

**ADDRESS TO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UDF
ROCKLANDS CIVIC CENTRE, MITCHELLS PLAIN
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Comrades and Friends

Firstly, let me thank each one of you for joining us today. The 25th anniversary of the great movement, the UDF, gives us an opportunity to reflect on our own lives over the 25 years – and yes, to recall the many contributions of so many of our people, the willingness to take on assignments we were sometimes ill-equipped for, and to remember those who sadly are no longer with us. But, perhaps more importantly, it is a day for reflection – we cannot live in the past or live off past glories – we must take joint responsibility for the future. That is the responsibility and the challenge of leadership. That is the calling for both correction and the continuity of sacrifice. That is the task of this day, 25 years after the launch of the UDF.

When we stood here 25 years ago, there were so many things we didn't know. We had no clear idea of what the structure of the UDF would be and how decisions would be made – whether they were needed for regional, provincial or national activities. In this hall 25 years ago, we were blown away by the 15 000 who gathered here and the hundreds of thousands more who they represented from every corner of South Africa. We were overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of support; we were quite convinced that we had read the cracks in the apartheid armour correctly, we stood before our people quite unclear still of how we would mobilise in detail. But we understood and were clear about our common goal and we had each other to rely on.

When we stood here we had no detailed binding ideology...But there were some things that we could be tested on. These were

- Our unshakable belief in a democracy to be delivered;
- An unequivocal belief in the creation of a non-racial unitary state in South Africa undiluted by racial or ethnic considerations as formulated in the Bantustan policy;
- An adherence to the need for unity in struggle through which all democrats regardless of race, religion or culture had to take part in;

- A recognition of the necessity to work in consultation with, and reflect accurately the demands of democratic people wherever they would find themselves, whether in unions, community, religious or student organisations. This would resonate in all the campaigns we embarked on.

This was key to what brought us together before 20th August – these were our guiding principles. We also knew that most of those who gathered were “Charterists” – but we had no way of expressing our support for the organisation banned in 1960. And so we agreed that the UDF would not purport to be a substitute for the liberation movement. Everybody knew what that meant. The UDF was the vehicle that gave us sufficient cover for nobody to have to admit to being part of a banned organisation. What’s more, the ANC in prison and in exile knew the same.

This fact is neither insignificant nor incidental. We were armed with an unbreakable trust in each other – the trust had a name – “comradeship”. It allowed us to believe in each other and know that our backs would always be covered by those whom we called “comrade”. Beyond that fundamental trust in each other, we were armed with self-belief – the path we were pursuing had never been walked. We took responsibility for the lives of all of our people, especially those who had yet to be committed to mass-based organisation. The historic mantle that fell on us was to take forward – not the struggles of the 80’s, or the 70’s, or even the 60’s – we had to reconnect with the mass-based struggles led by the ANC in the 1950’s – we knew the details of the Alexander Bus Boycott; the Potato Boycott; the Defiance Campaign; the Campaign for the Congress of the People and the 1956 Women’s March. We knew dates, places, events and the personalities involved in each campaign. We needed this detail because advancing those struggles were the mantle of responsibility we had to assume. And there was little room for error. If this was the responsibility of history, then we quickly had to work out who to trust – we could only trust each other. We also knew that we could neither trust, nor rely on the state for anything. This was the real awakening, the genuine Vukuzenzele. This was self-reliance as never seen before. The state was the enemy – its interests were diametrically opposed to ours; its agents would try to divide us, its police would torture us. Against it we needed victories to mobilise increasing numbers of our people.

We knew that the world was a difficult place – the major powers were led by Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of the UK, who labelled Madiba a “terrorist” and Ronald Reagan as President of the USA. We understood that even these world leaders would find it difficult to openly support the Botha regime against the seething mass of humanity that the UDF was to become and the international support garnered by the ANC. They were distinctly not our friends, they just could not be seen to support brutality against us. We took our chances, because we had each other as the only reliable allies.

Because we only had each other, we learnt to respect one another and the different roles each and every one of us had to play in the fight for freedom. Never, would anybody say or do anything hurtful against another - a comrade. It was this, more than any ideology or strategy and tactics, that took the UDF into every nook and cranny of the vast country. And, it was this demonstrable comradeship that became the magnet for the unorganised to join with us. Our mobilising ability everywhere, especially here in the Western Cape, was without precedent. We could sing “Die Mammies, Die Pappies, die hondjies, die katjies ; is saam in die struggle.” We could sing this because we knew it to be true.

But, this 25th anniversary cannot be about hankering after the ‘glory days’. It is about reflection and it is about planning. So, we should acknowledge to ourselves that we have never reached those heights of mobilised and ready communities. This should be something we must aspire to.

