



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Eulogy by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the official funeral of Isithwalandwe
Seaparankoe Andrew Mokete Mlangeni**

29 July 2020

The Mlangeni Family,
Former President Thabo Mbeki,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Chairperson of the June and Andrew Mlangeni Foundation, Deputy Minister
Hlengiwe Mkhize,
Representative of the Premier of Gauteng, MEC Panyaza Lesufi,
Mayor of Johannesburg, Mr Geoffrey Makhubo,
Treasurer-General of the African National Congress, Mr Paul Mashatile,
Leadership of the African National Congress,
General Shoke and the leadership of the Military Command,
Relatives and friends,
Fellow Mourners,

It is with heavy hearts that we gather here this morning to bid farewell to our dear father, leader and comrade Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe Andrew Mokete Mlangeni.

As we gather here, we are consumed with grief as we mourn the passing of an icon of our struggle.

Yet we are also here to celebrate a hero of our struggle for freedom and democracy.

In the many profound tributes that have been delivered over the past week, the overriding sentiment has been that his passing marks the end of an era.

It was an era of tireless struggle, of sacrifice and service, of honour and integrity.

It was an era of leaders who embodied the best in humanity.

Andrew Mlangeni was among the very first recruits of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

And of course, he was the last surviving Rivonia trialist.

He was also the last to testify at the Rivonia Trial.

He was given the gift of time that his fellow Rivonia trialists were not.

But he was also one of the last of an extraordinary generation of freedom fighters.

The black, green and gold colours of the African National Congress flowed through the veins of our departed leader.

He served his movement and his country loyally over seven decades.

The struggle was his life – and freedom is his legacy.

He was a product of the golden age of our struggle, when sacrifice and commitment to freedom were the only considerations that motivated leaders to be involved in the struggle.

He belonged to an era when leaders were even prepared to die for the struggle for freedom.

It was just a few weeks ago that we laid to rest his dear friend and comrade, Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe Denis Goldberg.

To lose them both in such quick succession is indeed a blow.

The great cohort to which they belonged is now in full complement in the celestial realm.

They join their comrades, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Walter Sisulu, Albertina Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and many others.

We are sad to have lost our father, but we are grateful as a nation for God's providence in enabling Ntate Mlangeni to make old bones, as they say.

We are reminded in the scriptures that grey hair is a crown of splendour and is attained in the way of righteousness.

The Mlangeni family deeply mourns their father who was 'the pillar of the family', as his son Sello reminded us last week.

The family, like those of other prisoners, suffered immensely during his 26-year imprisonment.

The spirit of resilience saw the Mlangeni family through much more pain than most of us will ever know.

But through the faithfulness and support of his wife, the late Mme June Mlangeni, he led his family from inside and outside prison, instilling in them courage and conviction.

In paying tribute to him this day, we also pay tribute to Mme Mlangeni and to the family for their sacrifices.

We pay tribute to Mme Mlangeni for her activism and leadership.

It was she who was instrumental in mobilising women in and around Dube to participate in the 1955 women's protest in the streets of downtown Johannesburg and in the famous 1956 anti-pass march to the Union Buildings.

It was she who endured police harassment and was placed under house arrest several times over the period of her husband's imprisonment.

As this remarkable couple belonged together in life, so shall they forever remain together in our remembrance of them.

While history will place Andrew Mlangeni in the pantheon of the great leaders of our nation, he will be remembered by his people as a person of humility, humanity and dignity.

He will be remembered for his kindness, his boundless optimism and for his mischievous humour.

There was no task that Bab' Mlangeni would not undertake in the service of the struggle and no responsibility that he would evade.

As an activist in the Young Communist League, as Chairperson of the ANC Dube branch and later Secretary for the Soweto region, he was known as someone who sought to build unity and consensus.

He was known as someone who would draw others into the fold through engagement and persuasion.

In prison, he made up for the opportunity he lacked outside and acquired two university degrees.

He served our democratic Parliament with dedication.

In the committees in which he both served and led, he did so with diligence and wisdom.

He pursued the building of a new, united nation with the same fervour and conviction that led him to join the armed struggle, to risk torture and death and to place his life in the hands of the people.

Just as he fought to end that crime against humanity, so too would he take up the fight against the inequality and poverty that continues to deny so many of our people so much of their humanity.

In his statement during the Rivonia Trial, he said:

“South Africa, my Lord, is a very rich country. [T]he resources could be exploited for the benefit of all who live in it. This government and the previous governments have exploited not the earth but the people of various racial groups whose colour is not white.”

