

FIRST ANNUAL DENIS GOLDBERG LECTURE – CLOSE THE GAP
Walter Sisulu Hall, Randburg. 6 October 2012

Programme Director

Distinguished comrades and friends

I am deeply touched by the the Randburg Ward 102 Branch deciding to honour me by choosing to name itself after me.

Comrades, I have called this talk Close the Gap, and shall explain this title later.

First allow me to express my sorrow at the loss of Comrade Zwelakhe Sisulu. I am sure I speak for all when I ask the Branch secretary to send our condolences to Comrade Zwelakhe's immediate family, and to the family of his birth, and indeed to our Movement. We have lost a real hero of our struggle for freedom.

Then I need to express my delight that "my" Branch has invited my comrades from the Rivonia Trial, Madiba, Andrew Mlangeni and Ahmed Kathrada to be here tonight. Thank you Andrew for being with us. We are the survivors. How I wish that Tata Walter, Oom Gov, Oom Ray and Comrade Elias could be here in the flesh. I like to feel that they are smiling on us here tonight. I would have loved Bram Fischer to be here. As leader of the defence team he saved our lives in the notorious Rivonia Trial. Sadly he did not himself survive his own term of life imprisonment for his own activities as Chairperson of the illegal Communist Party against the apartheid state. George Bizos is here and that is also great. Ministers and other leading people, I thank you for being here. But there is one more special person here, Hillary Hamburger was my prison visitor for 14 years and was my link to the world. To have such a friend is indeed something special. Her husband is with her and I greet you too Tony. They do wonderful work at their Ububele African Psychology Training Centre training lay and professional group therapists for traumatised children and the community. They are based right on the edge of Alex.

But, there is somebody else very special here tonight. He is one of the oldest comrades and friends I have from our days of political activity in Cape Town in the mid 1950s. He is comrade Andimba Hermann Toivu Ja Toivu, founding member of the Ovambo Peoples Organization which later became SWAPO. He was also the founder of PLAN - Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia. He is indeed the Father of free Namibia and I am deeply honoured by his presence here tonight. I thank my Branch executive for bringing him and his companion, cde Heloa Schityuwete, one of the first trained PLAN fighters, to be with us.

Perhaps I should explain why I accepted the Ward 102 Branch's request to allow them to use my name. In principal I think we should wait until someone has passed on before naming a living organization or place after a person. After all, in life he or she may "go bad" or the branch, for example may go bad and the person then feels the need to dissociate him or herself from the branch. After all, life is full of risks, isn't it?

I accepted because of a touch of vanity, I suppose. But there are deeper reasons. I come from a previous generation who saw little prospect of surviving the struggle and it is rather nice for a new generation to acknowledge that others came before them in the struggle, albeit in a different phase of the struggle. Then, I suppose I am still a product of the old society, as indeed we all are. We still see each other as belonging to different groups. We are rather squeamish and so we now speak of ethnicity instead of race. After all, we always spoke of the national liberation struggle in which the sharpest contradictions were those affecting black African workers in a capitalist society. Then there were the national minorities – Coloured, Indian and White. To have African comrades who stand up and implicitly proclaim that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it," by choosing to name their branch after a member of the most privileged of the national groups, demands that I have to respond positively. Not least because this adherence to the principle spelled out so clearly in the Freedom Charter of 1955 that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white together," goes beyond what we used to call multiracialism and now speak of as non-racism. It is for me especially important in this

period of nation building, of attempting to achieve cohesion, while there are some younger leaders who espouse the opposite: a narrow national chauvinism that creates enemies of our party, the ANC, the ruling party in the national government.

Let us be honest comrades and acknowledge, so that we might rectify matters, that there is considerable ethnic rivalry in every part of our country. National minorities are frequently reminded of their status, especially in KZN and the Western Cape Province. Is it not sad that the party of non-racism, the ANC, in the Western Cape is riven with racist rivalry and division? And the rest of our country is also being torn apart by ethnic groups or language groups or other formations conniving at creating local, regional and national power bases on the basis of 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours,' and why should we care about the silly old priest's cry that we are the land of ubuntu? Are we, Comrades, the land of ubuntu? Or are we the land of "all for me and devil take the hindmost?" And in case I am being misunderstood, and even though the Archbishop and I come at things from different perspectives, he and I agree that society has to be built on the belief in a shared humanity, or ubuntu, or be torn apart.