Then came the exhilarating days of the 1994 elections. The call from Rocklands Civic Centre eleven years earlier – “We want ALL our rights, we want them HERE and we want them NOW” came to pass. Perhaps the “NOW” aspect was somewhat delayed. In the preceding decade there were too many prison nights, too many broken bodies and too many funerals of comrades. But we secured what we set out to do. It was OUR victory, it was OUR democracy, these were OUR institutions. We knew that what we didn’t secure at the barricades, we won in the negotiations – frequently these victories secured only because of the force of the seething mass of humanity that was the UDF.

Then we sat back and allowed ourselves to be paralysed. That fundamental driving force of the power of organised communities, the force that carried history appeared to be

replaced by the organs of state. We should have known that the state could only be a supplement, that it could not replace the organised formations of our people. But, we erred in giving up our real power. So organisations began to wither away.

Our means, the street committees and the civics were replaced with a false belief that elected councils were sufficient, and that the legislation calling for participatory democracy would be adequate. Similarly, in the UDF we had organised formations of teachers who would meet after school, and over weekends to develop the curricula for the national democratic revolution – these initiatives were thrown overboard. We allowed our teachers to argue for as little teaching time as they could get away with. The nurses and doctors who would staff clinics and hospitals whenever the people needed them – even if it was only to treat the victims of bullet wounds, appeared unwilling to do this any longer. In general, the public servants who were our mainstay for transformation, the people's professionals, those who found themselves employed by an enemy employer, suddenly their passion dried up. Our ability to deliver a deep and durable democracy focussed on improving the living standards will never be attained without the commitment of our public servants in the key social services of education, health and welfare. Similarly, we cannot secure the lives of our people in the absence of a radically transformed police service where every policeman or woman is also a developmental agent. We must now realise that the dream of a developmental state cannot ever be attained merely by parliament – we need public servants as the agents for transformation. We have the laws – for school and clinic governance and for community police forums. We have a law that requires participatory local government. But laws alone are insufficient. We must get the institutions of the people to work. We must change the relationship between the state and public servants from one shaped by industrial relations to one where the measure is transformation for development.

This is the message from the ANC's 52nd National conference in Polokwane last year. It is a message amplified by the January 8th statement this year. In that Statement we said, "Our teachers must commit to a set of non-negotiables – to be in school, in class, on time, teaching, no abuse of learners and no neglect of duty." Exactly the same message should go out to all public servants – in national, provincial and local government, without slacking or deviations.

We have the power – we won that at the ballot box in 1994, 1999 and in 2004. And we will again secure it in 2009. But it will mean less if we fail to recognise that the power of the ballot box needs to be supported by the means of organised communities acting with government. Our power will mean nothing if we fail to reignite the self-belief in our people.

Those among us who have lived through these tumultuous 25 years in history must understand a few issues. We must carefully draw on our own experiences and plan ahead.

Firstly, the UDF lit the fires of self-belief, of action and of revolution in the hearts of millions of our people who otherwise may not have given such an organisation a second thought – and we must understand that the fires we lit are not burning as brightly as they should. Our responsibility for engagement in the lives of our people has to continue. We must recognise this reality and understand that we simply cannot walk away.

Secondly, we must never allow ourselves to forget that revolutions are continuous. The bulk of what we started remains incomplete, and that is the problem. *Aluta continua*

Thirdly, we must know that revolutions are collective acts of sacrifice and commitment. Revolutionary flames are extinguished by self-serving individuals and greed. We must know this and stop the hatred, bullying and personal enrichment.

Fourthly, it is abusive to think, even for a moment that the lives of millions of people in a revolution can be sacrificed for an individual, or even for a few ideas sitting in the heads of leaders. Revolutions succeed because they address the concrete realities of the drudgery of the everyday existence of ordinary people.

Fifthly, we must know that revolutions demand discipline – both personal and organised discipline. Part of discipline is comradeship another part is offering a good example. You simply cannot earn the respect of the masses of our people by disrespecting those who have marched with you. And revolutions are acts of love by people who care – revolutions shrivel and die when the impetus for them is hatred.

When we gathered here 25 years ago, we sang of our leaders, we sang in one voice, “Tambo, iUDF iyasevumela” and we sang “Rohlihlahla Mandela, Freedom is in your hands, show us the way to freedom, in this land of Africa.” Well, we need to be reminded that at his 90th birthday recently, uMadiba said to the assembled crowd, “It is in your hands.”

So perhaps, learning from our own history we should sing together that Freedom is in our own hands, because history prescribes that. We must sing that we will never give up that hunger for freedom, even to our own comrades in parliament or in government while we sit on our hands expecting something. We must sing that never, never and never again will we give up what we won, what is ours and what we cherish.

There are songs to be sung, there are victories to be won, there is work.”

We must shout both because it is correct and we mean it

“AMANDLA NGAWETHU”