

The 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture
delivered by
His Excellency Joaquim Alberto Chissano, Former President of the
Republic of Mozambique and Chairman of the Forum for Former African
Heads of State and Government

THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE LIBERATION
STRUGGLES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: Myth or Reality

The Principal and Vice Chancellor of Unisa, Professor Mandla Makhanya, the CEO of the Steve Biko Foundation, Ms Obenewa Amponsah, members of the Biko family, Your Highness, the King of Ivory Coast, Your Excellencies, members of the diplomatic core, professors and academics from the University of South Africa present, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I should like from the outset to place on record my sincere appreciation to the Steve Biko Foundation for extending to me the invitation to deliver the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture on the 38th Anniversary commemoration of the life and legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko. I am indeed honoured to join the impressive list of prominent Africans and icons of the liberation struggle in Africa who preceded me in delivering the Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture series. In this regard, the list includes: the late President Nelson Mandela; former President, Thabo Mbeki; Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Archbishop Desmond Tutu; Professor Chinua Achebe; Professor Ngungi wa Thiong'o; Dr Mamphela Ramphele; and Minister Trevor Manuel, to mention but a few. Let us use this occasion of the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture to salute them for their contributions to the annual Memorial Lecture series and for their individual and collective commitment and dedication to promote Black Consciousness as a fundamental tool for the total emancipation of the African peoples in South Africa, Southern Africa, Africa as a whole and even for the Africans in the Diaspora.

As we meet here today, we should remind ourselves that we are living in an asymmetric world where Africa and its resources continue to be plundered and the plight of the African people continues to be reality. As we gather for this 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture we are all conscious of the fact that Africa is the only continent with the potential of remaining the bread basket of the world. However, for this to happen we need to rescue the noble ideals of Black Consciousness, which will enable us to gain consciousness of who we are, what we represent and the imperative need to embrace democracy, fight corruption, fight impunity, promote integrity, and end the scourge of perpetual conflict on the Continent. Maybe I should illustrate this with an example which comes to my memory just now when we say that for

us to be the bread basket of the world we need to rescue the noble ideals of Black Consciousness; we have to know who we are.

It reminds me of an episode whereby we, African Statesmen were meeting with some European Statesmen and we were discussing the New Partnership for African Development, which is now called NEPAD. And suddenly one among us Africans started thanking the Europeans for the noble idea of NEPAD which he said came from the Europeans who were in front of us. He started praising them, congratulating them and addressing all the contributions of our thoughts to them. I remember that I had to intervene to remind the person who was speaking that the idea never came from the Europeans; the idea had come from eminent leaders like President Mbeki, President Obasanjo, and President Bouteflika. It were Africans who created the idea of what brought us to NEPAD. So I felt that it was lack of pride in ourselves; we did not know what our capacities were; that we were capable of having very noble ideas. So we have to rescue the noble ideas of Black Consciousness.

Perhaps at this stage I should point out from the outset that in the invitation extended to me to deliver the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, fortunately or unfortunately I was left to cherry-pick my own topic but obviously within the framework of the life and legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko. Upon reflecting on the history of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, I came to the conclusion that there were distinctly two schools of thought about the Black Consciousness Movement. The first included those who considered the movement as a revolutionary movement that played a critical role in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and by extension, the struggles against Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola and indeed the struggle against the unilateral declaration of the independence or UDI in Rhodesia now Zimbabwe. The second school of thought in my view was made up of those who saw no specific role or relevance of the Black Consciousness Movement in the specific struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa or the overall continental struggles against colonialism towards the social, political and economic emancipation of the black majority on the Continent. This school of thought characterized Black Consciousness as a wish-wash concept imported from some Africans in the Diaspora with no specific role or relevance to the liberation struggles in Africa, and in particular to South Africa and Southern Africa.

I should also like to point out that somehow in the invitation, I was reminded that the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture in 2015 coincides with the commemoration of the 40th Independence Anniversary of the Republic of Mozambique and therefore it might be an opportunity to reflect the various ways in which the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) influenced Steve Biko's political development and the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement as well as the contemporary relationship between the Republic of Mozambique and South Africa and other countries in Southern Africa. Earlier on I mentioned that I thought I was allowed to cherry-pick a topic of my choice but from the invitation letter, one would by

now realize that in fact, I was not given the prerogative of choosing a topic for the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture but that the topic of the lecture was already prescribed in the invitation letter with very little room for maneuver. Nevertheless, I accepted and indeed I am pleased to be here and deliver the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture.

