

Special sitting of Parliament to pay tribute to the late President Nelson Mandela.

Jeff Radebe, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Member of the ANC NEC and NWC, Cape Town. 9 December 2013.

Mr Speaker;

I beg the indulgence of all South Africans and the world to break with convention because today is a tribute to no ordinary man. I do so not because of my disrespect but because I have been asked to pay tribute to one of the greatest sons ever to grace the length and breadth of our beautiful country, continent and indeed, the world.

All the contributors to this special sitting have spoken with unanimity because the man we are paying tribute to was well-loved and respected across the aisles of this august house. Allow me to start where I should end. *Aah Dalibhunga! Madiba! Sopitsho! Yem Yem!* Allow me to speak directly to our icon as if he was present among us. I am doing so because for a life he so well-lived and the dedication he put to a cause in the service of others. I am addressing him directly Mr Speaker, because although he has passed on, his spirit moves in this house.

Madiba, when the sad news of your passing on was received on the 5th of December, many thought the sun would not rise the following day. It did rise, but there was a strong ray missing. The nation should indeed be in mourning but the need to celebrate your life surpasses all our tears. We need to reflect deeply and safeguard all those institutions which you bestowed upon us. One of these institutions is the Constitution, which we are all obliged to safeguard. There is no better way to thank you as Parliamentarians than to ensure that the Constitution you assisted to craft will always reign supreme.

In 1934 at the age of 16 years, when you returned from the initiation school at Mvezo, the elders gave you the name Dalibhunga. To be given such a unique name at that age was an indication that you were born to lead. Whether you knew that one day, as 490 legislators we would be so gathered in solemn respect to wish you well on your next journey, is a question we cannot answer. For many of us it was neither envisaged nor forethought, even though we knew it was inevitable.

I remember with fond memories when you visited to my Constituency in on the 27th of April 1994. You had come to report back to the first President of the African National Congress, Rev Langalibalele Dube, that the people of South Africa had attained universal franchise for all. As a symbol of respect, you cast your vote at Ohlange High School, in Inanda, a school established by Rev Dube. I had the honour to accompany you when you cast your first vote as a free South African.

I am today speaking of you as a man who could have chosen to lead a life of comfort and wealth, of glory and fame, but chose to lead his people. I am speaking of you who could have chosen to challenge the laws of the country in high courts and win, but chose to lead a life of prison – all because of the love you had for your people.

With your friends, Walter Sisulu and former President Oliver Tambo you forged one of the best fighting triumvirates against the system of Apartheid. The three of you became the architects of our democratic order.

Some of us who were called to serve in your Cabinet approached the responsibilities with fear and trepidation. You comforted us all by stating that we were equal to the task because you too, had never been President before. We took our cue from you and did the best we could in spite of our inexperience. It was an honour to serve in the first Cabinet at your pleasure, Mr President.

You taught us the true meaning of forgiveness. You helped us to reclaim our dignity as a people, and emboldened us to stand with our shoulders high and our chins up. Your power to forge unity through sports across all codes, reduced all anxieties and fear for the future. Captured in *Invictus*, your power to use rugby to heal the nation will be kept for posterity to assist our children forge an even tighter unity.

Bidding you farewell as a gallant soldier, Commander-in-Chief and leader of our revolution is to send you to meet those leaders of the ANC who went before you, such as Dube, Lembede, Mda, Tambo, Luthuli, Mabhida, Joe Slovo and Chris Hani and many others. You have joined the leadership corps that never bent when they were persecuted – a leadership that faced grinding indignity of the humiliation the system of Apartheid, and came out on the other side with their heads held high. It was a leadership that never bent with the wind. You are also joining your favourite isiXhosa poet, S.E.K Mqhayi whom you referred to as our Shakespeare, our laureate, and *"a comet streaking through the night sky."*

I remember vividly that at Your Welcome Home Rally in Durban you called on South Africans to throw their weapons in the sea, a decision which was not popular particularly in KwaZulu-Natal at the time. It was only later that we realized the wisdom of your call, for continuing with internecine violence would have led to a mutually assured destruction, making the attainment of peace even more difficult.

You have taught us the true values of humility. Your leadership has been one that was underpinned by honesty. You were courageous and led our country with integrity. You were compassionate and generous. You warned against the devastation of war and preached peace in some of the intractable conflict zones such as when you were the facilitator in the Burundi conflict.

You brought us back into the family of nations. Having been isolated because of the policies of our past, the presence of world leaders tomorrow and Sunday will bear testament to the manner in which you have helped us find our place in the community of nations. Indeed, when you stated on 10 May 1994 that *"Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world,"* you were ushering us into an equal footing with the nations of the world.

So when I pay tribute to you today I am moved by the spirit of respect that has been accorded to you from the different time zones. It is zones that are earlier time zones than ours, such as time zones of our friends and Comrades in New Zealand and in the Eastern Pacific. I am talking about those in the different climates who lived in the sunny parts of Europe and the colder climes of the Antarctic. I am speaking about the many tributes that have poured from the Americas and from our African brothers and sisters. Your life touched all of them and restored faith in the triumph of the human spirit.

I am talking about the kaleidoscope of the colours of the people of the world who inhabit the Antipodes, the Transatlantic, the Equator and the Amazon forests. I am talking about people of different political and ideological persuasions and religious convictions. All of these looked up to you as their own icon too.

