



**Keynote Address delivered by the Minister of Energy, Ms Dipuo Peters, MP, on
the occasion of the Peter Mokaba Memorial Lecture.**

20 June 2013, Westernburg Hall, Polokwane

I take this honour, on behalf of many contemporaries of Peter Mokaba, not as an opportunity to rewrite our history, but to revisit, recall and re-evaluate an account of Cde Peter's public and political life and all significant moments in history that shaped and characterized it.

This Memorial Lecture has afforded us an opportunity to reflect and draw crucial lessons from the illustrious life of a man who laid his life at the service of the people.

We are here to remember a revolutionary who was an embodiment of the Alliance. We remember Mokone, the Roaring Lion of the North.

Allow me to also pay homage to his contemporaries and other heroes and heroines of a bygone era. We salute and hail their indispensable contribution as we reap the fruits of our hard earned democracy, in a country they selflessly, tirelessly, relentlessly and determinedly served.

It is, without any doubt or equivocation that when the history of our people, the youth struggle in particular, is written, their names will feature, with Cde Peter's name as a prominent feature.

The first President of the ANC Youth League, Anton Lembede made his clarion call for young people to occupy the foremost trenches in the battle for freedom of our people and said:

“We are not called to peace, comfort and enjoyment, but to hard work, struggle and sweat. We need young men and women of high moral stamina and integrity: of courage and vision. In short, we need warriors. This means that we have to develop a new type of youth of stoical discipline, trained to endure suffering and difficulties. It is only this type of youth that will achieve the national liberation of African people”

Peter Mokaba spared neither strength, nor effort to advance the cause of liberation and heeded this call. He cut his teeth in liberation politics in the 1970s, as a learner at Hwiti High School in Mankweng. Like many student and youth activists of that era, his political activism was further ignited by the 1976 Student Uprisings. Indeed, the legacy of June 16 1976 inspired thousands of youth to become active in youth formations and fight for freedom.

Wheels of apartheid were grinding, a remarkable number of learners were brutally killed, others critically injured and many others disappeared without a trace. This generation of youth did not relent and despite these ruthless crackdowns and unabating repression on a massive scale. They continued to bear the flag of freedom very high even above the smog of apartheid oppression.

Peter managed to evade a possible arrest in 1977, where he was charged with public violence. He was acquitted when all 28 state witnesses refused to testify against him. Moved by the shortage of teachers, he taught Mathematics and Science. In 1980, he registered in an institution of higher learning.

He was arrested in 1982, at the then University of the North (Turflop), was sentenced six year in Robben Island. He was later released on appeal after a year, got detained on the same charges, sentenced to three years, suspended for 5 years.

The youth activism during this era of mounting repression intensified, eventually leading to the expansion of Umkhonto WeSizwe ranks. This inspired the courage and resilience of many revolutionaries who were relentless in the quest for freedom. Peter joined Umkhonto WeSizwe and underwent military training.

Again, during this era, a new level of political consciousness and commitment without which the spark that ignited Soweto, Langa and Bonteheuwel could have flickered and died, was promoted. Black Consciousness was on the rise. While it was construed to be exclusivist, the assertion by Steve Biko that “being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude” addressed such concerns.

The South African Students Organisation (SASO) had been founded in 1969. The Congress of South African Students was also formed in 1979 and subsequent to this was the formation of AZASO. Peter distinguished himself as both a youth and student activist. His approach to waging such a struggle was premised on the understanding of the inextricable nature of of the two, with education as a tool through which the youth development agenda should be furthered.

Let us also remember that against all odds, he managed to complete matric.

The consolidation of the struggle for better education of the African child was inevitable, with a firm foundation having been laid through the June 16 Uprisings. This, however, was not a stand-alone struggle waged else where. Countrywide, communities had become sensitized of the importance of education.

Learners and students clearly understood that their education would be of benefit not only to themselves, but to the entire communities from which they originated. This has profound resonance with SASCO's affirmation; "We are members of a community before we are students". The education system of the time was characterized by racial inequality and an antithesis to the envisaged "People's Education for People's Power". The state of education had evidently reached a crisis level. The National Education Crisis Committee was thus constituted in 1982.

