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Theme: Building capable local government to advance the task of fundamental social transformation in South Africa: lessons from Oliver Tambo

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The Tambo Family

Academics

SALGA Officials

Government Officials

Distinguished guests

Students

Ladies and Gentlemen

I greet you all

I would like to thank the Vaal University of Technology for inviting me, as chairman of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in Gauteng Province, to deliver the institution's inaugural lecture in the Remembering our Heroes Dialogue. I feel highly honoured and esteemed to be the first to deliver this lecture. My theme is: Building capable local government to advance the task of fundamental social transformation in South Africa: lessons from Oliver Tambo. Learning and drawing lessons from Tambo is important for all of us, especially for you students. We need to learn about the heroes and heroines of the struggle and unearth their history from the archives and from the memories of their comrades.

This lecture comes as our country celebrates 20 years of democracy. Of course it proceeds, and is linked to, our SALGA games, the annual SALGA Gauteng O R Tambo inter-municipal games, hosted, this time around, by the Sedibeng District Municipality and to be held here at Vaal University, on the 24th of October. We would like to thank the University, through you, Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Motloana, for allowing us access to the Institution's sporting facilities for our 8th Annual SALGA games.

Let me remind you: the forthcoming games are part of SALGA's plans to encourage social cohesion and interaction within its constituency in class, race and gender terms. A truly non-racial, harmonious, prosperous and of course well governed South Africa, free of the scourge of apartheid, is what Oliver Tambo lived and died for. We as SALGA must draw inspiration from this great leader

as we seek to build capable and efficient local government to achieve social transformation in our country.

In 1960 the African National Congress, then under the leadership of Chief Albert Luthuli, instructed Oliver Tambo, the Deputy President of the ANC, to leave the country and build the external mission of the ANC. At the time the ANC and all other left leaning organisations were banned by the regime following the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960. This was a few years before I was born: born, like so many of us, into apartheid bondage, a system that enslaved our people.

For the Tambos, and in particular Oliver Tambo's then young wife, Adelaide and children, exile meant going into the unknown, away from the familiar bounds of Johannesburg, their home. It meant being detached from the country that which was dear to them, even though it was under the jackboot of apartheid.

The Tambos could have chosen to live a simple life, detached from the struggle against apartheid, accepting apartheid rule and surviving on the crumbs from the master's table. Ma Tambo, as Adelaide Tambo was affectionally known, could have chosen to stick to her nursing profession and live as normal a life as was possible in the abnormal apartheid society. However, like the 20 South African nurses that agreed to serve the newly liberated Tanzania under Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, at Tambo's request, Ma Tambo chose the uncertainties and perils of exile life.

As for Oliver Tambo himself, he could have flourished as a lawyer in Johannesburg, even though apartheid would have limited his opportunities. Apart from staying in Johannesburg, Tambo had the option to return to the Transkei. He could easily, in the context of homeland politics, have become a lawyer, cum businessmen, cum homeland politician and in that way become apartheid's conveyor belt as did Kaiser Matanzima and other homeland leaders such as Lucas Mangope.

However, Tambo chose the ANC route. It was the hard route, the route of self-sacrifice, which would in the end bring about the total emancipation of his people, the black majority. Thus, he agreed to go into exile to serve the movement and ensure its firm establishment in order to wage the war against apartheid. Tambo was not alone in this: Frene Ginwala, Thabo Mbeki, Johnny Makhathini, Mendi Msimang, Ruth Mompati, Yusuf Dadoo, Duma Nokwe, Alfred Nzo and Joe Matthews were amongst the first ANC exiles in the early 1960s, working in different capacities to ensure that Tambo succeeded in his initiatives and recognising him as the glue that held the ANC together during trying times in exile.

Tambo travelled the length and breadth of the globe, organising funds and aid, building ties and networks with countries like the Soviet Union, Cuba, Zambia, Tanzania and the Scandinavian nations, in particular Sweden. He also worked closely with organisations that were sympathetic to the ANC such as the widespread Anti-apartheid movements.

Tambo built and ran the ANC in exile like a government in waiting, establishing the movement's missions in a range of countries, run by Chief Representatives, all reporting to the ANC headquarters firstly in Tanzania and subsequently in Zambia. These missions were charged with addressing the needs of ANC cadres on the ground, ensuring that they received basic necessities. With Thomas Nkobi, the long serving and trusted treasurer-general of the ANC in exile, on Tambo's side, from

whom we can draw lessons on accountability as municipalities, the movement's purse was in good hands.