On the basis of the invitation letter and after reflecting on the background material and in order to try to be honest to the invitation, I decided that I should share my views on the topic: the Black Consciousness Movement and the History of the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa: Myth or Reality. Beneath all reality, the idea is to identify the ideological divergence and narrow them down to better understanding of the role and relevance of Black Consciousness in the liberation struggles in South African and Southern Africa.

The basic objective is to demonstrate that the two schools originate from similar political circumstances but differing at the level of theory and practices. Since the origins are the same, the overall objectives cannot be very much different. Obviously the major consideration and the source of inspiration were to bring to end the apartheid regime in South Africa and therefore contributing to the advancement of democracy in South Africa, Southern Africa and Africa.

At this juncture, allow me to preference my lecture by suggesting that the liberation struggles in Southern Africa had a lot in common, more precisely they had a lot of similarities in terms of philosophical orientation and political demands. This was precisely so because FRELIMO, ANC, MPLA, ZAPU, ZANU and later ZANU PF consulted regularly under the leadership of the Front-line States, led mostly by president Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Samora Moisés Machel, and Robert Mugabe on how to effectively conduct the liberation struggles to free Southern Africa, in particular and Africa in general. Let me add, to correct myself, the omission of SWAPO, which was also part of us.

Just as the enemies of the struggle shared information, the movements also shared information and experiences in consolidating the gains of the movements and intensifying the struggles. We can therefore talk of common discernible patterns and trends in the struggle against the system of apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in the Portuguese colonies in Southern Africa. The important thing to note is that there were more similarities than differences and a victory of one was considered as a victory of all.

Significantly, the two schools agreed on the historical evolution of the Black Consciousness Movement; they all agree that it originated and was promoted largely by Africans in the Diaspora. We all agreed that pan-Africanist ideals originated and therefore Black Consciousness emerged in the late 19th century in response to European colonization and exploitation of the African Continent. There is a common understanding that pan-Africanist philosophy held that slavery and colonialism depended on and

encouraged the negative and unfounded categorization of the race, culture and values of the African people. These destructive beliefs in turn gave birth to intensified forms of racism, the likes of which pan-Africanism sought to eliminate.

At the same time, it is generally accepted that the Black Consciousness Movement is associated with the American educator, W.E.B Du Bois and others who promoted the concept of pan-Africanism and who participated in either of the two pan-African congresses in 1900 or in 1945. For example, there is no disagreement on the role of Du Bois in the promotion of the Black Consciousness philosophy; it is therefore common knowledge that Du Bois echoes Civil War era black nationalist Martin Delany's and his insistence that black people take pride in their blackness as an important step in their individual and collective efforts towards their political and economic emancipation. But it is also important to remember that in 1897, Henry Sylvester-Williams, a West Indian Barrister, formed the African Association in London, England to encourage Pan-African unity; especially throughout the British colonies. Sylvester-Williams, who had links with West African dignitaries, believed that Africans and those of African descent living in the Diaspora needed a forum to address their common problems. Let me add here that fortunately in the Continent, we are coming back to this awareness because the African Union has got another state member, which is the Diaspora, so there is once again a coordination of action.

In 1900, Sylvester Williams organized the first pan-African meeting in collaboration with several black leaders representing various countries of the African Diaspora. At that congress – some Mozambiquens participated – for the first time, opponents of colonialism and racism gathered for an international meeting. It is general knowledge that the conference held in London attracted global attention placing the word pan-African in the lexicon of international affairs and making it part of the standard vocabulary of black intellectuals. The two schools also converged on the historical fact that as a broader political concept, pan-Africanism's roots lie in the collective experience of African descendents in the new world. It was in the new world that the campaign for racial equality and an end to racial discrimination started.

This was a long time ago but I may tell you about my own experience. When I was a student at secondary school we had a Union of African Mozambiquen Students, we felt discrimination and so on but I did not take the decision at that moment to fight hard to get militant for the cause of liberation more than when I arrived in the first world, in Portugal. I realized that in that new world we could fit as a free people. This is when I found the nature of our colonizers and where I met other black people from other countries – in this case, from other Portuguese colonies – and realized, well, let me say in short; my Black Consciousness came in. So I understand this struggle started there in those days; all those black people living there. They found the new reality and they understood who they were; the need for fighting for equality. I have to emphasize here; when I say to fight for equality I do not mean to fight against whites.

There is also agreement that Africa assumed greater significance for some blacks in the new world for two primary reasons. First, the increasing futility of their campaign for racial equality in the United States

led some African Americans to demand voluntary repatriation to Africa. Next, for the first time the term Africans, which had often been used by racists as a derogatory description, became a source of pride for early black nationalists. Hence through the conscious elevation of their African identity, black activists in American and the rest of the world began to reclaim the rights previously denied them by Western societies.

