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**ADDRESS AT A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR ERIC MOLOBI
LINDER AUDITORIUM, JOHANNESBURG
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TREVOR A MANUEL, MP MINISTER OF FINANCE

*It is love for mankind's better future,
Desire that we may all be better,
That our mistakes be higher ones and
That the lowest level in living conditions be
At least one which is adequate;
It is love that drives the seed into becoming the future tree;
It is love that makes people extend their hands across seas,
Across race, across creeds,
Forging links that make the human dream grow into splendid
human realities;
It is love that drives the mother to protect the child against suffering;
It is love that makes the writer weep when a bloodtide announces itself
just over the horizon
Ben Okri*

Ben Okri, in writing these words, could be describing the life of our Comrade Eric. Eric Molobi gave of himself fully – to serve, guide, protect and lead without asking for anything in return.

When he was arrested, detained, tortured and imprisoned in 1974 it was for that vision which Okri describes as *“that the lowest level of living conditions be at least one that is adequate”*. But by his activism happening as early, when the risks were so much greater, was about the *“love that drives the seed into becoming the future tree”*, and this month we will celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of a great tree planted in Soweto – and we will know that the ground was prepared by Eric.

Eric’s love and engagement was never distant and aloof in relation to anybody. In the first chat we had in the eighties, and in every discussion since, to the last one a few months ago, he addressed me simply as “Broer”. He used the term not as a fashion statement, but as a form of address so wonderfully warm, so full of respect and with so much dignity. Eric used the term “Broer” to extend his dreams, to help those dreams grow, through the agency of those whom he trusted and cared for – and there are so many of us, Eric’s ‘broers’ in whom he identified an extension of himself.

That forging of links was the story of Eric’s life. I have not observed his business contacts at close quarters – but I can imagine that those business persons whom he engaged with closely – people who came from different backgrounds – Ernst Kahle, Bill Lynch, Johan Rupert, Peter Doyle and so many others would also have been touched by his greatness, warmth and clarity – no need for secrets or duplicity. Eric’s intentions were clear, *“love for mankind’s better future, desire that we may all be better.”* This was articulated in strong contradistinction to those who would say – “what’s in it for me.”

Notwithstanding the harshness of the torture that he’d been through, (this was not the stuff you spoke about), he was prepared to take responsibility again after his release. History would not wait, the seed was also growing into a tree and young trees need to be nurtured, that was Eric’s calling and that was his continuous act of love. So when the idea of the UDF had come, it required ideas,

experience and passion, Eric was there and ready. When the struggle shifted intensively to education, and the NECC cried out for leadership, Eric was there and ready – regardless of the depth of risk. Many of us will recall the NECC meeting at Easter of 1986 in Durban, where we watched Eric’s car set alight from the windows of the Moon Hotel, where we were staying, when we watched the armed attack on us, when decisions were taken that the conference had to proceed and that the delegates had to be protected. When we were literally under fire, we saw and felt the quality of Eric’s leadership.

The establishment of the partnership between Kagiso Trust and the European Union was probably not designed by either party to have such detail or longevity. The fact that Eric had the trust of the initiators like Oom Bey and the counterparties in Brussels, because not trusting Eric was an exceptionally difficult thing; this trust allowed for the partnership and the rise of KTI to ensure the sustainability of plough-back into communities. This transition was one that required, beyond the necessary trust, an enormous amount of vision, and Eric possessed this in such vast quantities.

Despite the environment that he worked in, and the people that he rubbed shoulders with, Eric’s remarkable strength was his internalisation of the values that had guided every action through his adult life. The “love that makes the writer weep when a bloodtide announces itself just over the horizon” was in evidence when he recently explained some of his concerns about what is going wrong with Black Economic Empowerment. He related an incident to me about a particular individual – he explained that when he visited this entrepreneur, he was taken to the garage before being taken into the house – for in the garage was the pride and joy of the owner – “Just over three million Rand’s worth of motor cars”; Eric’s horror continued when he saw this same person in Soweto on two occasions on the same day driving different luxury cars. Eric’s concern was about what we demonstrate to the youth, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, if all we struggled for was for such conspicuous consumption. With the

keen mind of the accountant he added that this guy could not be very smart to invest so much in an asset that depreciated so rapidly. To boot, he said, the person, whom he described very colourfully, never even lifted a finger in the struggle, but was now appropriating all its fruits.

Values, principles and service – the three attributes that made Eric the great friend and comrade were attributes that he had in great abundance.

But there's the other private side of his life – his deep love and partnership with Martha, Lele and Tiisetso – this was the area of no compromise, and this was the foundation of Eric's remarkable strength.

Thank you.

In his passing, we have lost the best of what defines us – go well, broer, you have been a great teacher, leader and friend. You have served life and the movement so well because you loved us all so deeply.