of a young person—or a young country, or a young continent—you could, and should, still be heard and valued.

And in many ways, this is what the Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, and indeed much of our work at the Foundation is about: intergenerational dialogue; providing a space through which we as Africans can collectively examine the past, in order to learn from it, and to better understand the present; but more importantly, understanding the past and the present so that we may, in the words of Thomas Sankara, “dare to invent the future.”

And indeed, from #RhodesMustFall, to #FeesMustFall, to the recently fallen President of the University of Missouri, young people across the globe, from South Africa to Burkina Faso to Ferguson, Missouri, are inventing the future. They are, to quote Biko, “looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference.” Not only are young people looking forward to this future, they are striving daily to attain it.

With that said, the struggles of the 21st century are not the same as the struggles of the 20th. Having ostensibly attained political freedom, throughout the Continent and the Diaspora, people of African descent are working to realize economic opportunity; to address social issues such as police brutality; and to attain cultural equality; while women, continue to be marginalized personally, professionally and politically. These are just a few of the fault lines of the 21st century, a few of the challenges that face us today.

And in facing these challenges, it's our mission at SBF to provide spaces for young people to learn of the rich legacy of the African intellectual-activist tradition; and to create spaces for those who have gone before to reflect on, and record their experiences, so they might endow future generations with the inheritance of memory.

To this end, at SBF we focus on what I call the three Cs:

- Consciousness: Who am I?
- Community: What is my place in the world?
- Core Skills: the practical tools to make ideas reality.

These elements of our work are taught through programmatic interventions in the areas of:

- Arts & Culture
- Community Health
- Education
- Economic Justice
- And Sports Development

While we are a national organization, much of this work is carried out at the Steve Biko Centre, located in the Ginsberg Township of King William's Town in the Eastern Cape—where friends, colleagues and neighbors of Biko, are gathered to watch this lecture tonight.

Similarly, people are gathered at the Steve Biko Housing Association in Liverpool, England; one of our partner organizations in SBF's International Dialogue portfolio—which is also the final program in SBF's stable, and under whose auspices we are gathered tonight.

In short, while there are a thousand or so of us physically in ZK Matthews Hall tonight, many around the world are joining us virtually to think about what Biko meant in 1977 and what he means to each of us today.

To be part of that ongoing conversation, I encourage you to take part in SBF's campaign, #BikoToMe, which began on September 12th, the 38th anniversary of his death, and which will conclude on December 18th, Biko's 69th birthday.

We want to hear via Youtube, Twitter, Facebook or good old fashioned snail mail what Biko means to you, and to share that with our community across the globe, as we continually examine the legacy of this martyr. In this way, we will heed Biko's admonishment to continue on the quest for true humanity, because, "somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common brother [and sisterhood]. In time we shall be in the position to bestow upon South Africa, [and Africa, and I believe the world], the greatest gift possible—a more human face."

Thank you