

June 16 2007 - 31st Anniversary

16 June 2007

Speech by the Executive Mayor, Clr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of June 16 1976; "deepening youth participation in development through service" and the wreath-laying ceremony, Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum, Orlando West, Soweto - Johannesburg.

Programme Director

The Honourable, Premier Mbhazima Shilowa

MEC for Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Barbara Creecy

Members of the Executive Council

Members of the Provincial Legislature

Members of the Mayoral Committees

Members of the Local Legislature

Fellow Councillors

Chairperson of the National Youth Commission

The June 16 Foundation

Leaders of Political Parties

Leaders of various Civil Society Organisations

Members of the Community

Comrades and Friends

Programme Director, it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be part of this historic occasion. Today, as we have done in the past 31 years we meet here to pay tribute to those gallant heroes who sacrificed their lives to defeat Apartheid colonialism, oppression and repression. It is them who have laid a firm foundation and made it possible for us to further deepen our democracy, continue to build a non-racial, non-sexist as well as a prosperous society.

We know now that when 16 June exploded it caught both the Apartheid rulers and the liberation movement by surprise. This does not suggest in any way that there were no signs or indications that there was a simmering beneath the surface.

The South African Student Movement (SASM), the various school boards as well as individuals in various civil society organisations such as Beyers Naude in the Christian Institute had a sense of something ominous that was about to happen.

Some have described revolutions as a phenomenon that is constituted of accumulation of big and small grievances over a period of time. The simmerings and the explosions led to untold anguish and pain and spread from Soweto to Alexandra township and spilt over to more than 100 urban and peri-urban areas. Its initial eruption took nearly a year to run its course passing through a series of stages as student leaders endeavoured to change tactics in an effort to sustain the protest or impact – the attempt to draw in more and more adult and worker participation, devise country campaigns and respond to growing government repression. The June 16 uprisings, in terms of its coverage and impact was qualitatively different to any resistance encountered by the Apartheid regime up to that moment.

The response of the state was standard and predictable. More arrests, detentions, more banning orders and killings. More repression. The National Party as we know continued to

receive huge votes in each election that followed. More budget for defence and security institutions.

Many leaders of the then Apartheid government and personalities such as Dr Andries Treurnicht, the then Minister of Bantu Education, remained especially deaf to the calls for change.

Nelson Mandela in his Autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, describes how he and his fellow political prisoners on Robben Island first got to hear of these unfolding events. He describes it thus:

In June 1976 we began to hear vague reports of a great uprising in the country. The whispers were fanciful and improbable: the youth of Soweto had overthrown the military and the soldiers had dropped their guns and fled. It was only when the first young prisoners who had been involved in the 1976 uprising began to arrive on Robben Island in August that we learned what had truly happened. “

“ The events of that day reverberated in every town and township of South Africa. The uprising triggered riots and violence across the country. Mass funerals for the victims of state violence became national rallying points. Suddenly the young people of South Africa were fired with the spirit of protest and rebellion. Students boycotted schools all across the country. ANC organisers joined with students to actively support the protest. Bantu Education had come back to haunt its creators, for these angry and audacious young people were its progeny.”

Programme Director, for many young people of this period 16 June 1976 represented a “ baptism of fire” .

The story of 16 June was to impact quite heavily on the Liberation Movement as more and more young people left the country to swell the ranks of the armed guerrilla forces. The young people who left did not just receive military training but some acquired significant sophisticated skills in politics and other areas of life.

Today, Programme Director, we meet here to look at our past so that we may have an understanding of our present. We meet to reflect on the present so that we may have a glimpse of our future. We meet today on the 31st anniversary of June 16 1976 to remember the young men and women who paid the ultimate price and to say that their fight was not in vain.

We are here to pay tribute to the contributions they made to advance the cause of the national democratic revolution. As we lay these wreaths, we salute their courage, their insight and acknowledge their contribution in the quest to realise a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, united and a prosperous South Africa.

Programme Director, allow me to call upon all young people to seize the opportunities offered by our democracy.

The young people of today face many challenges. These range from poverty, unemployment, drugs and substance abuse, the scourge of HIV/AIDS and lack of skills.

Government has sought in partnership with various organisations of civil society to provide a comprehensive response aimed at empowering young people to grapple with the complexities of today and lay a basis for a further advance as we move into the future.

This response has, amongst others, the following key elements:-

- Establishment of youth units to assist co-ordinate youth services;
- Establishment of the youth forum to assist deepen democracy and ongoing engagement with government and other stakeholders;
- Use Council facilities as Youth Empowerment Zones with a focus on job creation, skills development and poverty alleviation;
- Implementing sustainable learnership programmes;
- Pest control through the Environmental Portfolio presently focussing on a campaign to end rodents;
- Craft development which will include Art Bank purchases of work of 190 young people, 80% of these are emerging artists; and
- Utilising 2010 FIFA World Cup as an opportunity to empower young people.

Some may look back at 1976 with a tinge of sadness and a sense of loss. But we also look forward to a future that holds great promise.

Our memories of the heroes and heroines of June 16 will remain embedded in our hearts and minds. June 16 will be celebrated as the day, which changed the course of history in South Africa by propelling our struggle for freedom to new heights.

Let us work together to empower our youth. History demands it.

Thank you

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