



MINISTRY: FINANCE
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TRIBUTE TO COMRADE YUNUS MOHAMED
MEMORIAL MEETING, JOHANNESBURG, 16 JANUARY 2008

TREVOR MANUEL, MP; MINISTER OF FINANCE

Justice Azhar Cachalia

Justice Dhaya Pillay

Parents and Siblings of our late Comrade and brother, Yunus

Comrades and Friends

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you in the shock and grief of the loss of Comrade YM. It is a privilege accorded me, in the same way as history accorded me the privilege of working with and learning from Yunus over a number of decades.

As we age, we appreciate beauty differently. Great works, such as finely woven rugs respond so wonderfully to the eye, and to touch. We could be forgiven for thinking that the beauty emanates from the bits of yarn tied together, when in fact

we ought to appreciate that it is the weft and warp, the undercarriage of the rug if you wish, that gives it form, depth and shape. Revolutions are no different, all revolutions need the brightly-plumed, charismatic, rabble rousers – but if that were all, you would only have episodically roused rabble. Revolutions need the undercarriage of thinkers, planners and persuaders. It was to this grouping that YM so obviously belonged. My experience of him was of a persuader – not because he feared, on the contrary by the time we first met he had already tasted solitary confinement, but because he was so focused on success. Yunus was one of those who gave our struggle form, depth, shape and style!

We were a part of a collective of people who were young, inexperienced and fearless. There we were, a group of 30 year olds, with Yunus as our senior at the ripe old age of 33, launching the UDF. I really wouldn't trust the youth with so big a task, but our elders did. We had all of the experience of student organisations and the odd civic campaigns, and we were ready. In this context, the role of people like YM included holding some of our wildness in check, and maintaining the momentum on course. None of this could be attained without taking the most unimaginable, but calculated risks – a revolution without risk is no revolution, and mistakes were inevitable. No sooner had we launched this fantastic movement, that we almost blew it completely four months later on a crazy debate about “flexibility of tactics” – I told you that those were crazy times. The issue should be less about what almost split the UDF than on how we were able to unite in the face of such self-imposed adversity. The reason that we were

able to pull through was that our lives depended on each other – we all faced enormous personal risks – banning, detention, torture, banishment and exile were the lighter side of those risks – so we needed each other, we needed trust and we understood the meaning of comradeship. That ability to put your entire life in the hands of another person with whom you shared a belief system, that environment that was devoid of personal glory, where patronage was absent, corruption punishable and squealing unthinkable – that was the furnace in which we were shaped. It was in that furnace that the calm rationality of Yunus won through, allowing us to win back ground and to advance towards our goal.

Yunus was one of a number of activists at the time that emphasised the value of grassroots organising. Honed in the civic movements, mainly in and around Durban and in Cape Town in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Yunus and many other activists mastered the art of door to door work; visiting the homes of people to present the views of the movement and building grassroots organisations. Yunus was a member of the ANC underground, yet spent much of his political life doing mass-based political work. It is this type of approach to struggle, to put people first; to take the masses along in our campaigns; to argue, persuade, cajole, convince the masses to become part of the struggle rather than passive bystanders...that YM will be remembered for. And he did this with the utmost humility.

So as we mourn the passing of so great a comrade and friend, we should pause and consider the source of his greatness. Yunus was driven by his beliefs in a world that should be different, where we can and must make that difference. Yunus would share the view that the struggle is not over and that we cannot conflate the struggle for a better life for all with our personal changed circumstances – fancy titles, big cars, more affluent suburbs and larger salaries – notwithstanding all of this, the struggle continues. The most fitting tribute we could pay to YM's life is to commit to recapturing the ground lost in the values that he has struggled for – respect and dignity for all, the highest ethical standards by the holders of office, non-racialism and non-sexism. Aluta continua!