At this stage of the lecture, I would like to submit that in fact there are no two schools of thought about the origins of the Black Consciousness Movement. We should therefore reject the claim that the Black Consciousness Movement had neither role nor relevance in the struggles for liberation in the continent and the system of apartheid in South Africa and Southern Africa in general.

From a historical perspective, it is clear that the link between the Black Consciousness Movement in the Continent and the Africans in the Diaspora would clearly suggest a common struggle within the Continent and in the Diaspora and therefore a common understanding. From the African perspective, it was abundantly clear that the enemy of the struggle was the same. Significantly in my view, it is clear that the liberation movements in Southern Africa were conscious of the fact that even though the enemy could be differentiated between Portuguese colonialism and apartheid South Africa or the UDI declared by Ian Douglas Smith former Prime Minister of Britain's rebellious colony of Rhodesia, the impact on the black communities in Mozambique, South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe was the same. At this stage, we can therefore conclude that Black Consciousness and the Black Consciousness Movement cannot be a myth but a reality in the history of the continent.

What most people do not realize is that colonial segregation in Mozambique was in some cases just on the same level as the policy of segregation and separate development practiced by the apartheid regime in South Africa. In fact I, many times, explain to people that even I think that in Mozambique apartheid was worse than here because while I am told that apartheid means separate development in Mozambique, segregation meant development for one and no development at all for the other.

While in South Africa you had scholars like Mandela, OR Tambo, Duma Nokwe, GB Marks, Kotana, just to name a few, in Mozambique the first doctor, black doctor; the first black man to get a degree was in the 60s, and we stayed a long time before we got another. But anyway, I'm not pretending to say that my sore is more painful than yours.

What most people do not realize is that colonial segregation in Mozambique was in some cases just on the same level, as I said, therefore one cannot say in precise terms what Biko learned from FRELIMO, or what, in precise terms, FRELIMO benefitted from the Black Consciousness Movement except to say that the nature of the enemy in Mozambique, South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe was the same and therefore the method of combat in theory and practice had more similarities than differences. Putting it differently, we learned from each other as the struggle continued.

However, I find it interesting that in the FRELIMO, we used words like: Conscientization because awareness was not enough. It was not enough to refer to the work of the education of the people in the sense of raising their consciousness, or awareness about their state as subjugated people and their rights, but foremost about their capability to conquer their freedom and their power to conduct their own destiny. In other words, to raise their consciousness about their dignity, their pride and the ownership of their own self as individuals and as people.

I notice also that one of Steve Biko's children was given the name Samora, like Samora Machel, the second leader of FRELIMO and the first president of the Independent Mozambique. The possibility of the FRELIMO led struggle for independence influencing Steve Biko cannot be ruled out and he would have not been the first one to have been influenced because we know of many in Africa who went as far as naming their children as FRELIMO. Others would name them as Aluta. Even in the United States of America I came across a Primary School named FRELIMO School. So I am not going to state categorically that Steve Biko was influenced by FRELIMO but some influence went to him, yes. I therefore do not consider Black Consciousness to be a myth; it was in fact an inspirational philosophy that politically galvanized all the movements in Southern Africa by raising their consciousness of the fact that when a dictatorship, colonialism, oppression, exploitation and segregation are a fact, revolution becomes a must and their reality. Therefore Black Consciousness helped to sharpen the political minds leading to a more conscious decision-making process among members of the liberation movement to fight and destroy dictatorship, oppression, exploitation and segregation in all their manifestations.

As liberation movements, we were all guided by our political consciousness, which inspired our determination and commitment to end oppression and racial discrimination by fighting the system of apartheid and Portuguese colonialism to the bitter end. It is precisely for this reason that Steve Biko said "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed. In other words, he who controls the mind of the oppressed determines the future of the oppressed." It is also in this mode of thinking that Karl Marx said "necessity is blind until it becomes conscious and therefore freedom is the conscious of necessity". Significantly, Steve Biko contextualized this by saying "Black Consciousness is an attitude of the mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time."

From this perspective I should like to suggest that as we discuss the place of ideas in the liberation struggles in South Africa, Southern Africa and in Africa in general, allow me to place emphasis on the relevance of consciousness in the struggle for political and economic emancipation by quoting from Victor Hugo, the French poet who argued that "there is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come". In the same trend of thought Oscar Wilde an Irish author, playwright and poet elevated Victor Hugo's assertion when he said that an idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

In this regard, Black Consciousness Movement in the context of the struggle against the system of apartheid in South Africa and indeed in the broader context of liberation struggles in Southern Africa and Africa was timely and dangerous to the architects of the system of apartheid in South Africa and indeed Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola and therefore the entire Southern African Sub-region.