The Executive of the Randburg Ward 102 Branch has asked me to speak on the topic, The National Democratic Revolution: Where are we?

What do we mean by the National Democratic Revolution? I suspect that much of the disunity in our ANC stems from our never having arrived at a consensus as to the meaning of this phrase.

In the political sense we have of course made some kind of fundamental shift in the relations between the peoples of our country. We have this wonderfully democratic constitution arrived at in the end by talking, arguing, and achieving agreement between the elected representatives of all our people (more or less). Our constitution sets out many goals that we still have to achieve in terms of equality and the restoration of the dignity of our people stolen from them by the history of colonial and racial oppression coupled with economic exploitation or super exploitation. It is the Inequality Gap, the disparities in the opportunities we are able to offer our people, that

we must deal with; the gap between urban people and rural, poverty stricken or well off that we have to close with all the efforts we can muster. I must add that it is clear to me that it will take a number of generations to achieve all our goals, but we cannot therefore not make the effort if we are to remain true to the principles of our struggle led by the ANC and its allies. Have we begun the task or not? And can such equality be achieved in a society which is so brutally exploitative and based on inequality? I believe so but only if we can change things around. It will take leadership at every level of our society.

I know that the passion for wealth and individual riches is a worldwide phenomenon, but our struggle was expressly against such greedy accumulation. What is it that makes so many of us so greedy? How is it that the cry of “I was not in the struggle in order to remain poor,” has become so widespread in practice?

How is it that we who were in a movement that said that we would overturn the race-based inequality of exploitation, now do the same thing not by race but by class as so many former struggle leaders, and so many new ones, have embraced the values of the old society.

The miners of Marikana have been the spearhead of the newly re-awakened realization that we have not changed the basic relationships of low wage cheap labour and high waged skilled labour and even obscenely high salaries of supervisors and managers in the private and public sectors.

The emergent trade unions of the seventies and eighties of the last century established the principle that working conditions did not stop at the factory gate. Living conditions, education, and health care were all part of the conflict. Have we forgotten this? How is it that so many who came out of that period of struggle became high ranking politicians and top civil servants and then fled the governmental scene to get rich quick?

Apparently earning ten times as much as an entry level worker or teacher was not a quick enough route to wealth. They felt that being in government and trying to sort out the mess we had inherited was too frustrating. Did they stay to sort out the mess? No. Too many went into business and into

the easy tasks of media criticism and unobjective crudely biased negativity because sensation sells media. Criticism can be valid and necessary, but the frequent misrepresentations are hard to swallow.

However we define our National Democratic Revolution, and the simplest definition is the extension of the democratic rights held by whites under apartheid to the historically disadvantaged national groups, I think that we have made enormous strides in a mere 18 years since 1994 when the formal transfer of political power was made from the white minority to the people as a whole. We always demanded “power to the people, Amandla ngawethu.” I cannot go on shouting slogans, comrades. The people have the power and the question has become how do we use that power? How do the people exercise control over their elected representatives who so often come to believe that having been elected the power is theirs for their benefit alone. This is especially important at local government level where service delivery must take place. Hence the title of my talk: CLOSE THE GAP.

Political power is ours, isn't it? Have we closed the gap, have we achieved greater equality for the mass of our people? Yes and no, comrades. Have we transformed the relations between low paid and high paid workers, and managers and capitalists and their CEOs? How is it that the same division of labour between low paid and exorbitantly paid workers remains as the workers of Marikana so brutally exposed and were themselves then so brutally treated? How is it that we were overtaken by events at Marikana and elsewhere when leading members of Government and the ruling party are directors and large share holders in the affected mines? How is that a truly great activist, a former Governor of the World Bank and now Chairperson of Goldfields mining corporation complains about a lack of leadership by government and yet presides over a company with miners striking for better pay and conditions? Do our comrades' companies pay better wages and provide better working conditions? I doubt it comrades.

Have we made real progress in enlarging our economy? We have over 40 per cent unemployment in the formal economy. To employ them we need

to double the size of the economy very quickly in order to simply stand still, so to speak. It is a formidable task. I think we have simply divided up the cake to accommodate a new section of the ruling class. I am nearly 80 years old and I have lived through a lot of history. I have seen English speaking capital and international capital rape our country and screw our people. In 1948 a new group, Afrikaans speakers, took their bite at the cherry. And now we are repeating the process with a new group of aspirant and arrived (ses'fikile) capitalists. I discovered yesterday that ses'fikile means that when I have to close the boot of my car, I cannot gently assist gravity with a light touch of my hand. Ses'fikile means that I touch a button, and, whoops, it is closed. It also means that when a pedestrian walks past my car when I am caught in traffic the radar system sets off a buzzing noise. Hey, we could have used that in the underground!

