

Session on Takalani Community Radio Station

Mayoral Lecture on Freedom day: 26/04/2013

Freedom Day is an annual celebration of South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections of 1994. Peace, unity, the preservation and the restoration of human dignity hallmarks Freedom Day celebrations on the 27th of April of each year.

The road to democracy was a long and difficult one. Since the arrival of the White man at the Cape in 1652, the indigenous peoples of South Africa came under White control and domination. Soon all peoples of colour were denied the vote and hence a say in the running of the country. South Africa was never truly independent nor democratic. The exclusion of the majority of South Africans from political power was at the centre of the liberation struggle and resistance to white minority rule. Despite much opposition to White rule to halt white encroachment on black land in South Africa, blacks were systematically herded into restricted areas and homelands and their rights to equal opportunity denied; With the formation of the South African Native National Congress (which later became the African National Congress (ANC)) in 1912, the resistance movement became formalised. The ANC strived to improve the conditions of the blacks. Its task became more difficult after the Nationalist Party victory of 1948 - when the grand machinery of Apartheid was put into motion and became law. Each race was given different privileges, some more and others less.

Nevertheless, the ANC and its allies continued to seek the freedom of all its peoples and continued to challenge the unjust apartheid laws. When The Congress of the People (held in Kliptown in 1955), adopted the Freedom Charter, the blue-print for a democratic South Africa was laid. The Charter affirmed 'that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no Government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people'. In 1961 South Africa became a Republic and the 31st of May was declared a national holiday (Republic Day) by the National Party, yet it was never celebrated by all South Africans. The Umkonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC was formed during this period as a means of armed resistance. Many of the leaders were banned, imprisoned and tortured. After 1976 the liberation struggle gained momentum. The Soweto Uprising of 1976 saw increased militancy. Trade Union movements started to revive and assert the rights of workers. Hundreds of residents' associations, sports, student, women's and religious organisations joined the resistance struggle. The Church could no longer stand by silently and added its voice to the liberation struggle.

In 1984, the Government introduced the Tri-cameral parliament, giving Coloureds and Indians the right to vote. The Blacks, who were in the majority, were excluded from this formula. The United Democratic Front (UDF), launched in 1983, brought over 600 organisations together to demand the scrapping of the Tri-cameral parliament. In 1985 the Government declared a State of Emergency in an attempt to suppress the freedom movement.

By 1988 a stalemate had been reached. The Government began looking for a way out and as a result started negotiations with the ANC leadership. The ANC, South African Communist Party (SACP), Pan African Congress (PAC) and other organisations were unbanned on 2 February

1990. A non-racial constitution was eventually agreed upon and adopted in 1993. The new Constitution came into effect on 27 April 1994, the day the nation cast its vote in the first democratic election in the country. The ANC was voted into power and Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the President of South Africa on 10 May.

The celebration of Freedom Day is no ordinary celebration. It is a day when all of us need to pause and reflect on the past, to remember the heroes and heroines who brought us our freedom, those whose sacrifices made it possible for all South Africans, black and white, to enjoy the benefits of democracy and for all of us to prosper in conditions of peace and stability. As we are about to celebrate this important day we need to ask ourselves whether we are today using all opportunities brought by freedom and democracy to prepare a better tomorrow. Again during this month of April we are commemorating the brutal death of our own leader Inkosi Bambatha KaMancinza Zondi who led the Bambatha Rebellion against poll tax many years ago and through his actions inspired many patriots to sacrifice for the freedom we are enjoying today.