It was therefore for this reason that Bantu Stephen Biko had to be eliminated – his ideas were dangerous – and the time of his ideas had come. It was therefore necessary to eliminate him. Unfortunately, Biko was eliminated but fortunately his ideas continue to inspire many and often celebrated as part of the life and legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko the comrade intimately associated with the philosophy of Black Consciousness.

I would like to submit that in essence the Black Consciousness Movement arose from the necessity to address the injustices inflicted on the black people by colonialism, apartheid, oppression, domination, exploitation and segregation. The philosophy was essentially to raise awareness of these unacceptable injustices, mobilize, galvanize and unite the black people to fight for their right to be treated equally like people of other races. Therefore, the black consciousness movement fought for a just cause; one in which all people regardless of race, color of skin, religious belief and political orientation could live in peace, equality and harmony.

I therefore submit again that Black Consciousness is not a myth it is a reality. As a member of a liberation movement FRELIMO I experienced this reality since I was motivated by my own consciousness to join FRELIMO so as I could contribute to the fight against colonialism, oppression and injustices perpetrated against the black race at all cost including sacrificing my life if that should have been necessary.

I must admit unfortunately, I never met Steve Biko in person as I was in exile and he was fighting from the “belly of the beast”, the apartheid regime in South Africa. Unfortunately, comrade Biko was assassinated only two years after the proclamation of the Independence of Mozambique. The apartheid system robbed his life from us in brutal circumstances that defy the respect for the dignity of any man including black-man.

Ladies and gentlemen. In conclusion to the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture I should like to assert that as someone who was closely involved in the liberation struggles in Mozambique under FRELIMO, the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa reflected the concern for the existential struggle of the black person as a human being, dignified and proud of his blackness, in spite of the oppression of colonialism and the exploitation by imperialism and capitalism and suppressed under the system of apartheid.

It has been argued and correctly so that from the perspective of the history of black consciousness, within and outside the continent, it is abundantly clear that the main objective of this global movement of black thinkers was to build black consciousness and an African consciousness, which it was strongly felt had

been suppressed under colonialism and exploited by imperialism and capitalism and most certainly the system of apartheid in South Africa in particular and in Southern Africa in general.

From the point of view of the 16 Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture on the topic of Black Consciousness Movement: Myth or Realities in the History of the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa, I should like to submit that it is clear that the Black Consciousness Movement, encouraged the evolution of a movement of black people to determine their own destiny on the basis of their own political consciousness based on their specific circumstances and the political environment forced into them.

The movement also encouraged the political notion that for black people to reverse their then predicament of misery, oppression, exploitation and segregation, had to have and believe in their pride and blackness as both a distinct identity and a powerful culture resistant to any foreign domination and exploitation. As an idea and a mind-set Black Consciousness was recognized by the apartheid South Africa as a politically dangerous idea capable of mobilizing the black race within and outside the Continent against any system of racial discrimination, subjugation and exploitation. In my view Black Consciousness was both militant and avowedly non-violent. What was violent was the other side.

There is no doubt that the Black Consciousness Movement was also inspired by the success of the FRELIMO in Mozambique in its armed struggle but also in its philosophical manifestations. In fact when I said that we were fighting for our liberation, we should add that we were also fighting for the liberation of the white man. Let me add here that the thinking of Steve Biko and his movement was the same as the thinking of FRELIMO. There were, in those days people who were using words like “these whites must go” and we even had strikes amongst ourselves in FRELIMO because some would find our struggle as a struggle against the whites. Our first leader was married to a white woman, a white American woman from the United States. So, there were some who were not looking at him as a good leader just because of that. So it was a fierce struggle within our own ranks to define who our enemy is.

Actually the exercise to define the enemy started when a group of comrades were being trained in Algeria, the first country that accepted to train our people to fight against the Portuguese. The first to give us our first weapons; it was Algeria. And when they were pausing after food or during meals, they would ask each other: who is our enemy? Why are we fighting? Against whom are we fighting? And for what are we fighting? These were the questions which every day they had to discuss. I didn't have much to read about Steve Biko, but I read. And I found you needed this strong philosophy of defining correctly the reasons of the fight. That's why for me Black Consciousness fits very well.