Year 1983 marked the launch of the anti-apartheid umbrella organization, the United Democratic Front (UDF). This historic occasion took place at the [on 20 August](#). This came as retaliation to the banning of political formations. Threats were made by the apartheid government, but people defied those threats and attended the launch in large numbers. It was Cde Peter who strengthened us and said, "rather die to a man than to let the enemy pass".

Student formations found a voice in the UDF. Among them were COSAS, NUSAS and AZASO and others. Comrade Peter had already been a formidable force to be reckoned with, within the student movement. His voice was one that could not be ignored, even within the UDF circles.

ANC declared the year 1985 as the year of the youth. Youth formations and structures were established throughout the country. The ANC leadership in exile called on the youth to unite and consolidate their effort of being the thorn on the enemy's flesh. At a national level a committee was established to work towards the launch of the national youth organization. Cde Peter Mokaba and many others played a leading role in such a committee.

In a secret meeting held in Cape Town, the South African Youth Congress was formed on the 27th March 1987. This was a culmination of all planning and consultative efforts notwithstanding the repressive conditions we found ourselves in at the time. The new Youth Congress brought together various youth formations or congresses from many of

the country's townships. These included the Cape Youth Congress, PEYCO, SOYCO,AYCO, the Galeshewe Youth Congress and many others.

When we formed SAYCO, we understood that the youth of South Africa needed a voice and that we had a burden on our shoulders - having to ensure the liberation of other young people and the society at large. This was well embedded in SAYCO's preamble as set out in the constitution:

"We the young people of South Africa,being the working youth, the unemployed youth and student youth, noting our own suffering and that of our people as a whole under the evil, criminal, oppressive and exploitative system of apartheid and colonialism, realise the overriding need to consciously and actively engage our country's youth in the ongoing democratic struggle against national oppression and class exploitation."

As implored by Frantz Fanon when he said, "Every generation of youth, must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill or betray it", we had no doubts or delusions about our mission and we were fully cognizant of all its consequences. Freedom or death: victory is certain! Clarion call and motto of SAYCO.

Firebrand trailblazer, Comrade Peter Mokaba got elected as President of SAYCO and was again retained in this leadership role in 1990. Comrade Rapu Molekane as the Secretary General. He was the first and last president of the SAYCO. We thus referred to him as the 'Alpha and Omega'.

Cd Peter Mokaba,believed in the superiority and leadership role of the ANC.This was shown by him leading the newly elected SAYCO leadership to go and consult with the ANC in exile to be debriefed and mandated.SAYCO believed that any leadership in the country is place keepers for the actual parliament of the people;the African National Congress.

Arguably, as young lions of that decade, we were working towards total insurrection. Peter was always at the forefront of this struggle as both a youth activist and an MK cadre. He was arrested in 1988 and charged with commanding MK structures in the then Northern Transvaal. He was acquitted due to a witness refusing to testify against him. It was for the second time that such an acquittal had happened and this points out to the popularity he had on the ground and within SAYCO and ANC circles.

Peter continued to express opposition to all attempts of inflicting divisions within the Mass Democratic Movement. He also maintained a firm belief that the ANC remained the tried, tested and trusted vehicle that will usher the toiling masses to a free, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society as envisioned by the NDR.

Within the UDF, he fought against and defeated the argument that suggested that the UDF and SAYCO did not need to dissolve to make way for the ANC when the Liberation Movement was unbanned.

He further advanced a view that all youth must join the ANCYL as soon as it is also unbanned. Neither did he labour under the impression that SAYCO existed to replace the ANCYL, nor did he believe that the UDF sought to replace the ANC and its alliance partners. He understood these as necessary interventions necessitated by conditions of the time. He remained committed to the task of rallying all youth behind the ANC banner while championing their aspirations.

Contrary to popular and widely held belief that Peter hated whites, he hated white supremacy with no motives or hopes of replacing it with black supremacy. A view is still widely held by many that Peter's hatred for white people was carried through the popularized "Kill the Boer" slogan.

