

MINISTER RONNIE KASRILS' SPEECH
NATIONAL ARBOR WEEK 07 SEPTEMBER 2001
EMZINONI TOWNSHIP (BETHAL)

Premier of Mpumalanga, Ndaweni Mahlangu, MEC for Local Government, Mr. Mohamed Bhabha, the Executive Mayor of Eastvaal District Municipality, TE Mdluli, the Mayor of Highveld East Municipality, Mr. M Tsheke, Amakhosi, distinguished guests, the community of Emzinoni, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to celebrate Arbor Week with you today.

Master of Ceremonies, we celebrate Arbor Week during 1-7 September every year. The purpose of celebrating Arbor Week is to educate and inform the general public about the importance of trees. The theme for Arbor Week this year is “**Trees are Life-Mehlare ke bophelo**”. This theme embraces following important messages:

- ◆ Protection of indigenous forests: This is so important because it mitigates the negative effect of pollution and provides oxygen which is essential for humans to live. Indigenous forests also provide so many things, like firewood and medicines, which are important for people's livelihoods.

- ◆ The economic value of trees: Forests, particularly planted forests, provide jobs and economic opportunities for many of our people in rural areas. The economic benefit is, however, destroyed by fires and that has an adverse effect on the growth of our economy. It is our duty to assist in the prevention of veld and forest fires.

- ◆ Urban Greening: Trees in our cities, towns, townships and informal settlements help to provide a better environment to live in and thereby acknowledge the dignity of people.

Arbor Week is an ideal opportunity for commemorating people who have been involved in the struggle for liberation in this country or for those who have made significant contributions in their community. Trees can be planted in memory of those

people. My Department has launched a Remembrance Campaign last year and such people are now entered into a Remembrance Register.

Trees serves as a symbol of healing. This is particularly applicable in areas such as a Bethal and the whole of Eastvaal District, which was affected by the legacy of the past. Most townships are characterised by lack of planning, public amenities, housing, open space management and greening. This was as a result of an uneven distribution of resources by the previous authorities. This situation becomes even worse when one compares townships with adjacent suburbs which are characterised by proper planning, good quality houses, proper roads etc.

These imbalances have resulted in people revolting against the system. Hence today we have the fallen heroes who fought against this particular system. About twenty trees will be planted in memory of some of the heroes in the Eastvaal Municipality. I hope these trees will serve as a symbol of healing to the families and loved ones. This will also contribute to the reconciliation of all our peoples.

Ladies and gentlemen, amongst those who stood up against the system was Shadrack “the Lion of the East” Sibande. Comrade Sibande was instrumental in exposing the exploitation of farm workers and killings by farmers on the potato farms. People were killed and allegedly buried in potato fields. He championed the first national potato boycott against the potato export.

He was among those who were charged and became part of the first treason trial with former President Mandela. He was deported to Komatipoort after the treason trial where he worked with Slim Dick Mtsweni who was later forced out of the country and killed by the South African Defence Force in Botswana. Sibande was advised by the ANC and his family to leave South Africa. He eventually left South Africa for Swaziland where he was later joined by his family. His son, Peter Sibande, also joined the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). He died and was buried in Angola. The Lion of the East became ill, died and was buried in Swaziland.

He recruited the likes of Victor “Kuki” Khayiyana and others into the struggle. Victor Lunga Khayiyana became involved in politics at a very early age and was often at

loggerheads with the Apartheid Regime. He was never scared to tell the officials that they could only manage to beat him because the law allowed them to. He used to say “but with a fair fight you will never beat me”. Victor was able to continue with his education whilst being involved in the struggle and got his Diploma as a herbalist and as a magician. His friends used to call him “Impisi” and his fans used to say “Hejja Fosajh, Heimantra...”

Victor joined Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1979. He dedicated his whole life to the struggle and died in Piet Retief after an exchange of gunshots with soldiers in 1985.

Victor had proven his leadership capabilities and the determination to succeed in a range of MK operations and on that basis he was recruited to MK’s Special Operations Unit. He underwent specialised training in Angola in armour piercing incendiary.

As a member of the Solomon Mahlangu unit along with Barney Molokoane, Victor launched the successful attack on Sasol on the night of 31 May 1981. This attack took place on the 20th anniversary of the Republic and rang the beginning of the end for apartheid.

As was the case with Barney Molokoane, Victor dedicated much of his time in Special Operations to destroying Sasol 2. He had an intimate knowledge of the area and knew all the routes like the palms of his hands.

Victor’s striking feature was his resourcefulness and determination to succeed. He came inside the country on various occasions to do reconnaissance for future operations. On one such occasion, Victor, who had a pistol with him, was stopped by the police. The police asked to see his dompass, which Victor produced. Afterwards, Victor said the policeman was not suspecting him of doing reconnaissance but should he have been confronted, he would not have hesitated to use his pistol.

He had this tremendous ability to use his ability to interact with others which enabled him to walk away from potentially dangerous situations but if need be, he was prepared to fight it out.

On another occasion inside the country, Victor's motorbike was confiscated by the police because he did not have a valid driver's license. It took much persuasion to get Victor to let go of his plan to go back in order to get his motorbike.

He is survived by his Mother Inah, his wife, Meisie, and children, Mandla, Mzwandile and Busi, his sister, Nomahomba, and 11 grandchildren.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we plant these trees for these heroes, we remember and honour the contribution they have made towards the liberation of this country. My Department has also donated twenty plaques, which will be mounted next to the trees planted in honour of those who will be commemorated here today. The names of those persons commemorated here will be entered into the Register of Remembrance.

I hope that the Eastvaal District Municipality, Community Based Organisations, Non Government Organisations and the Community of Wattville will work together to take the greening of Mzinoni Township forward. I am not only encouraging the greening of Mzinoni, but I also encourage the District Council to start greening initiatives throughout its area of jurisdiction in order to address the imbalances of the past.

I also want to encourage Community Based Organisations, Non-Government Organisations and communities to work with their municipality in ensuring that greening does take place throughout the year and not only during Arbor Week

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you all for your time and contribution in promoting Arbor Week. I would like to also thank the organisers of the event for their tireless effort in making the launch a success. Thank you all for celebrating Arbor Week with me today.

I thank you