Until he drew his last breath, it was his firm and unwavering determination to ensure that the plentiful resources of our country would be used for the benefit of all its people.

It was his firm and unwavering determination that no person should claim dominion over another, that no woman should be subordinate to any man and that no child should fear abuse or hunger or discrimination.

To the last, he fought for a society founded on the principles of equality and solidarity.

We have lost not only a great patriot, but a strident moral voice.

Andrew Mlangeni was never afraid to confront the vices that can too easily engulf a nation emerging from a broken past.

Just as he dedicated his life to ending the corruption of the human soul that apartheid typified, so too would he speak out against the avarice that threatened to erode our hard-won democracy.

Always faithful to the principles of his movement, the African National Congress, always true to its revolutionary discipline, he understood his responsibility to challenge the abuse of power and the plunder of resources.

He understood his responsibility to remind us of the solemn commitment we have made to future generations and would not hesitate to tell us when we fell short or when we faltered.

He could not be cowed and he would not be silenced.

When the NEC asked him to lead the Integrity Commission, it saw in him a leader who was the repository of the ethical leadership of the ANC.

He took that position because he believed that leaders of the ANC should represent the best of ethical behaviour and should know that our people expect that they should always be judged by a higher standard of ethical behaviour.

And so, if his passing does indeed mark the end of an era, we must ask of ourselves the question: what now?

What shall define this new era, our era?

Will it be an era of adherence to the values of his glorious movement?

Will it be an age of increasing prosperity and security for all?

Will it represent the realisation of the dream of the Freedom Charter, of a country that truly belongs to all who live in it, black and white?

Will it witness the emergence of a new generation of young leaders – women and men of extraordinary talent, integrity and resolve who dedicate their lives to the service of humanity?

This is a question to which all of us who gathered here – whether in person or virtually or in spirit – hold the answer.

It is through our actions that we will define this new era.

It is through the principles that we observe, the values that we hold dear and through the responsibilities that we each take upon ourselves that we will forge a new society.

So let us draw guidance and inspiration from the lives of Andrew Mlangeni and the great leaders of his age.

Let us honour their courage and their sacrifices by being conscientious in our conduct and honourable in our intentions.

As they did, let us place the needs and interests of our people at the centre of our every policy, our every strategy, our every decision, our every act.

We bid farewell to Bab' Mlangeni at a time of great peril for our country and our world.

A virus is sweeping the globe, causing widespread disruption and destruction.

COVID-19 has cost many lives and, before it runs its course, it will take many more.

It has cast into sharp focus the deep divisions within our societies, exposing the many ways in which inequality and injustice manifest themselves.

The coronavirus pandemic has not rendered the fight against poverty and unemployment any less urgent.

If anything, it has revealed how important the fundamental transformation of our economy and our society is for human health and well-being.

This pandemic must provoke us to action, it must heighten our ambition and deepen our resolve.

It is nearly 60 years since Andrew Mlangeni and his comrades made a bold and audacious statement to the world.

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.”

These words may belong to another era, but their significance resonates across the decades.

We are once again faced with a choice, to submit or to fight.

Let us declare here in honour and in memory of Andrew Mlangeni that we will not submit.

We will not submit to coronavirus. We will defeat it.

We will not submit to poverty and inequality.

We will not submit to corruption and greed, to mismanagement and complacency.

We will not submit to gender-based violence and femicide.

We will not submit to the destruction of our planet, to the neglect of our children.

We will not submit to despair or despondency or cynicism.

We have no choice but to fight.

To fight for equality and justice, for water and electricity and food in every home, for land to farm and factories to run, for quality health care, for decent education, for peace and safety.

We have to fight for honest, committed and capable leaders, for democratic institutions that are strong and durable, for equality between men and women, for the rule of law and the realisation of equal rights for all.

For it is then, when we are engaged in this struggle, that we will pay to our beloved father, leader, friend and comrade the greatest and most enduring tribute.

Andrew Mokete Mlangeni has departed this world, but his legacy, his values and his struggle live on in each of us.

His commitment goes beyond what was expected of him as an ANC member and his memory will be deeply embedded in the hearts of many South Africans for a long time to come.

He will be missed but what he stood for will not be forgotten

It is now our solemn responsibility to strive together, sparing neither courage nor strength, to build the glorious future to which he dedicated his life.

Baba Mlangeni has gone home now, guided by a commitment to freedom and by the lives of those that preceded him.

May his soul rest in peace!

I thank you.