We know that this slogan has been interlinked with other revolutionary songs that are perceived to have carried racist messages. One cannot help but to point out to the

“ayesab’ amagwala” song, opportunistically popularized as “Dubul’ iBhunu”. To Peter Mokaba, songs and slogans help rally and call on the masses to action. The political messages were carried in songs and slogans. What you sing and recite you will never forget. The messages get carried across to the masses with ease.

To associate Peter Mokaba with racism on its own was a demonstration of how many people are devoid or have a limited understanding of the various contexts and conditions under which our liberation songs were sung. In the context of the “dubul’ ibhunu” song, akin to that of the “kill the boer” slogan, the “boer”, “ibhunu” is the enemy.

This referred to the policy maker who established laws that perpetuated crimes against humanity, one who took orders to infiltrate liberation movements. In the military sense, as Peter was an MK soldier, it was understood as a member of the South African Defence Force, or a collaborator thereof. That is the enemy that Peter sang about!

Lest we forget that even during atrocities that saw many of our comrades die, near-death experiences for some, freedom fighters like Peter were never in despair, but drew strength and found solace in song. It indicated resilience and rededication to the advancement of the course of freedom.

As a further indication of his understanding that he and his contemporaries and others who waged the struggle before our generation thoroughly understood the enemy and were under no delusion that White South Africans were the enemy, he said, and I quote:

“The support of the youth for the ANC is based on the Freedom Charter. It is not just a loyal support but a convinced support that understands the policies of the ANC, that knows the whites, as whites, are not our enemies. They know the system that privileges whites people is the enemy”.

The system was the enemy and white people benefitted from this system.

This goes against false suppositions that he was anti-White, something that many continued to bedevil him with, even up to the point of his death.

When ANC and its YL was unbanned. Peter Continued leading the PNYC and ultimately the YL. He ushered in the unbanned YL and developed its POA which supported the processes of rebuilding the ANC and mobilized youth in support of the CODESA negotiations process. He encouraged the youth to encourage negotiations and constantly reminded us of our responsibilities.

Peter, was an ANC NEC member, who spoke his mind and was central to drafting many of the ANC policy and discussion papers. he said what many feared to say inside constitutional structures of the organisation. He was also amongst the first team of young people deployed to parliament in 1994. He served the Organisation delectantly and was later deployed as a Deputy minister of Environment and Tourism. He was very central to the initial Environment policies of the ANC.

In the Youth organisation, he perpetuated his strong conviction that

"there is nothing wrong if people differ. It is only natural and encourages healthy and robust engagement on issues. It is also not uncommon that people view things from different lenses, but the intolerance of different views should be discouraged as it can go to extremes of the real enemy being ignored, triggering fights among comrades."

Before and throughout Peter's association with the African National Congress, the ANC YL always drew political guidance from the ANC. The League had a twin role of being a body of opinion for youth within the ANC, and being an organ that mobilizes the youth around the ANC vision. The League also had a massive role in ANC campaigns and many of its leaders had been entrusted with responsibilities within ANC structures.

The ANC entrusted such “Young Lions of the Struggle”, as President OR Tambo called them, with huge responsibilities due to the potential recognized and the energies required in carrying out organizational tasks. Even then, “generational mix” concepts were not introduced. Leaders of all “generations”, eras and epochs collectively executed and carried out duties and responsibilities they had been entrusted with, with no attempts to belittle any generation’s contribution.

While the League continues to advance its role of mobilizing the youth around the ANC vision, it should not lose sight of the greater task of being responsive to the aspirations of young people, beyond ANC circles. This is a lesson drawn from the state of the Youth League in the late 1950s. Whatever the preoccupation the ANC Youth League might have, it should never be at the neglect of its primary constituency.

Peter was a dedicated volunteer and cadre who rose to prominence within MDM structures when there were no prospects of any form of material benefit. Volunteerism was his dominant trait. Energetic as he was, he would not hesitate to act on any instruction or command given. This also resonates with words when he said; “we have regarded ourselves as foot soldiers and we regard Mandela as our commander”. This was an expression of great humility in light of many latter-day self-appointed commanders whose obsession is titles than the responsibility that comes with them.

