



# African People's Convention

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## MANGALISO SOBUKWE MEMORIAL LECTURE

by

Comrade Themba Godi

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At

Kempton Park

Comrades it is a pleasure for me to be here with you on this occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the passing away of a great leader of our people and an outstanding patriot Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.

This occasion is part and parcel of the great strides that the APC continues to take as it cements its place at the centre of our country's politics. The past five months of the APC's existence have been tumultuous. If the APC was a car I would say that it has no reverse gear, for it can only move forward!

We have since defined the main tasks facing us as follows:

- i) Build structures; this means the need to have properly functioning structures at provincial, regional and branch levels. The APC must be an organised

organisation. Structures give an organisation shape and capacity to operate. Political work is about the collective. Structures thus give us the institutional platform to act as a collective, eschewing individualism. This aspect, Comrades, cannot be over-emphasised. We need structures, we need them now. It is the responsibility of all comrades to ensure that they come from functional branches, from functional regions and provinces. You in Gauteng are better off since the distances you must cover in doing organisational work is small compared to, say, Northern Cape.

- ii) The second task which is equally important, is the need to recruit members. We don't want our structures to be Commanders without an army – barking orders to themselves. We need members. The APC cannot be a small group, isolated from the people; all by itself, for itself. We have said the minimum number of members to launch a branch is fifty, but that is just the absolute minimum. We need to strive to have as many people as possible into the APC. Why should our branches have less than a thousand members each? There is absolutely no reason. To guarantee the electoral success of the APC next year, we need a firm and broad membership base. This aspect, too, cannot be overemphasised.
  
- iii) Thirdly; it is pursuing the Party's Massline. This, my dear Comrades, means our structures must follow a political line that is mass based. It means that our structures and members must be involved in the lives and activities of the people. This must be the distinguishing political feature of the APC. We need to be the eyes, ears and spokespersons of our people. Our existence should have meaning to our people. So, let us judge your work on how you involve yourselves in community programmes. This is to ensure that the promise of freedom does not just remain words, but have material meaning to the masses.

Talking of freedom, reminds me why we are gathered here today. The Preamble to our Country's Constitution, in part, enjoins us to honour those who fought and suffered for freedom and justice. The struggle for freedom has produced many heroes and heroines. One of these outstanding leaders is Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, whose passing away 30 years ago we are commemorating. Although Sobukwe started out as a leader in the ANC Youth League and finally as founding President of the PAC, he nonetheless became a national leader, respected and recognised by all our people irrespective of organisational allegiance.

Sobukwe was a pace setter. I do believe that if Steve Biko represents the hope of the liberation struggle, and Nelson Mandela represents its triumph, then Sobukwe represents

the suffering during the liberation struggle. In this order. Suffering - Hope –Victory. Thus Sobukwe-Biko-Mandela.

Mangaliso Sobukwe was born in the little karoo town of Graaf Reinet. His political activism took concrete shape as a student at the University of Fort Hare where he completed his junior teachers degree in 1949. He was active in the ANC Youth League, serving in the Research Unit and later as Branch Chairman of the Fort Hare branch. In the early fifties, whilst teaching in Standerton (Mpumalanga) he was the National Secretary of the Youth League.

When he was dismissed from Standerton, he got a post as a junior lecturer of African Languages at Wits University.

In November 1958, he and a group of Youth Leaguers pulled out of the ANC and launched the PAC in April 1959 as an African Nationalist party. Following his arrest on March 21, 1960 for the nationwide anti-pass campaign that he led, he was sentenced to three years hard labour. At the end of his sentence, the racist parliament passed the General Laws Amendment Act – better known as the “Sobukwe Clause” – which empowered the government to keep in jail any one who had completed his/her sentence. This was to be renewed annually. This clause was meant and only used for Sobukwe. At the end of his sentence he was thus transferred to Robben Island (in 1963) where he stayed until 1969.

On Robben Island he was not kept in a cell, but a separate house was built for him. The reason for his isolation was that he should not influence the other prisoners. Those prisoners who dared to greet him would be severely punished. When he was released in 1969, he was banished to Kimberly where he stayed until his death on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1978. He was buried in his hometown of Graaf Reinet.

Sobukwe did not only possess great intellect, but was a visionary leader, who had courage, honesty, integrity, uprightness of character and above all a consuming love for his people. He was uncompromising; yet humble. His teachings of African Unity, of continental integration resonated with the ideas of the leaders of the Continent like Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Sekou Toure; Amilear Cabral, Ben Bella etc.

What we learn from Sobukwe’s life and suffering is commitment; and dedication to a cause. May we, Comrades, learn and emulate this great leader of our people. We must never forget Sobukwe. We must not let him die. Long live Mangaliso Sobukwe!

Next year is elections year, so let us prepare for it with the singlemindedness and confidence of Sobukwe.

The 2009 elections should serve as a platform to demonstrate that the APC is here to stay. That the APC will dialectically play a key role in the politics of our country.

Forever breaking new grounds,  
Forever APC

Thanx