Under Tambo, the movement established camps in Tanzania and Angola for the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), creating a strong army under the command of Joe Modise who worked closely with Chris Hani and Joe Slovo. MK members received training in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Soviet Union and Cuba, ensuring that they were amongst the best-trained armies in the world.

To Tambo education was important as a tool to liberate the country from apartheid. Tambo himself, his long time comrade and friend Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani, Thenjiwe Mtintso and others cut their teeth at the illustrious University of Fort Hare, where the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of this University, Professor Gordon Zide studied and later worked as University Registrar. From the early 1960s, the ANC under Tambo sent cadres to various countries where they acquired tertiary education in different fields, skills which are relevant today for the running of our country, from national to local government levels.

Tambo was instrumental in the establishment of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), the ANC School in Mazimbu, just outside Morogoro, in Tanzania. Tambo expected high standards of education and governance from Mazimbu, and this is what he got. The school, which was the ANC's gem in exile, boasted a mini-hospital, a farm and furniture factory. It was self-sufficient in more ways than one. So well run was this "small town", as one could proudly say of Mazimbu, that it was the envy of every international visitor and indeed a model upon which our municipalities should be run in this new dispensation.

Tambo was accountable to the ANC and ran the organisation on democratic principles. Under his leadership, the ANC held conferences in which leaders were democratically elected, policy issues debated and new resolutions on the overall governance of the ANC adopted. The first National Consultative Conference of the movement in exile was held in Morogoro in 1969. This was followed by the Kabwe Conference of 1985. In both conferences, Tambo was endorsed as the President-General of the ANC.

This then is a short but I believe incisive overview of Oliver Tambo and his immense contribution in the struggle against apartheid - the man who organised, managed and governed the ANC with such patience and skill in exile for 30 years, from 1960 to 1990.

Tambo lies in his grave in Wattville in Benoni and next to him his wife Adelaide, inseparable in life and in death, like Walter and Alberina Sisulu, also our struggle veterans who made an immeasurable contribution in the struggle against apartheid. The Tambos lived in Wattville in the 1950s, cramped in their matchbox house and denied their rightful place at the table of mankind by the regime. Nelson Mandela, a long-standing friend, comrade and brother, bade them farewell in 1993 and 2009 respectively.

The question is: as a people who were once oppressed by apartheid and as South Africans, have we drawn lessons from Tambo? Was his leadership, his undying commitment to the struggle for liberation and legacy in vain? The answer is: no, certainly not.

I am humbly standing here before you, as the Chairman of SALGA in Gauteng, to commemorate the life and times of this gallant yet unassuming leader of the ANC.

Oliver Reginald Tambo holds a special place in my heart, speaking as one of the leaders of the Congress of South African Students and the Soweto Students Congress in the 1980s, the petrol bomb and stone throwing generation who eventually overthrew the apartheid state. As student leaders, Tambo inspired us through Radio Freedom. We learnt from him about a variety of subjects: the armed struggle, the importance of education and that as the oppressed majority we should prepare to govern. Tambo's book, *Preparing for power: Oliver Tambo speaks*, published in 1987, follows the pattern of his speeches on Radio Freedom. Such banned literature, which was only available through underground ANC structures, inspired us to immerse ourselves in the history of the struggle and in debates about the future of South Africa. Some of us were arrested for being in possession of banned literature and detained without trial. Some of us were of course arrested for our overall involvement in the struggle against apartheid and served lengthy sentences. Sadly, some died in detention and thanks to the brutality of the apartheid police.

It is from Tambo that we, the insurgents of the 1980s and now SALGA leaders, government administrators and sometimes ministers, mayors and others in the democratic dispensation, continue to draw inspiration. We would not have the SALGA games named after Tambo if we were not inspired by this great leader. Let me remind you again that hosting the OR Tambo Inter-municipal Games is a prominent initiative of social cohesion. Tambo also enjoyed activities linked to sport and the arts. He loved and was dedicated to choral music and in exile he enthusiastically supported the work of Medu Arts Ensemble, the cultural wing of the ANC. There is thus no doubt that building a capable local government to advance the task of fundamental social transformation in South Africa requires lessons from Tambo, some of which have been outlined in this lecture. As SALGA in Gauteng we have travelled in Tambo's footsteps, ensuring that our people live a dignified life after the humiliations of apartheid.

We have the support we need to make our programmes a reality. At its heart is our strong legal and constitutional mandate: we know what our job is and it is clearly described in our legislation. We have the full support of government, with access to the highest decision making bodies. We have the ability to influence local government through lobbying national and provincial authorities. We have a track record of successfully delivering on projects. For example, accountability and capacity building remains the cornerstone of SALGA and this, as outlined earlier, was emphasized by Tambo. For instance:

As is clearly laid out in SALGA's Strategic Plan 2012-17 we champion capacity building for Councillors. This is a vital area in which we have been very active. It means programmes to induct and train new councillors so that they are fully aware of their responsibilities and how to carry them out, with a second phase focusing on specialized portfolio areas such as finance, human settlements and health. Capacitating people on the ground is a crucial aspect of development and which, as stated earlier, Tambo achieved through the education of ANC cadres at SOMAFCO .

