



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

**Inaugural Dr. Andrew Mlangeni Memorial delivered by
Minister Ronald Lamola at the University of South Africa on the 06th of June
2021**

“Integrity and Revolutionary Ethics in Year of Charlotte [Manye]-Maxeke”

**Programme Director: Member of the Executive Council for the Gauteng Province
Responsible for Sports Arts and Culture and Recreation Ms Mbali Hlophe**

Distinguished Guests

Fellow panellists

**Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa: Professor Puleng
Lenkabula;**

The Council, Senate and Student Body of Unisa;

**Chairperson of Andrew and June Mlangeni Foundation: Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize
our Deputy Minister responsible for Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities;**

Former Ambassador of South Africa to Poland Ms Febe Potgieter-Gqubule

I have the honour of presenting the inaugural lecture today, the Premier of the home province of Baba Mlangeni, David Makhura could not be with us and thought it prudent that I be the one to take the baton.

In the spirit of Thuma Mina I have obliged.

Program Director, in preparing for this lecture, I thought if there was something we had come to learn from Andrew Mlangeni was the ability to speak truth to power no matter the costs.

And it is for the reason that he remains a towering figure of history, who, while known to be very humble, is nevertheless part of the galaxy of the twentieth century revolutionaries whose legacies loom large over the horizon of South Africa's history.

"Some of our political leaders have become absolutely corrupt – they are no longer interested in improving the lives of our people. They are busy lining their pockets with the money that is meant to help the poor people. What a disgrace!"

They have forgotten that many people died for this democracy that we are enjoying today. The percentage of our unemployed youth is very high, poverty is rampant, and there is no sign of an immediate solution."

These are not my words, but are rather words of Baba Andrew Mlangeni, a struggle icon in the true sense of the word. He departed very suddenly just less than a year ago.

As we gather in his name today, as an attempt to connect the past with the present, and the present with the future, I think it should concern us all that this

statement made by Baba Mlangeni in 2018, resonates with the lived experience of so many South Africans to this day.

As a matter of fact, it is as if the words were spoken yesterday.

This week, we learnt from the 2021 Statistics South Africa's First Quarterly Labour Force Survey, that the official unemployment rate among youth is 46.3 %; and 9.3% amongst university graduates.

It is also in this week, where we were once again confronted with doubt about the whether we all believe that South Africa belongs to all those who live it. This doubt comes even though we may be one country and no longer a country suffocated by racial oppression.

It has become evident that there are some citizens who are still deeply committed to keeping practices of colonialism and the false racial superiority that apartheid sought to sustain.

Notwithstanding all these difficult facts, there is no question that we should not despair. Our commitment to a non-racial society will not be frustrated by those who long for a South Africa modelled on exclusionary systems.

If we choose not to approach these weighty matters with illumination and deepened understanding, these treacherous conditions may wreck the vehicular means we have inherited from our history to realise some of the strategic goals for which Andrew Mlangeni's generation lived for, and thereby make us the generation that betrayed the revolution itself.

In the name of Baba Andrew Mlangeni, we must not only advance a constitutional democracy, but we must implement it in all its respects.

As we mark the 25th Anniversary of the Constitution, the department of justice and constitutional development will unravel programmes which will help us review the impact of this document in our lives. But most importantly, this will be an opportunity for us to all engage on how we can deepen the impact of the Constitution in all spheres of society.

And of course, in the implementation of the Constitution, there should be no room for corruption. We need to ensure that this society we reconstruct, is not only politically inclusive, but equally economically inclusive. Economic inclusivity also goes to the heart of the type of economy we need to construct amid a global pandemic.

Earlier, I had mentioned that our unemployment rate amongst youth who are graduates stands below 10%. This inevitably points to a critical fact, youth who leave the education system at secondary school level are most at risk of being unemployed.

Of course, we gather here in youth month and so the underlying the philosophy of the youthful struggles of 1976 in a quest for democratic citizenship, national integration and the recognition of the legitimacy of the African of being, should not be lost on us.

Inevitably, part of the solution to our youth unemployment problem lies in the education system itself. Our ability to retain students in the system is critical, but even more critical, is our ability to identify those who may not have the aptitude to remain up to matric.

The second solution is in the domain of offering vocational training and creating different pathways to the workplace. ***“Only the combination of the formal and informal education can catapult humanity to greater heights.”***

This is just yet another wise saying the late Sitwalandwe Andrew Mlangeni bestowed upon us.

Program Director,

Two things Andrew Mlangeni throughout the course of his life was committed to, were integrity and ethics. One thing we must all reconcile ourselves with is that, if you choose to shun your integrity and ethics, you cannot fundraise sympathy when lady justice takes the wheel.

It has become so common a practice for us to declare that, so and so is innocent and question why he or she is charged selectively. Let us reflect on this conduct, who are we to proclaim the innocence of people who have on the face value of it, shunned integrity and ethics.

At the very least, we should give these people the space to prove that integrity and ethics were never shunned by their actions. We cannot all be judges; it is only those who have been called to uphold the rule of law when all else fails who can proclaim one's innocence on our behalf.

