
**WELCOME SPEECH BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF FREEDOM PARK, MR
FANA JIYANE, ON THE OCCASION EMANCIPATING THE AFRICAN VOICE: PAC/APLA
MILITARY VETERANS SEMINAR CO-HOSTED WITH THE HUMAN SCIENCES
RESEARCH COUNCIL ON 25 APRIL 2012**

Distinguished guests

All military veterans present

Dear colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen.

Let me express on behalf of Freedom Park, my warm word of welcome and gratitude for attending this seminar. As you may have read from your invitation cards, this seminar is co-hosted by Freedom Park in collaboration with the Human Science Research Council on their seminar series titled: *“Contributions, Experiences & Sacrifices: Post-liberation knowledge production and nation building by military veterans.”* Other partners include the Department of Social Development, the Departments of Military Veterans, Science & Technology; and the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation. This seminar builds upon the African Knowledge Producers Series hosted by the HSRC since 2008 and supported by the Department of Science and Technology in which, a very successful inaugural conference entitled “Professor Bernard M. Magubane at 80: Celebrations of Life” was hosted in 2010, for which Freedom Park was one of the partners.

This collaboration is very important for Freedom Park; as it represents our commitment to work together with the HSRC in recognising the contributions made by heroes and heroines in the struggle for freedom as well as in deepening the debate on the politics of knowledge production, particularly in recording the past and exposing the silences on

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alternative narratives of history, politics and society. The general perception is that military veterans or 'ex-combatants' in general, from all races and from differing political ideologies, have not been well integrated into mainstream society. Although attempts have been made by the democratic government to meet their socio-economic challenges, through for example the Military veterans Bill of 2011, their social needs remain unfulfilled, with no appropriate service given to them towards mainstreaming in post liberation period. Most importantly, their experiences are generally not known by the public. These challenges are potential risks to building an inclusive and cohesive society, which the country committed itself to post 1994.

As part of celebrating the 18th year of freedom in South Africa, this seminar is in recognition of the contributions of the vast number of heroes and heroines that fought from grassroots levels for our democracy. We have thus deliberately decided this freedom month, to pay tribute to the contributions made by the Pan Africanist Congress towards South Africa's liberation from apartheid through its armed wing APLA. Our understanding is that since 1994, the PAC/ APLA has not been sufficiently celebrated in SA, or even accorded the recognition it deserves in bringing about the freedom we currently enjoy.

From the point of view of Freedom Park, the focus of this seminar is in line with carrying our mandate: to emancipate the African voice and foster sustainable reconciliation, social cohesion and nation building; restorative justice, healing and rehabilitation for all Africans. Our driving principle is to ensure reconciliation among all peoples of this country, and provide healing from the divisions of the past, as a catalyst to nation building. Reconciliation at Freedom Park is a unique process that must be preceded by identifying the truth about any divisive element such as conflict, trauma and pain and then seeks ways of bringing closure to them. It is only after the truth has been acknowledged, that the redress process can be entered into.

This seminar, therefore, offers a platform for engaging and learning from our hidden history, forgotten contributions, experiences and sacrifices made by the veterans themselves. This is an effective method from which to communicate unrecorded experiences as well as presenting the truth about the history of the struggle and resistance

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in South Africa. In the end, we hope that this seminar will contribute to the reintegration of military veterans into mainstream society by fostering a sense of unity, security and belonging amongst them and with mainstream society.

I am aware that many people believe that Freedom Park is an ANC project, and therefore think we are biased towards honouring members of the ANC. I want to correct this misconception by assuring you that Freedom Park is an inclusive organization that seeks to unite all the diverse people of South Africa irrespective of race, colour or political affiliation. As a demonstration of our commitment to the principle of inclusivity, we have honored in our Gallery of Leaders, the contributions made by Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, who in 1959 formed the PAC. His name is among other prominent leaders who participated in the formation phase of the liberation struggle. We acknowledge the fact that it was because of his commitment to the struggle that he led the widespread anti-pass demonstration that occurred on 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville, that left 69 people dead and about 200 wounded. The 69 freedom fighters who fell on that day are honored at Freedom Park, and inscribed on the Wall of Names alongside other heroes and heroines in the struggle for freedom.

The PAC's military wing, Poqo, which was launched in 1961 in response to the Sharpeville massacre and arrests of its leaders, was one of the first black organisations in South Africa to resort to armed struggle in fighting subjugation by white minority. Although poqo was a crude formation; seen to symbolize the most threatening and brutal form of black revolt, its activities were deemed by the party not only necessary but critical in overthrowing the oppressive system of apartheid. But we cannot forget that at the time the PAC and Poqo members were operating and rounded up by the police, the same was happening to members of the military wing of the ANC: MK, whose activities were followed by several bomb attacks on government installations.

The political unrest spearheaded by the veterans reached its peak when poqo members planned a nationwide mass uprising for April 8, 1963 which was averted when thousands of PAC/ poqo members as well as ANC members throughout the country were subjected to several trials and subsequent arrests and imprisonment on Robben Island. Many were

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sentenced to death and hanged. Once again, at Freedom Park, we have honoured more than 100 names of these stalwarts of the struggle by inscribing their names on the Wall of Names, alongside other heroes and heroines who paid the ultimate price under the category “Political executions”.

Because our intention is to contribute to knowledge production, the approach taken in this seminar is to honour Mxolisi Mgxashe and his book entitled “*Are you with us? The story of a PAC activist*”. We believe that Mr Mgxashe has a story to tell, specifically based on his/her experiences and sacrifices as a member of APLA. We hope that his contributions to the struggle will be identified with by many and hopefully pave way for other military veterans to share their experiences in the quest to emancipate the African voice. In this regard, this seminar will serve as a reminder of the forgotten contributions made by the PAC military wing towards National liberation, which will also contribute to their reintegration into mainstream society.

As we deliberate on these important but sensitive issues, let us experience the freedom we fought so hard for, and feel free to share our experiences. Let us take this as an important step towards not only setting the record straight, but healing, reconciliation, social cohesion and nation building. With these few words, I declare this meeting open!

Thank you.

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