Environmental and climate change must be the concern of every citizen, not just a subject for international conferences and agreements. In this spirit, we are facilitating and supporting the participation of municipalities in initiatives such as training, workshops and partnerships.

We have made successes in balancing gender representation. In this province we are coordinating capacity building programmes for female councillors to further address gender mainstreaming. In the same spirit we are facilitating the participation of municipalities at the national youth summit so as to develop an integrated approach to mainstreaming issues affecting the youth, and we are also monitoring progress on the mainstreaming of disability issues. In addition, the welfare of our older citizens is of great concern, and we are hosting provincial workshops on the provision of services by local government for older persons.

We are coordinating capacity building workshops on integrated poverty alleviation. We realize the danger of uncoordinated initiatives that risk duplication, with waste of resources and energy. Therefore we are monitoring the mainstreaming and alignment of poverty programmes with the human development strategy and the growth and development strategy. Poverty alleviation is closely linked to the need for a vibrant and inclusive economy, and this must be a local as well as a national and provincial concern. Therefore we are coordinating knowledge sharing on key emerging economic development issues such as informal trading, enterprise development and LED strategies, in the development of provincial chapters.

As we all know, HIV and AIDS is a major threat to communities and individuals. Therefore we are assessing the capacity of municipalities to contribute to the ongoing provincial HIV and AIDS campaign, and we are evaluating the implementation of the HIV and AIDS integrated mainstreaming framework by municipalities.

We have, on a broad front, greatly improved our ability to support and advise members. Our capacity to engage stakeholders, and to lobby and advocate in the interest of member municipalities is now widely acknowledged. We are a strong and vital presence in the field of labour relations. For instance, SALGA continues to provide leadership on matters related to collective bargaining and general conditions of service in the sector. We do not just look outwards: we are also focusing on the integrity of our internal processes.

As I mentioned earlier, Tambo's leadership was consultative and accountable to the ANC. This is what we represent as SALGA. For example:

SALGA continues to strengthen its own corporate governance through strong and responsible leadership and continuous emphasis on financial and ethical accountability. What does all this mean in practice? It means clean audits. It means direct support to municipalities where necessary. It means programmes for community works and for clean towns and cities.

We are taking various measures to improve the administrative and planning functions of municipalities. We are contributing to the streamlining of developmental planning through consulting member municipalities about the proposed Spatial Restructuring Guidelines by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. We are facilitating improvements in municipal internal audit units through assessing them and rolling out internal audit guidelines. We are providing multi-disciplinary hands-on support to municipalities based on audit outcomes (Randfontein and Westonaria) and providing dedicated support to municipalities in Gauteng affected by major boundary redetermination (Sedibeng DM, Lesedi, Ekurhuleni, Randfontein and Westonaria municipalities).

We have already had successes such as the campaign for 50/50 representation by men and women in local government leadership structures. This is in line with Tambo's thinking: in 1959, Tambo headed the ANC's Constitutional Commission which recommended more constitutional recognition of the ANC'S Women's League (ANCWL).

We are implementing a differentiated approach to municipal trading services. This means identifying challenges that municipalities in the province face in regards to water, electricity and waste management and drafting a support programme based on this realistic, evidence-based analysis.

Housing is a crucial area for local authorities. We are facilitating consultation and support on social housing and backyard dwellings and helping municipalities to implement plans for rental housing.

I have given an indication of our approach as SALGA, which I believe is in the tradition of what Oliver Tambo, to whom we are all indebted, would have wanted for our country. I want to urge you and all South Africans to abide by his principles. Tambo served the people with humility and graciously handed over power to Nelson Mandela on his return from exile. Even at the 1969 Morogoro conference, Tambo was willing to step down as ANC President but seriously persuaded by conference delegates to continue to lead the ANC. This what all leaders must do, and this is what Toivo ya Toivo, a revered SWAPO veteran who was incarcerated at the notorious Robben Island for years, emphasizes as well: that leaders need to step down graciously and not overstay their welcome.

My fellow countrymen, let us work hard to build this country. That is the best way to honour the memory of Oliver Tambo, Adelaide Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Charlotte Maxeke, Ray Alexander and the many other struggle icons who fought against apartheid.

Thank you