



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE CDE MARTHA MAHLANGU AT HER MEMORIAL SERVICE AT MORELETA PARK AT MAMELODI BY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA ON 19 MARCH 2014 .

Programme Director

The Mahlangu Family

Distinguished Guests

Comrades and Friends

Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here today in the memory of our mother, Martha Mahlangu, so that together we may celebrate and share both our joy in the gift that her life was to us, and the pain that her passing brings. In sharing the joy and the pain individually and collectively today, may we lessen the pain and remember more vividly the joy.

The African National Congress was only 12 years old when Mme Mahlangu was born in 1924. Certainly, her parents, who were undoubtedly as oppressed as any other black person at the time, did not know the role their daughter was going to play in the struggle for our freedom. Mme Mahlangu's parents lived in oppression and their child too was to endure the same suffering they and everyone around them was subjected to. Her children were also going to suffer the same indignity and humiliation when she became a mother herself. Such was the life of a black person in South Africa. It was cheap and dispensable. Women were subjected to the triple exploitation and oppression of race, gender and class.

Let me remind you that Mme Mahlangu was born at the time when it was a crime to be black in South Africa. At the age of 31, in 1955, she gave birth to a son, Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu, who would become not only our struggle hero, but a symbol of the armed struggle waged by our glorious army, Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of our noble movement, the African National Congress. At the time when it was not easy to be a black person in South Africa, and even worse to be a parent of a black child, let alone a parent of a people's soldier, Mme Mahlangu stood tall and sustained the struggle through sacrifice and selflessness. She nurtured and groomed her son to join the ranks of the ANC and serve the nation with distinction. Solomon Mahlangu's courage and bravery is derived from her mother's genes. In seTswana, we say, "O e antse letseleng".

It is easy to be tempted to remember Mme Mahlangu only as a mother to our struggle icon, Cde Solomon Mahlangu. It is equally easy to remember

her only as the mother of that MK member who was hanged by the apartheid regime; the mother of one of our bravest heroes of the struggle. Yes, it is easy to only relegate her to the mother of a young man who defied the shivers of death and bravely called upon his people to continue the struggle for liberation from death row.

Yes, we are proud that she was the mother to one of us and one of the bravest fighters for freedom. We will always be proud of her for giving South Africa such a hero. But I want to caution that in so doing, we must not neglect or turn a blind eye to her personal contribution to the struggle for freedom. She may not have carried an AK47 and may not have left the country into exile or sent to Robben Island or any other jail for that matter. But her own contribution to the struggle was huge and should be acknowledged as such. She was a member of the Federation of South African Women, the ANC and the ANC Women's League and was very active in community initiatives at Mamelodi.

She contributed enormously to our liberation as well as in consolidating the gains of our democracy. When others abdicated their responsibility and turned their backs on the ANC after we attained freedom, she supported our democracy by voting for the only party that cares for the poor and the marginalised. Above all, she shied away from seeking special treatment because of her role and that of her family in the struggle. She had a sense of belief that sought to think about the nation as a whole rather than herself and her family – something she demonstrated throughout her life, in suffering and in many other difficulties she and her family experienced.

To the Mahlangu family, may it bring you joy that Mme Mahlangu did not only belong to you, but also to all of us who knew her, and those who only knew about her sacrifices. Your loss today is also our loss and may it bring you joy that she may be gone, but please take solace that her legacy and heroic deeds are entrenched in our people's hearts and will live with us forever.

As we gather here today to pay tribute to this heroine, I must confess that it's hard to say goodbye. We wish that so much of her life had not been lost to her suffering, that things could have been different for her, and for us.

While we know that she is at peace and that her struggles are at an end, there is pain and sadness. But even though she is gone, she has left the legacy of her love for her country and her people – for us and those who oppressed her and those who executed her son in 1979 and denied her the opportunity to bury him with dignity.

The way she touched our lives was profound and will remain immeasurable. It is incumbent upon all of us to keep those fond memories alive by sharing them with one another and generations to come. At 89 years, we should be saying, she indeed lived her life to the fullest. God has taken very good care of her. But we also know that it was never going to be enough to live with her. We were never going to be satisfied to be with her and therefore we were never going to easily let her go. But as long as we believe in the good moments we shared with her, and cherish the things she did for us and with us as a nation, she will always live among us.

One of the things we often hear as we travel the length and breadth of our country is people complaining about some of the things that they have not

been able to enjoy during this democratic dispensation. We seldom hear them rejoicing about the many things they have already enjoyed through and because of democracy that people like Mme Mahlangu and Solomon brought us. How many people in this world have it so much easier than our departed Mme Mahlangu did. How many never had to face half the trouble she faced, and yet lose sight so easily of what is truly important. Many of us get distracted by insignificant things in life, many of us brood and focus on our little problems, and forget that which is most important – our collective being, building the new democratic South Africa from the ruins of apartheid.

But through everything Mme Mahlangu went through, she managed to keep her priorities straight. What can be more important than loving and showing your love for your nation as a whole? How can some of us who are blessed with so much forget to be thankful and proud to be South Africans, while somehow a person like Mme Mahlangu kept her faith through all of her difficulties. This is a wonderful legacy. This is a wonderful example to follow.

Knowing how much her family meant to her, and also how she loved her people, it was such a special blessing and very apt that just before she passed away, Mme Mahlangu attended this year's State of the Nation Address as a special guest of President Zuma and she kick-started our celebration of 20 years of Freedom. Indeed, she would want us to continue the celebrations not only through song and dance, but by continuing the struggle to make South Africa an even better place to live in. Although respecting the right of those who doubt the importance and imperative to vote in the forthcoming elections, I am sure she would be saddened by

such myopic decisions. Therefore, let us make her proud by not only exercising our right to vote, but also voting correctly.

In two days' time, on 21 March 2014, we will be celebrating Human Rights Day and in two months' time, on 7 May 2014, we will be going to the polls. The confluence of these important days should inspire us to keep Mme Mahlangu's legacy alive. Let us continue to build and entrench a culture that upholds human rights in our country. Let us continue to vote the ANC into parliament with greater majority so that it may continue to lead us into a better life for all.

Long Live the Spirit of Mme Mahlangu Long Live!

Viva ANC Viva!

Viva ANC Women's League Viva!

Viva ANC Youth League Viva!

Amandla!

I thank you