In remembering Baba Mlangeni, the time has come to heed his counsel and be never afraid of taking bold steps, to ensure that the aspirations of the people are realised.

So in the context of this Andrew Mlangeni Memorial Lecture it is helpful to see the underlying inter-articulations of these deeper historical processes whose

distinctive transformative impact on the political process are only visible over a span of time.

Programme Director;

Our theme for this memorial lecture is: 'Integrity and revolutionary ethics in the year of Charlotte Maxeke'.

Within the limitations of the time available, I propose to unpack these principles of integrity and revolutionary ethics within the context of the current political landscape in which our country finds itself.

Let me also emphasise the fact that in the African National Congress (ANC)'s political calendar the year 2021 is officially designated 'The Year of Charlotte Mannye-Maxeke', since it is the 150 Anniversary of her birth.

In Charlotte Maxeke we had multifaceted individual who was not only the first African woman to obtain a degree in the sciences but also a pioneer in that she was a delegate during the formation of the ANC.

A fearless leader and high-end intellectual, she was among the first historical actors in our country to elevate the gender project as constitutive of the human agenda, by not only overcoming the gendered strictures within the ANC and without, but also contributing to the emergent construction of revolutionary and contrarian discourse which would lay the foundations for future generations.

Ntate Mlangeni and his generation succeeded Mme Maxeke's generation and their revolutionary heritage. They took the torch up until we can gained we our freedom.

Once again it is an honour to deliver this Andrew Mlangeni Memorial Lecture ‘in the Year of Charlotte Maxeke’.

Programme Director;

It is always helpful to unpack a topic of this nature to ensure a minimum level of common understanding.

I understand the noun ‘integrity’ in its conventional, denotative sense to mean the ***‘the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’***.

It is now commonplace to understand ‘revolution’ ***‘...in its literal meaning of a turnaround, a revolving, or a change of political or social condition’***

And let me clearly state my understanding of ‘ethics’ as classically defined, to be ***‘rational inquiry into, or theory of, the standard of right and wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct, which ought to be accepted by a class of individuals’*** (Mautner, 1996: 201).

As you can see none of these definitions structures of society it is an internal inquiry of the self.

The departure of Andrew Mlangeni has robbed us individuals who adhered to this societal code.

The question is who now becomes the guardians of integrity? More pointedly to young people is the revolution safe in our hands? Can the generation of Baba Mlangeni, Mandela and Sisulu trust us to take the revolution forward.

In our case, therefore, revolutionary ethics would therefore mean the universal standard of right and wrong that an oppressed people adopt in their execution of struggle to change their political experience qualitatively.

I would make so bold as to assume that the driving logic of the struggle to transform human experience for the better automatically sets the standards of what is projected into the changed conditions in the name of which the struggle is waged.

In other words, we cannot have one set of standards for what is right and wrong, good and bad, in the course of conducting the struggle, and expect to have a completely different regime of ethical standards in the envisioned society.

Of course I am saying this aware of the fact that each historical period tends to impose its own unique conditions whose inexorable logic may or may not impact on how we conduct human affairs.

The political struggle is a complex process that tends to develop its own self-reflexive practices at a theoretical level.

This, however, still does not detract from the fact that the underlying tenets of a progressive African revolutionary humanism are a transhistorical imperative which may only be forcibly modified by the hand of time, but never hollowed out of content or have its form deformed beyond redemption.

Program Director and Guests

I would like to contend that if revolutionary ethics in modern society are, at least partially, contingent on the ability to make a living, meaning disproportionate reign of stomach level politics, then it makes sense to arm ourselves with education to be able to be less dependent. This way we are able to preserve our freedom. We who are living today during the democratic era do not have any excuse not to educate ourselves.

It fact, it may very well be considered a measure of historical irony that Ntate Mlangeni and his generation furthered their education while incarcerated.

His generation went to school even while imprisoned, preparing themselves for the advent of freedom so that they could measure up to the demands of a modern state system. They appreciated the intrinsic value of education.

On this challenge to further their education he states that:

"One of the biggest prisons we were afraid of being locked up in though, was the jail of ignorance. We had to demand to have access to education, a fight that was fought over a period of three years until it was granted in 1967. Guess who was the first among the inmates to register to study? Some fellow called Andrew Mlangeni."

"I took a journey of 12 years to gain a BA degree, despite all odds. Our jailors were against us studying and they found excuses to disturb our progress. At times, it was due to the unavailability of funds, but we never let that deter us. I went to prison without a degree, but came out with two degrees."

On the face of it the question of education may appear a bit tangential to the topic at hand but a closer look reveals the profundity of this issue as a form of self-emancipation.

The question we need to confront is whether our current crop of political leaders is educationally equipping themselves to avoid the prison of ignorance?

Being educated does not only mean the capacity to give effect to effective government to meet the demands of the people; or less dependence on political largess for personal survival; it also means equipping oneself with the necessary intellectual apparatus to be able to grasp the fundamental questions of the day at a much deeper level than would have been the case otherwise.

