

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo as he delivers the Chief Albert Luthuli Memorial Lecture at Luthuli Museum, Groutville

21 July 2016

Luthuli Family

We profusely thank the Clermont Choir Foundation for bringing us together here and for its achievement as they remain the undefeated national champions in the choral music sector in South Africa.

We fully agree with their reasoning that the legacy of Luthuli should always be supported and sustained for generations to learn of this leader who by his stature gave Africans respect and dignity. We are happy to learn from them that Chief Albert Luthuli was also a choral music fan who also taught music.

Paying tribute to Chief Albert Luthuli in 2010, President Jacob had this to say:

'This memorial lecture affords us the opportunity to celebrate the life and teachings of Chief Luthuli not only as an ANC leader, but also as a leader beyond the confines of the congress movement. He made himself available to serve in many community structures, in various capacities. He is known as a traditional leader, lay preacher, devoted Christian, teacher, college choirmaster, sports and cultural activist.'

I am as well be adding that Luthuli was a peacemaker; a leader who did not harbour any hatred or resentment because even after years of

harassment, banishment and persecution, he displayed none. The whole world saw and heard him during his Nobel Prize Lecture, delivered at the University of Oslo as he said:

"How easy it would have been in South Africa for the natural feelings of resentment at white domination to have been turned into feelings of hatred and a desire for revenge against the white community.

So coming and standing at this podium on the 21st of July, is really a moment of reflection; a moment filled with tears as it is the day this African giant fell. It is also a moment of great anxiety to his family and to all members of the African National Congress as we again get reminded of the confusing and unconvincing statements of how he actually died.

We have been told the Nobel Peace Prize winner and former President of our glorious movement, the ANC, died on this day after he was struck by a train on a railway bridge very close to his home.

It could have been easy for us to accept what was being said about his death, had he been a free man amongst the people who loved him. Chief Albert Luthuli was a banned man during the time of his death – he was confined to his home and restricted on the number of visitors he was supposed to have by the Apartheid regime in what was then called Suppression of Communism Act.

It was no surprise then that in March 2005, 40 years later, the family revealed that it had not find closure to the intriguing aspects of his death, with daughter Albertina Luthuli calling for a fresh and full probe, saying:

"If you have lost somebody dear to you, I think as long as there are stories flying around and you don't know the true circumstances, it just doesn't go away from you.

There will probably be nobody to prosecute. Therefore it will at least give an answer to the questions that are there and give peace of mind to everybody."

Chief Albert Luthuli embodied humanity, love and leadership.

His desire to enlighten his people became evident by his choice of qualification which was to undertake a teaching course at Edendale and thereafter take a responsibility to run a small primary school in the Natal uplands.

He also believed in self-development as was shown by his enrolment at Adams College in 1920 for a higher teachers' training course.

As fate would have it, he was retained at this institution as a member of the training college staff, teaching alongside ZK Mattews, a stalwart, who was then the head of Adams College High School. Here they nurtured, mentored and taught Anton Lembede, who was to later to become founder of the ANC Youth League.

Though 'privileged' as a teacher, Luthuli showed empathy with working people's concerns and demonstrated this by joining the Natal Native Teachers Union which in 1928 elected him as its Secretary.

He always ensured that he was where the people are and thus made football his choice of sport – though he was not a prolific player – he was nonetheless chosen to be a secretary and supervisor of Adams College Football team, the Shooting Stars.

Luthuli never put his interests above that of his people as we know that he even reluctantly agreed to heed a call to become chief in his ancestral village of Groutville. This entailed forsaking his teaching career and returning home to become an administrator of his people's which he enthusiastically did, adjudicating and mediating local quarrels, and organising African cane growers to guard their own interests.