We praise Nelson Mandela for his sacrifice but what are we sacrificing today?

I saw Mr Hart, an economist, on the SABC yesterday morning. He told us that a small section of the population, the working class and the trade union movement are destroying the country. Business knows what is best just as it always did under apartheid, is his attitude. How is it that we have simply adopted the previously existing relationships in our new society? How is it that the public broadcaster provides no counter view to the view that working people are a small minority of our people and business does not always know what is best?

History comrades! As though we are helpless in the face of our history. History! We study the past so that we may decide where we are going; not merely to know where we are going. We are deeply influenced and formed and informed by our history. But we are not trapped by our history. Nor are we trapped by human nature, for if we were we would not proclaim ubuntu, and therapists would not try to assist their clients to live with and overcome the selfishness of alleged human nature. Humans have free will. We make choices. If we are trapped by our past why aren't we still living under apartheid?

Let me talk about comrades Mandela and Tambo.

Mandela is a great leader, without doubt. But the way we honour him as Saint Madiba who single handedly brought us freedom, does him a great disservice. Worse, it does us a great disservice because it demobilizes us. What marks out great leaders like Mandela and Tambo is their ability to mobilize many others, tens of thousands of others. The second great characteristic is their ability to find new strategies to meet changing situations. Think of the Youth League of Tambo and Mandela, and Mda, Lembede and others who created the activist ANC in the 1940s; the African Claims document that asserted then what Biko asserted later: to be free we must believe we can be free, ie that we are the equal of all others. Thus the emergence in the liberation movement of the concept of equal rights for all and especially all South Africans. This gained acceptance in the Freedom Charter: SA belongs to all who live in it and All shall be equal before the law. Then the Defiance Campaigns and then the call for the armed struggle holding out the prospect of a political solution. Thirty years later, the suspension of the armed struggle and the negotiated settlement to save lives. That great leadership consisted also of holding fast to principled positions despite the personal cost. Mandela and Tambo for example could have become extremely rich lawyers, but one ended in prison for 27 years and the other in exile for 30 years and led us to freedom. But OR did not himself see the promised land. Attending the assassinated Chris Hani's funeral was too much for him in his weakened state of health.

We rightly praise our generation of leaders for their readiness to sacrifice. But what are the previously privileged and the newly privileged prepared to sacrifice today to achieve a new cohesive nation?

I hear people talking about a sell-out! Have they forgotten, or never read and understood how shaky was the ANC and its allies' hold on power in the early period after 1994? Have we already forgotten the violence against our people that killed 10 to 12 thousand people murdered by the apartheid state and its collaborators amongst the oppressed? Think of the shooting at Bisho. Think of the killings in Alex and Soweto when Inkatha decided it had

to be a national political party and not just in KZN: 1600 dead in the first month and 2000 in the second month. And more later. Think of the role of the third force and the killings at Boiphatong. Peace was necessary and that required compromise. We had the sunset clauses leaving the old civil service in place, but we also had the TRC when the politicians of the apartheid state wanted amnesty for all politicians, officials and their armed services, torturers and the like. But we also took over the existing labour relations of low paid workers and high paid skilled workers with even more for the supervisors and more still for the managers.

We can find these relations, or distribution of what we might call the wage fund in the national convention of 1909 – no political rights in order to have cheap black labour for industry, commerce, farming and the mines. Then we had the Lands Act to force people off the land as cheap labour and they were compelled to work as wage labour by having to pay taxes in cash. Payment in kind was no longer permitted. Hut tax, poll tax, wife tax, dog tax etc. The 1922 White miners strike where the ratio of how many cheap Black labourers to how many high paid white workers was the issue was significant. The 1922 miners strike led in the 1924 general election to a coalition of Afrikaner Nationalists and the White Labour Party, with the Chamber of Mines making white workers high paid – 18x the pay of black workers - and as ‘managers to control Black workers.’ This was reinforced in 1946/47 in the great African miners’ strike and the subsequent Judicial Commission into mine workers wages. The Chamber of Mines, the bosses, presented a classic cost of reproduction of the work force argument. They said, “Since we give them land on which to live rent free we can deduct the cost of rent from their needs. Since they often grow a bag or two of maize on the land we give them, we can deduct the value of these crops from what we have to pay the migrant mine workers.” Note that the mines consider the land conquered by the settlers and vested in the state as land that they, the mines, gave to their workers’ families! They said they provide a bunk in a barracks and they provide three meals a day and this is part of their wage too. The lack of social services, schools, clinics etc in the reserves meant that the cost of raising children, the next generation of

