



**MINISTRY: FINANCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**ADDRESS AT THE FUNERAL OF PERCY SONN
ST GEORGES CATHEDRAL, CAPE TOWN
02 JUNE 2007**

TREVOR A MANUEL, MP, MINISTER OF FINANCE

Sandra, Leigh, Hugh Ben and Freddi
Mrs Sonn Senior,
All Percy's Siblings
Family
Friends

I stand here, on behalf the South African Government to extend our sincerest condolences to the family and to pay tribute to a life so rich, which was taken from us so soon.

Percy was a pioneer. Throughout his adult life, he demonstrated the courage and fortitude to go where none had been before. It was his willpower and frequently his singleness of purpose that separated Percy from the rest of us. He never left any doubts about what he sought to achieve, and no part of his agenda was ever hidden from view. He never minced his words – unflinchingly telling you what was on his mind.

Percy lived every part of his life in the quest for justice – wherever he found himself – as a lawyer, a jurist, an investigator, a sports administrator or a friend, this quest was tireless. And in that quest, he understood, better than most that it would not be attained by merely masquerading as Mister Nice Guy.

As though if writing about the life of Percy Sonn, The Nigerian novelist, Ben Okri, writes

Before we can create a new world we must first unearth and destroy the myths and realities, the lies and propaganda which have been used to oppress, enslave, incarcerate, gas, torture and starve human beings of this planet. Facing the lies of history is a basic human responsibility. It is unpleasant to do, but liberating to accomplish. It liberates all of us.

So, let us today, celebrate our liberation. But, in that celebration, let us reflect on the life of Percy – one of those rare people who understood history and understood his own responsibility as an unearther and destroyer of the myths and realities, and the lies and propaganda – and he recognised more than any that it was simultaneously an unpleasant but liberating task. Such have been the contradictions of Percy's entire adult life.

The world around Percy was divided into two groups – a small minority whose comfort zone, frequently built on falsehood and denial who couldn't deal with his blunt exposures of their superficiality. And, on the other hand, a large majority like those of us gathered here who loved and respected Percy for his courage, commitment and refreshing honesty.

One can examine the different parts of his life – as I can over the thirty-odd years that I have known him – and you cannot but be struck by the consistency of the Percy you loved. What you saw, was what you got.

My first encounters with Percy, was after I had heard many stories of Percy the legend. It was in the mid-seventies when I observed him operating as an attorney in the Woodstock practice. My observations were from the vantage point of a friend, rather than as a client. His clients were able to benefit from his fierce loyalty to each one of

them, from his commitment to their cause and from Percy's palpable desire for justice. Having had the privilege of watching him in different guises over the years, and reading of the tribute paid to Percy this week by Inzamam ul Haq, which focused largely on his approach to the recent debacle at Lords, I was convinced that Inzy and I knew the same Percy and appreciated his quest for justice.

Regardless of his rigours of his day job, there were two big passions to which he would retreat – the one was Sandra and the children. and the other was cricket. There are many others present, far more competent than I to speak about either of these.

Permit me, though, a few brief comments.

Sandra and the children were Percy's first and deep love and his refuge – sometimes from the storms out there and always for the replenishment of energy. “ Bok en die laaities” were the foundation on which Percy built and they were a source of immense pride to him, and everybody who met him knew this. In paying respects and celebrating Percy's remarkable life here, I want to express our sincerest appreciation to Sandra, Leigh, Hugh Ben and Freddi. Because of your sharing and sacrifice, we can celebrate this liberation together.

On cricket, that remarkable writer L R James, teases an enquiry with the question, “What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?” And Percy's answer to that question was provided in the depth of his commitment to the players, their well-being, to the communities that spawned them, to their dreams and prospects, and to the soundest administration of the game. In this country, it was the work of transformation, “far beyond a boundary”. It is an area that those who opposed transformation, or who proffered schemes for window-dressing, will be able to write volumes about – they would have encountered the wrath of Advocate Sonn. And in the wider world of cricket, it was the bridge between different parts of the cricketing nations – for justice and in the interest of the game.

The poet, Pablo Neruda writes, of a man like Percy

Where he lived, everything

A man touched would grow;

*The hostile stones,
hewn
by his hands,
took shape and form
and one by one took on
the sharp clarity of buildings,
he made bread with his hands,
set the trains running,
the distances bred townships,
other men grew up,
the bees arrives,
and through man's creating and multiplying,
spring wandered into the marketplace
between the doves and the bakeries.*

Go well dear comrade, may your dear soul rest in peace.
Thank you very much for the life we will always remember.