Peter Mokaba was a leader of the people, by the people and with the people. We should never forget his sacred gift of reaching out and extending an olive branch to traditional and community leaders. He greatly contributed to the establishment of CONTRALESA. He was appealing to the young and old, and understood that the aspirations of young people were inseparable from those of the society at large.

He assumed a role of a unifier and was called on to intervene in moments when many of us would tremble with fear. He was on only a firebrand, he was a fire extinguisher, too. Even his detractors gave him credit for the reconciliatory role he played.

Many people, even today still believe that Peter Mokaba was sidelined and prevented from speaking at the funeral of Cde Chris Hani due to fears of further insurrection. It should be understood that Peter did not address the mourners at that funeral because he had subjected himself to the leadership and guidance of the ANC as the mother body.

He understood that the Youth and Women's League were leagues of the ANC and that they should at all times. The defiance of the ANC by its leagues was never and still is not an option. He further affirmed the greatness of the tripartite alliance. He fought hard against 'Operation Thunderstorm' - an attempt that sought to portray a split between the ANC and the Youth League.

His fearlessness should never be construed as disrespect. It proved true the assertion that young people are inherently impatient. He led young people who were determined to achieve "Freedom in Sisulu's and Mandela's lifetime". He thus earned the respect of his young constituency and from older people.

Every generation has its own struggle. I would not want to reincarnate Peter Mokaba to the present and age, but let me hasten to say that great lessons lie in his approach in advocating for and being responsive to the struggles of his generation.

In the same spirit, I would never reduce to no significance challenges that young people of this generation are confronted with. Young people have long been empowered to be masters of their own destinies. Equally, Government has set out and is still seized with devising interventions that alleviate the plight of our youth.

This generation of youth needs to responsibly enjoy whole, alcohol, drug and HIV-free lives with unyielding passion. What should be at the forefront is the quest to make education fashionable.

Crass-materialism continues to inflict many young people. Young people are discouraged from pursuing education by those who believe in the get-rich-quick approach.

While it is good to chant slogans, youth leaders of this day and age should guard against chanting meaningless slogans. Furthermore, slogans alone cannot address challenges you are faced with.

Youth participation in the economy should be advocated for. The socioeconomic emancipation of young people should take a centre stage as it always has, even during Peter Mokaba's times. People did not believe in quick buck. Peter himself ran a hair salon when 'perm' was still fashionable.

It is good to advocate for 'economic freedom in our lifetime' as it is good to call for 'socialism in our lifetime' and 'free and quality education in our lifetime'. When all these calls are made, emphasis should be made on education. Education is the precondition to the advancement of any struggle. We should continuously advocate for EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION as we did in bygone eras.

Women empowerment is one transformation imperative that cannot be ignored or belittled. During our youthful days, women in the struggle continued to preach the gospel that 'a woman's place is in the struggle'. We are yet to see the rise of women, young women in particular, to higher echelons in government, civil society, private sector and other key sites of the struggle.

Many other challenges that you grapple with as youth of this generation are best known to you. Continue devising strategies on how to best address them. We will continuously lend a helping hand and ensure that our interventions are responsive to your plight.

The are some of the valuable lessons we can draw from Peter Mokaba's life. He is a giant revolutionary whose legacy should be engraved and written in indelible places.

Allow me to borrow from the words of Prof. Dennis Brutus and say:

"He does not die who lives in the consciousness of his people

He does not die whose works endure in the society of his people

His spirit lives when the memory of his people preserves his work and his words,

And when his deeds continue t march forward t shape the future".

In conclusion, let me echo the words of Former President Mandela. In his tribute to O.R Tambo, he said and I quote:

"While the ANC lives, Oliver Tambo cannot die"

Emulating these words,

While the ANC lives, Peter Mokaba cannot die

While the ANC Youth League lives, Peter Mokaba cannot die

While the ANC Women's League lives, Peter Mokaba cannot die.

I thank you!