workers, was very low. The learned judges of the Beaumont Commission perpetuated the differential wages of so called unskilled workers and skilled artisans. Miners are not unskilled. They get two weeks training after striking before being allowed underground again. These differentials were not determined by relative contributions to production and the values created. They were determined by class interests blatantly reinforced by the segregationist/apartheid state. We took over these differentials and some of our great leaders allowed themselves to be willingly coopted. We have not significantly set about changing these differentials. I have remarked that we have leaders on the inside of the mining industry and yet we were unaware of the boiling resentment of the miners! How did we allow the same old migrant labour system to continue with miners living in shanties in order to claim a living out allowance to send to their families in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere? Comrades, we prattle about ubuntu and don't really mean it.

You know of course that the President does not himself set his salary and that of his Cabinet Ministers, Premiers and MECs and Judges. A committee made up of judges does that for us. You know of course that judges are totally unbiased and thus totally objective, as if they do not live in our society. They set salaries based on the old apartheid norms of relatively enormous incomes for people who have important responsibilities while knowing that workers, teachers, nurses, factory workers and miners live on starvation wages. Can it be right that a mining company CEO takes home more than a 1000 times the wages of his workers; or that a CEO of a supermarket chain gets a 1000 times the income of his workers, mainly women: R30000 a year against 3 million a year? Of course the President has to approve the suggested pay scales for himself, his deputy and the other top people. So comrade Minister please take a message to the President: Please set the example of how we are to CLOSE THE GAP between low pay and high pay: NO INCREASES FOR YOU FOR 5 YEARS and that includes the top ranks of civil servants as well.

I enjoy the singing of our gatherings. Both of my wives have passed on. Each of them said that if we could sing freedom we would have been free

long ago, and equally if we could sing socialism we should have had our revolution by now. But freedom and equality will not be won by singing alone. Nor will they be won by shouting slogans. We cry Amandla – Power. And indeed power is ours, power is the people’s power, since we are a democracy.

I have a difficult problem for us to solve. What is the role of the Trade Union movement in a developmental state in a period of transformation? How is it that public sector unions affiliated to the Alliance are so little concerned with transformation in practice rather than in rhetoric?

I mentioned the political activity of the new trade unions of the seventies and eighties of the last century. Now activity seems to take the form of factionalising about leadership positions based on personal or even ethnic likes and dislikes, and not on policies and principles. Let me take public sector workers as an example. It could be the health sector, but for example the largest teachers union, SADTU, is affiliated to COSATU which is allied to the ANC, but what role does that Union play through the professional activities of the teachers in bringing up a new generation of young people who will transform our country. It seems to me that too many of our teachers, NOT all, are concerned only about their pay and conditions rather than the sacrifices needed to transform our country. Where is the leadership in each school, in each branch of the Union among the elected officials for the task of transformation? Mbongi Ngema’s Sarafina is the fictional model of a struggle heroine among teachers. Teachers can rightly say that in some provinces they cannot do their work because the management of the system, a Provincial competency, is failing the learners by not ensuring that study materials, school infrastructure and the like are available and even the allocation of teachers is poorly performed in most, but NOT all Provinces. But why does SADTU not demand of their colleagues in NEHAWU, also a COSATU affiliate, and also in the ANC Alliance, that they work with them to transform our country? Why do we, the parents, not demand of our teachers, management officials and School Governing Bodies that we are all workers in the system and all responsible for transformation.

Let me boast and say that my generation of activists and leaders saw the prize as freedom, not what we would get out of being in the struggle. I call upon my Branch in Ward 102 Randburg, to lead the way in all these fields. I could have also taken the health sector as a similar example.

I would like to discuss the consequences of corruption, the misappropriation of public funds in both the public and private sectors. But enough for one night.

To end I want to say that the point comrades is that we are collectively responsible because we allow ourselves to be demobilized, to wait for a new Saint Madiba to come and solve our problems.

Comrades, it is not enough to dream of what our country must become. We must act to make the dream come true. Join me comrades in this exciting and enormous task.

Thank you