Yet it is also true that the imperative for survival compromises many a good cadre as they are trapped in a morally corrosive and corruptible political environment which they cannot challenge without being reduced to beggarly living conditions.

Unlike the boldness that comes with principle and conviction to challenge that which goes against the grain, quiescence takes precedence, which implicates complicity and acquiescence on the part of all concerned.

But an observer of current South African politics may ask with some warrant as to why are there educated, young black South Africans implicated in malversation or misconduct in public office, if education makes us less dependent the political machinery and machination?

To be sure, I am not sure whether I do have the answer to this morally intricate question.

What makes this question necessary is the fact that moral courage is another defining feature woefully wanting in our social practice.

Indeed, many of the young black people implicated in malversation are educated people who did not need to sell their soul to the highest bidder for self-preservation.

They are highly educated and hold illustrious degrees which could enable them to walk away from perceived venial conditions which could compromise their moral rectitude.

Has the integrity and revolutionary ethics that drove the political agenda of Ntate Mlangeni's generation been recast in the post-apartheid society to reflect the narrow interests of certain white collar workers and certain sections of us the political class?

To this question I would readily say 'yes'; after all nationalism in the post-colonial setting has all-too often proven a malleable project that could be re-interpreted to suit the temper of the times.

This is regrettable, though.

If sections of society which the late African-American leader and intellectual W.E. du Bois labelled '***The Talented Tenth***' suffer from failure of moral imagination at a time when South Africa depends on their skills, knowledge and vision to revolutionarise African experience, how are we to catalysis change that catapults post-apartheid society to qualitatively new heights of social development?

Without sounding elitist and disregarding the historical force of the working and under-classes in societal change, one cannot help noticing the transformative impact of national elites at the discursive level in all modern societies. It is

invariably the intelligentsia which set the moral tone of the generation and define the intellectual agenda of the time.

Even the early history of anti-colonial struggles was made legible by the discursive practices of the pioneering African intelligentsia who were drawn into the violent European modernisation process but, to their eternal credit, redefined the terms of these imposed conditions of modernity on their own terms.

The late South African scholar, Ntongela Masilela, employs the concept of the '**New African Movement**' to distinguish the generational difference of this emerging Western educated Africans who embraced modern ways to lead the struggle for the dignity of Africans.

Such agential awareness of the strategic role as well the historical imperative to contribute to the transformation of society and the ability to resist the temptation to betray or abandon this role is a form of critical historical consciousness that has been voided to some extent in the post-apartheid era.

As leadership in an expansive sense, betraying our historical role to give bearing to the enduring values which we have inherited from the luminaries who preceded us amounts to a regression and a betrayal.

Having fought the racist system which dehumanised us, we need to be careful not to instinctually re-appropriate the terms of reference of the oppressor in re-defining ourselves. Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher warns us that '**he who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby becomes a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you**'.

In this regard, and as I conclude, I wish to make a call to all South Africans to re-embrace the capacious notion of a revolutionary African nationalism unadulterated by the toxicity of extraneous matter.

We have to boldly recuperate this genuine revolutionary notion from degenerating into narrow parochial and reactionary form of nationalism serving as a legitimating discourse for the grasping hands of rapacious elites who have abandoned the revolutionary project.

As we reclaim the moral high ground of the revolutionary ethics Ntate Mlangeni and his generation bequeathed to us, let all the motif forces of the South African history re-assert the legitimacy of their space in the process of re-inscribing the African humanism into the historical canvass.

Integrity and revolutionary ethics are by definition rooted in the philosophical wholeness of the revolution, if by the later we still mean wholesale change of the socio-economic make up of society for an even higher plane of existence.

Concepts such as revolutionary practice, integrity and ethics need be abstract from the theories, neither should the notion of a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist, democracy and just society rooted in material progress and economic justice. As advanced by our Constitution.

Those of us who remain need to be the custodians and practitioners of Ntate Motlatsi Andrew Mlangeni legacy. And that during is revolutionary practice, integrity and ethics are not taken for granted but are asserted boldly and loudly, even to the cost of one's well-being. Outspokenness against the violation of the revolutionary tenets is the price to pay, there is not any other way.

As George Orwell says '**during times of universal deceit, telling the truth**

becomes a revolutionary act'. There can be no better expression of revolution, of upholding integrity and ethics in the process of societal change, than telling the truth.

In other words, telling the truth in is itself a revolutionary practice. It is through this revolutionary practice of telling the truth that qualitatively new, lucid and higher forms of social consciousness are born. Ntate Mlangeni was the epitome of this new form of social consciousness which remained impermeable to deformities, deviancy, and apostasy.

It was exactly with this revolutionary practice in mind when the Brazilian revolutionaries Paulo Frere and Macedo stated that:

“[T] he new man and the new woman do not appear by accident. The new man and the new woman are born in the practice of the revolutionary reconstruction of the society”.

I thank you.