You could have chosen the relative comfort of the life of royalty, but you chose an uncomfortable path of taking up the cause of your people's freedom. You were ready to die for the cause you took, and had to suffer the indignity of twenty seven year's incarceration. But you taught us much more than sacrifice. You taught us the true meaning and the power of forgiveness.

More than any other leader, you stand majestically as the rightful claimant to the title of Father of the Nation.

I am paying tribute to you as recipient of the Noble Peace Prize. I am paying tribute to you as a man who braced the cold weather of the Atlantic on Robben Island and the glaring light of the sun that nearly made you blind. I am paying tribute to you as the man who stood to defy the power of the Apartheid State and told them that you would stay your course for the benefit of his people.

From the loins of Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa and the girdle of the Nosekeni of the Nkedama of the amaMpevu clan, you were born to lead the nation and the world. You washed in the waters of Mbashe River in Mvezo, which (in your *Long Walk to Freedom*) you described as (Quote) *"a place apart, a tiny precinct removed from the world of great events, where life was lived as much as it had been for hundreds of years. (Unquote).*

In your veins coursed the royal blood of Mqhekezweni, where you defied your noble station in life to be a ploughboy, a wagon guide, a shepherd who rode horses, shot birds and jostled with other boys in stick fighting. I speak of you as a man who chose to be ordinary. At this Palace, you lived a life of simplicity, even when you could have taken advantage of the royal life of golden spoons and gilded existence.

From this experience you learnt that in the presence of opulence, the lives of the less endowed were more important than your own. Although you walked tall among Kings, Queens, Presidents and Prime Ministers, you never forgot the ordinary men and women.

You ran your race with distinction and you now have to take a well-earned and deserved rest. We shall always remember you for the favourite theme song *Lizalis'idinga lakho!* (*Fulfil Thy Promise Oh God of Truth!*) which you sang with much zest and vigour. As the sweet melodies of the song reverberate, we join you with the composer, Tiyo Soga, in wishing you smooth passage on your next journey. Today we call on the voices of Sisulu, Tambo, Luthuli, Mabhida and Hani to join you in the melodic lyrics that filled the Waaihoek Methodist Church at our movement's inaugural meeting on 8 January 1912.

It is in another song that your impact on the lives of others and the example that you set where one should also look to. Thus when Whitney Houston in her velvety voice sang the R Kelly-written song, *I Look To You*, they must have been referring to the example that you set for all.

She sang:

***As I lay me down;
Heaven hear me now;
I'm almost lost without a cause;
After giving it my all,
After my strength has gone;
And when melodies are gone
In you I can be strong;
I look to you.***

I stand today to proclaim to the world that although you were ours in the African National Congress, there are many who have claimed you as their own hero too. You were a man for all seasons, a leader to all of us, and a glue that binded us together.

We live in the comfort that you and many other leaders of the movement never wavered in your resolve to categorize our struggle as a just one. We have never wavered, under your able leadership, to tell the world that as we struggled for our liberation, we were also struggling for all the oppressed people of the world.

Now that you are in your eternal sleep, and now that you have breathed your last breath, the world looks back at you with fond memories of a man who captured their imagination. There are those who have nimbler feet, whose memory of your famous Madiba shuffle shall forever consume their imaginations. There are those of the lettered kind, whose abiding memories shall be your sharp pen and excellent wit. There are many who are more inclined to the world of *fashion*, who will remember your multi-coloured shirts.

Then there are children who will always remember the love you have for them. Many of us, as lawyers, remember vividly how you showed how injustice permeated our courts. When you stood in that inquisitory court to proclaim that you stood accused in a White Man's court, you made us realize that the issue of justice was paramount and until there were equal rights for all there would be no justice.

There are now stark questions that many people are asking about the African National Congress, as we are laying you to your eternal rest on Sunday. The first of these is whether the African National Congress will ever be the same again. Let me, without equivocation, state that you voluntarily joined the African National Congress as member.

You were a colossus who led the Africa National Congress and our country during one of its most trying and difficult times of the transformation of the country. Some have used similar terms such as titan and giant who carried a universal message. You contributed immensely to its growth and consolidations. You will go down in history as one of the shapers of our democratic state. Even by your own admission, you claimed to have been no bigger than other members of the African National Congress, stating eloquently, that you were a member of the collective. But I say you were first amongst equals.

On such occasions of grief, we have to accept that such big men as yourself, survive because of the support of even stronger women. There can be no mention of Tata Mandela's achievements without mentioning the sterling roles that were played your wife Mama Graca and Mam Winnie. To these strong women, and the entire Mandela family we appreciate how they ensured that the Madiba we bid farewell to today had comfort and support, and that throughout his life, he had a shoulder to lean on.

Your long walk to freedom has not ended. It is just the passing of an era. We pick up your spear to continue your long walks towards the economic emancipation of all so that our economy must reflect the demographics of the new South African rainbow nation.

As I close, let me go back to the beginning. Dalibhunga! Sopitsho! Madiba! Dlomo! Yem Yemu! Ngqolomsila! Velabambhentsele! The big tree has fallen. The world will never be the same again! A pledge we make to you Mr President is that as a nation, we will keep on walking.

Siyabulela!