



SPEECH BY ANC DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT UMKHONTO WE SIZWE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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This MK National Council is taking place at a defining moment in the history of our movement and our people. It is a moment of great uncertainty and instability, where the forces of division and factionalism are in a contest with the desire of our people for unity, renewal and progress.

We recall that Umkhonto we Sizwe was formed at another defining moment in our history, when the legitimate demands of our people were met with unrelenting force. For over three decades Umkhonto we Sizwe was at the frontline of the people's defence.

Now the aims for which our glorious people's army was formed have been achieved. The apartheid government has been overthrown. Liberty and democracy for all the people of this country have been won.

And yet the spirit of Umkhonto we Sizwe lives on. The tradition of selfless sacrifice, the deep political consciousness and fearless determination of the soldiers of Umkhonto remain. Umkhonto we Sizwe was led by the giants of our revolution, men and women who placed the interests of the people above their own welfare, safety and lives.

Umkhonto we Sizwe drew into its ranks the fighting youth of our nation. These were young people whose commitment to freedom, justice and equality compelled them to leave their homes and families, to journey to places unfamiliar and often inhospitable, and to undertake missions that were as arduous as they were dangerous. These were the people prepared to lay down their lives for freedom.

Now as we confront the enormous challenges of the present, these are the people to whom we look for guidance and inspiration.



Throughout its history, the combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe were defined by their courage, discipline, political consciousness, integrity, commitment to the people, and selfless sacrifice. Now, more than at any other time since the end of the armed struggle, we need cadres with the attributes that defined the combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Now we need cadres of great courage. They need courage not to confront the bullets of the enemy, but to confront the corruption and patronage that has debilitated our movement. They need the courage to be honest about the depth and extent of the problems within our movement and our society.

They need the courage to endure the insults and the ridicule – and even the threat to their safety – that comes from challenging those who seek to perpetuate the practices that have allowed our state to be captured. It is now that we need *disciplined* cadres.

These must be cadres who observe the revolutionary discipline practised by leaders like Oliver Tambo. For them discipline was not primarily a matter of rules, regulations and sanction, it was the product of a deliberate political decision by an individual to dedicate their capabilities, resources and energy to achievement of the aims of the movement.

We need cadres who diligently observe the oath they took when they joined the ANC, who submit themselves to the collective will, and who undertake the tasks they have been given by the movement without expectation of material reward.

We need cadres with the political consciousness of an MK combatant. Just as the political training of the MK soldier was as important as their military training, so too must the political training of ANC members come before deployment or election to high office.

We need cadres who are deeply versed in the revolutionary politics of the ANC and who place political considerations above narrow personal or material considerations. We need cadres who are able to analyse the prevailing political, social and economic environment effectively and develop strategies and tactics appropriate to these conditions.

We need cadres with **integrity**. We need people who will hold themselves to the highest moral standards who will jealously safeguard the principles and values of our movement. We need cadres who will not steal, not abuse positions of authority, and not use the organisation for selfish ends.



We need leaders who are exemplary, who set the moral tone not only for the ANC but for society. We need leaders that people can trust and admire.

We need cadres who share the MK combatant's **commitment to the people**. It is no accident that MK was known as the People's Army. It existed for the sole purpose of defending the people and waging a just war for their liberation.

The ANC exists for the sole purpose of serving the people, and we need to use this moment to rediscover and reassert this overriding imperative. Everything we do must advance the liberation of the people – blacks in general and Africans in particular – from all forms of political, social and economic oppression.

Our policies serve no purpose if they do not create jobs and push back the frontiers of poverty. Our actions in government serve no purpose if they do not generate economic growth and change the structure and ownership patterns of our economy.

We need leaders, cadres, ministers, MPs, councillors and public servants who are accountable to the people and responsive to their needs. We need to rediscover and nurture the value of **selfless sacrifice**.

With the advent of democracy, cadres of the ANC no longer face the prospect of exile, detention, imprisonment, torture, violence and death. But that does not mean that we no longer have need of cadres who are prepared to make sacrifices for the cause of liberation.

Membership of the ANC now brings the prospect of employment and material progress. That is not in itself wrong, but it cannot be what motivates the ANC cadre or informs their actions.

Difficult as it may be in the current environment, we need to develop cadres and leaders who are truly selfless in their service of the people.

In just over two months, the ANC will hold its 54th National Conference. It will be a defining moment for our movement and for the country. It will determine whether we continue along a path of organisational decline, or whether we act decisively and courageously to unite, rebuild and renew our movement.



From this conference of former MK combatants to the December conference and beyond, we must work tirelessly to forge unity within our ranks – unity that is founded on principle and a genuine commitment to our values and the service of our people.

We need to undergo a deliberate and intensive process of renewal that acknowledges our mistakes and shortcomings, and that takes practical steps to correct these. At a time when our movement and our country are confronted with grave challenges, the former combatants of MK must be afforded the space to play their rightful role in building, uniting and renewing our organisation.

To achieve this, Umkhonto we Sizwe needs to be united. We salute the efforts of the MK National Council over the past year and the efforts you have all gone to, and continue to go through, towards achieving this unity. But we need to more. We cannot achieve lasting unity in the ANC if the former combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe remain divided.

As the leadership of the ANC we must accept that we have not taken up the challenge to unite MK. In fact, if we are to be honest, we have contributed to the divisions. We need to do much more to attend to the welfare of former combatants. Two decades after the advent of democracy there are still many within your ranks who are unemployed, live in poverty or are in ill health.

There are still too many whose great contribution to our liberation is celebrated in books and speeches, but not reflected in the support and material assistance that a liberated nation owes its freedom fighters.

Correcting this historical injustice must be part of the renewal of the ANC and the restoration of its values.

Let us together pledge here at this conference that by the next time we meet, we will have made real progress in improving the lives and the welfare of all former MK combatants.

None of us can afford to ignore the history of MK: not simply because it is a history of sacrifice and struggle, but because it has produced cadres who have so much to offer our movement and country at a time when discipline, honesty and courage are required.

At this difficult time – a moment of great danger, but also of great opportunity and hope – we look to the founders of Umkhonto we Sizwe for inspiration. We recall their words when they said:



“The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom.”

Confronted with enormous challenges and great resistance by those who have much to lose from a revitalised ANC, we must now declare that we will not submit.

We will instead continue the struggle, by all means within our power, in defence of our people, our future and our freedom.

The nation expects nothing less.

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