



MATJHABENG MUNICIPALITY

FREEDOM IS INDIVISIBLE

On 27 April 2015, South Africa celebrates the twenty first anniversary of democracy and formal political freedom. It also enters the third decade of constitutional democracy. In this year, much as we take pride in the number of significant strides we have made as a country in search for ennoblement of humanity, we will commemorating this historic day against the backdrop of shameful and callous attacks on foreign nationals mainly in Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces.

The attacks have largely and officially been described as xenophobic. The debate on the accuracy of this characterisation is a task for another day and platform, safe to say that there is an appreciation that there is a particular class of foreign nationals which has been attacked. Foreign nationals who largely constitute middle and ruling classes in these provinces have been left unscathed. It is therefore the task of the theoretically advanced in our society to provide a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon. Lasting solutions will be only be found on accurate diagnosis of the social ills.

Be that as it may, the incidents suggest that South Africans may not be as free as we thought we are. During the dark years of apartheid in our country, there was widespread understanding that Africa and the rest of the world were and would not be free until all citizens, including South Africans, were able truly to exercise their total freedom in determining their destiny as a people. It is for this reason that many African countries readily opened their borders to our freedom fighters who had to escape the wrath of apartheid callousness here at home. Their camaraderie was not an exercise of pity or favour. It was rooted in deep revolutionary consciousness of internalisation of the struggle for human freedom. Our brothers and sisters understood that their freedom from colonialism was under constant threat from imperial apartheid state if South Africa was not unchained from the preposterous notion of white racial supremacy.

South African struggle was based on four pillars, one of which was international mobilisation. It is not a lie to assert that this is one area that the liberation movement mastered exceptionally since early 1960s when it ordered the then deputy president, Oliver Tambo, to leave the country and establish the mission outside. A number of countries in Africa and elsewhere were to welcome increasing scores of our activists in their shores. As part of their support for our struggle, many would use their scant resources meant for development of their nations to support us financially in terms of our military programme and school our cadres. Some of these nations in Africa suffered military attacks from the oppressive and rapacious apartheid government as a result of their solidarity with us.

When we finally attained political freedom in 1994, we correctly identified international work as one of the five pillars in which we seek to build a national democratic society domestically and contribute to the just and humane world order. This approach is informed by our experiences of apartheid days that human freedom is indivisible. We realise that our freedom as South Africans is incomplete if our brothers and sisters in Western Sahara and Palestine continue to live in fear from blood-hungry Morocco and Israel respectively. Because of the unconditional love we enjoyed from Africans when we needed it, we correctly stated in our constitution that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and that everyone has a right of movement, to enter and to leave the Republic as and when they need to. This right extends to foreign nationals who want to come into our country for business, work, studying and leisure. Indeed, the same right is enjoyed by South Africans across countries and regions. Indeed, apartheid also benefitted greatly from the exploitation of cheap labour from countries like Lesotho and Mozambique in mining industry and connected to that, the subsequent building of cities like Johannesburg and Kimberly.

Much as we have correctly said that South Africans are not yet fully free if the economy continues to exclude the majority from participation, the same can be said if we are still chained by despicable feelings of hatred and anger towards our own fellow humans from other countries. Freedom is not only about political liberties and ending of curfews. In his biography, our founding president, the late Nelson Mandela, captured the indivisibility of freedom more aptly:

"Freedom is indivisible; the chains on anyone of my people were the chains on all of them; the chains on all of my people were the chains on me. It was during those long and lonely years [in the struggle for freedom] that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I know as well as know anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that is not the case. The truth is we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey but the first step on a longer even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others".

Mandela might have written this in 1995 and in the context of repulsive black-white relations in South Africa. There is no disputing the relevance and applicability of indivisibility of freedom in wider global human relations milieu. And indeed, the road has turned out to be more difficult and unpredictable. As we enter the third decade of our democracy, it has become clearer that social cohesion remains an urgent task. It was therefore not a mistake when included social cohesion as one of the key performance areas of our ward committees in our performance scorecard. It was out of an analysis that it is a conscious social construct which needs to be built deliberately but patiently. It must be among the urgent tasks that an aspirant developmental state must address.

Let us preach the message of freedom indivisibility.

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SPEAKER**

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