Albert Luthuli was a Chief with a difference; he was able to take his chieftain hat aside and join people in their struggle for freedom. His resolve and fearlessness saw him leading in the 1952 Defiance Campaign, working side by side with other giants like Oliver Reginald Tambo. The whole world saw him burning his Dom pass as an act of defiance, an action that finally brought him into direct conflict with the South African repressive government which called him to resign from the ANC. As would be expected, the Chief chose to be on the side of the people and was dismissed from his post as the Chief in November 1952.

This episode will remain indelible in our memories as after his removal as chief of Groutville, Luthuli gave a speech entitled: "The Road to Freedom is via the Cross." It inspired generations as Chief Albert Luthuli eloquently described apartheid as a policy that degraded all those who are party to it, and in that speech he also expressed optimism that whites would sooner or later be compelled to change heart and accept a shared society. He knew that we will eventually be free!

The irony of his dismissal as a Chief, made our people to believe in him, to trust and love him and they demonstrated that by electing him as the President – General of the African National Congress in 1952 – by a very large majority.

As like never before, Chief Albert Luthuli, was re-elected as President-General in 1955 and again in 1958, serving until his untimely death on this day in 1967.

To this day, as it was then, banned or not banned; he remained a leader to all of us. He remained a Chief and a President to us. Years later would, President Nelson Mandela would describe him as; *'the greatest leader of the freedom struggle: a colossus and yet a foot soldier of our people.'*

We are grateful that he was honoured during his lifetime with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961, the Black South African to receive one. In his acceptance speech on 10 December 1961 at Oslo University, Norway, he explicitly declared that it was for all of us, saying:

"It can only be on behalf of the people of South Africa, all the people of South Africa, especially the freedom-loving people, that I accept this award, that I acknowledge this honour. I accept it also as an honour not only to South Africa, but for the whole continent of Africa. "

We are also proud that his wisdom and prowess were recognised beyond the confines of the Apartheid state as was shown by the 1966 visit of the then United States Attorney-General, Senator Robert Kennedy, who arrived by helicopter to seek his advice right here at Groutville.

Luthuli's tenacity and capacity for detailed planning was used as a source of inspiration to Umkhonto Wesizwe soldiers, the Luthuli Detachment, who were tasked to infiltrate South Africa through the then Rhodesia fighting side by side with Joshua Nkomo's Zipra forces.

We are also elated that African National Congress led government proclaimed Luthuli's home as a museum in August 2004; the Chief Albert Luthuli Museum. -.

We will also remain indebted to the KwaDukuza Municipality for its decision to create a bronze statue of Luthuli at its Chambers.

Generations to come also have a memorial to visit and pay homage at the Groutville Congregational Church where Chief Luthuli's grave is located.

As a Department, for our most prestigious and advanced hospital, when time came to decide on a name, there was no debate, but, Chief Albert Luthuli Central Hospital. With all the Specialists it employs, it is there to serve the uninsured masses of our people.

Finally, when the revered leaders of our country in democracy feel the need to recognise excellency, they bestow upon that individual, The Order of Luthuli.

The Order of Luthuli is South Africa's highest award for contributions to democracy, human rights, justice and peace.

The badge of the order is an equilateral triangle representing a Flint stone above a clay pot. The Flintstone depicts the sun rising above Isandhlwana, and the national flag, and it is flanked by two animal horns rising out of the clay pot, which bears the initials AL. Isandhlwana. It symbolizes peace and tranquility, and the leopard skin bands around the bases of the horns represent Chief Luthuli's headdress.

How then do we as current members of his glorious movement, the ANC, honour him?

- By uniting and mobilizing our people against social ills of drugs; sugar daddies and lawlessness
- Mobilizing against the spread of HIV, TB and stigma associated with them
- Working hand in hand to eradicate illiteracy and ignorance among our people
- Isolating and banishing those who kill candidates in the name of our African National Congress
- Going out to vote on August 3 in large numbers to defend the gains of our hard fought liberation and strive to further improve the lives of our people

Let us all emulate this leader; to me he remains an inspiration; a mentor and a Chief.

I love him.

Thank you.