When I entered the hall here, I looked around and the one idea that came to my mind was that we still have in the world to proceed with the struggle within this philosophy, within this concept because you are sitting here near me, you cannot see at the back, but you here, you see. The white skins are not there. The white skins are not there. So it means that we have to fight so that we accept this equality for which

we were fighting so that in an event like this, we come and celebrate together. They should be here, the white skins because they were also liberated.

I come very often to South Africa. In the beginning I thought that something was wrong because I was being served by white waiters. I go to meetings and I'm served by white waiters. I didn't find much complexity in this because I had experienced it in Portugal. But it is not enough being served by white people; we have to do away with the concept of racial divide; we are fighting for equality. You go to mining companies, for instance and you don't find many black managers. We have universities like this one producing many intellectuals, many engineers but you will find that the economists will be controlled. So we have to work; not to move the others aside. No, it is to get to our rightful place – respecting them. And they have got the duty to raise us up so that we are really equal in sentiments also. One would therefore conclude that the Black Consciousness Movement has a place in the annals of the history of the liberation struggles in South Africa, Southern Africa and Africa in general.

Black Consciousness ideals remain relevant and valid even today as besides the noble goals of rescuing the pride and resolve of the black people, it was also a political philosophy that was and continues to be instrumental in mobilizing, galvanizing and uniting people to attain a just society. A society in which different races live in an egalitarian setting. A society in which there is more solidarity amongst the people regardless of race, religious belief and political orientation. A society in which all the people live in harmony, working together to address the imbalances inherited from the horrendous past. Black Consciousness was never about one race, group or people dominating, exploiting, oppressing and segregating other groups or races. You can never say now it is our time to oppress the others. It was and continues to be for peace, justice, equality and harmony amongst races and groups of people. This has been all along the liberation struggle, from 1962 to 1975 and after the attainment of Independence also the philosophy of the FRELIMO in Mozambique

Finally I cannot conclude the 16th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture without paying tribute to a group of South Africans who were arrested and incarcerated for celebrating the independence of Mozambique under FRELIMO. It should be recalled that in late August and September 1974, after holding rallies in support of the FRELIMO government which had taken power in Mozambique, many leaders of the BCM were arrested under the Terrorism Act and the Riotous Assemblies Act. Arrests under these laws allowed the suspension of the doctrine of habeas corpus, and many of those arrested were not formally charged until the next year, resulting in the arrest of the "Pretoria Twelve" and conviction of the "SASO nine", which included Maitsho Mokoape and Patrick Lekota.

These were the most prominent among various public trials that gave a forum for members of the BCM to explain their philosophy and to describe the abuses that had been inflicted upon them. Far from crushing the movement, this led to its wider support among black and white South Africans. There is no doubt that

these events of intimidation and torture caught the attention of the sympathetic media and moved BCM closer to the United Nations and indeed the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

In my final remarks I seek the indulgence to bring to the attention of the distinguished audience that of Monday 28 September 2015 the Executive Secretariat of the Forum for Former African Heads of State and Government, commonly referred to as Africa Forum, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of South Africa (UNISA) ushering a new era of cooperation and collaboration between the two institutions.

The Memorandum Of Understanding which was signed by Professor Mandlenkosi Stanley Makhanya, Principal and Vice Chancellor on behalf of UNISA and Professor John A Tesha, Executive Secretary of the Forum for Former African Heads of State and Government on behalf of the Forum provides a framework for collaboration for providing training for and on behalf of the Forum by UNISA for participants selected by UNISA for Africa Forum, hosting seminars, public lectures and workshops by UNISA where possible and necessary collaboration on selected areas of Applied Research, Action Research and Theoretical Research.

As we mark the 38th Anniversary Commemoration of the Life and Legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko hosted by UNISA it is also an opportunity to pay tribute to the University for the excellent work it is doing in South Africa, Southern Africa and on the Continent. It is well recognized that UNISA is the largest open distance learning institution in Africa and the longest standing dedicated distance education university in the world. In my humble view, UNISA early one-century old deserves a word of congratulation as the oldest long-standing African University in the field of distance learning. Indeed, it has a world record.

What is interesting is that for some time now members of the Africa Forum have been invited to spend some time at the African Presidential Archives and Research Center (APARC) at Boston University, United States. At the same time APARC has been organizing annual presidential gatherings in Africa. The last one I attended was in Mauritius. I am informed that APARC seem to be experiencing some problems with Boston University and it is possible the Presidential visitors in residence may be discontinued. I would call upon the Principal and Vice Chancellor of UNISA to consult with the Executive Secretary of the Forum to explore possibilities for developing a programme perhaps to be named UNISA Former African Presidents in Residence.

I THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU ALL

ALUTA CONTINUA