

'Become like Ben Turok and be on the right side of history'

By Kgalema Motlanthe

Kgalema Motlanthe, the Director of the Board of the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) served as President of South Africa between 25 September 2008 and 9 May 2009, following the resignation of Thabo Mbeki. After the end of his interim presidency, Motlanthe was appointed as Deputy President of South Africa by his successor, Jacob Zuma.

Programme Director, Aunt Mary, Fred, Ivan, Neil, Marc and Karina Turok, esteemed members of the academia, trustees and staff of the Institute for African Alternatives, business leaders, leaders of civil society formations, comrades, ladies and gentlemen.

We are gathered here to express our condolences with Aunt Mary and the Turok family and this occasion leaves one with a deep sense of ambivalence: yes we are here to mourn but we are also here to celebrate a great life.

It is an honour to commemorate, remember and re-examine the life and work of Professor Ben Turok with you today. Through this deep process we are compelled to rethink what it means to live and die for one's beliefs. Like many of his comrades and like all of us, Professor Ben Turok is at once a product and creator of history. A child of his environment.

Today's memorial meeting and the moving tributes share the attributes of a man who proved to be nothing less than a great role model. A consistent moral leader of our time, whose lifelong dedication to the fight against oppression and injustice helped deliver freedom to our country.



Comrade Ben Turok was one among many who sacrificed their all to attain liberation and democracy. Many are not with us today, but like them and like many of us here, we have been at the centre of one of the most powerful political dramas the world has ever seen. Turok's and his generation's single-minded devotion to the people of Africa collectively shifted the nation and the global community towards human rights and racial equality.

Today's thorough depiction of Professor Turok, his life and his work, aptly describes a visionary who led us through the vast expanse of political, social and economic struggle. With the Freedom Charter as the road map, he helped navigate the liberation movement towards a struggle based on ethics, sacrifice and intellectualism.

Comrade Ben's history reminds us not to sink and drown into the political ocean, but to dig our feet into the sand >>



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and hammer with all our might against the waves of despair; to be buoyant and agile in our mindset; and see through the sediment of insidious plots that aim to steer our ship off course.

He reminds us not to divorce ourselves from our ongoing duty to apply our minds, question our motives, audit our successes, and scrutinise, on a granular level, our modes of operation.

Through the eloquent and insightful recounting of Comrade Ben by his family, his son Professor Ivan Turok, Professor Thuli Madonsela and Comrade Pallo Jordan, we grasp an important piece of history and learn what kind of conviction and force drove Ben Turok. History is important because it gives us context and is a foundation for the project of social cohesion.

To learn the lessons of our past, to understand and confront challenges of our present and to have an honest and open dialogue about our collective future, we need to revisit history and humanise what it means to struggle.

As Professor Keorapetse Kgosisile, writes in his poem entitled 'The Present Is A Dangerous Place To Live':

"Time will always be
Pastpresentfuture is always
now.

Where then is the life we
came to live?"

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an urgent sense of impatience in South Africa, a latent panic and unease that underpins our daily doubt, despair and distress.

This memorial service offers us connections to truths beyond an individual – a reflection of who we are, our wisdom gained and our wisdom lost. A chance to become like Turok and be on the right side of history. When contemplating and appreciating the legacy of a selfless leader we should ask ourselves: "what do we inherit from this hero?"

Within one of Prof Ben Turok's final requests for "a private ceremony, rather than anything official or formal, in view of the present predicament facing the country" is a poignant metaphor for his selfless style of leadership and his approach to activism.

We are exposed to his core values in this single statement and are encouraged to consider the heirloom of great leaders and examine the importance of social inheritance. The intergenerational transmission of Turok's ethics, attitude and actions must be the starting point of appreciating and celebrating the legacy of any hero – this is our inheritance – we are the heirs to the virtues of this revolutionary, thought leader, shepherd of truth and struggle icon.

In this and in many of Turok's public statements, he asks each and every one of us to re-examine whether what we are fed by the status quo is what we actually need – in true 'Turok-fashion', it is an ongoing criticism of passivity and of corrupt governance. In this, we may also interpret an appeal from Professor Ben Turok for us to challenge our social inheritance not to accept the route that has been selected for us by mounting challenges and the hollowing out of leadership.

Turok believed that government was not doing enough to pursue economic policies that ensured

inclusive economic growth. He believed and understood that we are running out of time and that we need a radical approach to governing South Africa.

Turok's robust opinions on the economy were shared and echoed at the Inaugural Drakensberg Inclusive Growth Forum in 2018: a gathering of a broad cross section of thought leaders and organisations, including communities; governmental bodies; political groups; trade unions; youth; vulnerable populations; civil society; the international community and the private sector to deliberate on important societal issues and engage in a dialogue.

This Forum's aim to ignite collaborative action and to address challenges was firmly met by Professor Turok's potent observations in a panel discussion on stage. His contributions included that: Self-enrichment and a departure from the strong moral values so eloquently captured in the preamble to the Constitution, are at the heart of government's failure to lead and serve the people of South Africa. His observations highlighted that:

South Africa has not clearly spelled out the economic legacy of apartheid and the inequality of wealth this created which is perpetuated by the continued dominance of the "apartheid profit model"; and that there is unfinished business that has been pushed into the background by the state capture crisis;

He went on to warn that:

More research needs to be done on international institutions and the implications of foreign direct investment generally; and that we do not confront the financial sector players as we should – their policies deny, limit and exclude many citizens from accessing capital.



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Turok’s further calls for alternative ways of economic development urges us to deal specifically with the economic legacy of apartheid and that transformation is inhibited because:

South Africa is oversensitive to the IMF, World Bank, etc. and is reluctant to change to economic policy that is [not] aligned with these organisations for fear that we might lose international respectability.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are in nothing short of a crisis right now.

The question of ‘how to rebuild South Africa’ assumes that South Africa has, at one point in its existence, enjoyed the status of a well-constructed and built up society, economy and political sphere. The prolonged destruction that South Africa has been subjected to goes back for generations. This guides us to ask the question whether our country in some way experiences a constant state of being fractured or broken without [an] opportunity to fully construct the South Africa of our dreams.

The last period of troubled years have been dominated by discourse that draws attention to the wide-reaching extent of corruption, dually intersecting

in unethical business and political partnerships, crises in Eskom and State-Owned Enterprises, and repeated demonstrations and social upheavals even along historical fault lines of race. We are constantly haunted. The project of social cohesion and nation-building efforts is under continuous threat.

A dedicated commitment must be made across all sectors of society, government, business, civil unions and communities, to invest in a system of opportunity and inclusion for all. This distinct attitude change will offer a concrete basis for the true development and construction of South Africa by providing the power to unlock our potential.

South Africa needs to look beyond our familiar ways of doing business and understand that what has worked in the past is clearly not working today – there is no panacea to our socio-economic problems and to our financial woes.

Ladies and gentlemen, Eskom is South Africa’s top risk. The crisis at Eskom threatens the entire country. The state-owned utility cannot manage to cover its costs and make the huge interest payments on its mountain of debt. Its poorly maintained power plants are struggling to meet demand, and it has lost many CEOs, Board members and highly skilled staff over the years. Eskom can be described as the biggest risk to the country’s economy.

Corruption and mismanagement have induced a brain drain at Eskom and other State-Owned Companies with over-regulation and availability of skills as a top concern. SOCs are not facing one single challenge, but a multiplicity of problems that if not properly diagnosed, [would allow] any turn-around strategy [to] only address symptoms that are on the surface.

Time is not on the side of the South African economy. Its impatient population and a generation of youth counting on us to lay strong foundations for their future attest to this reality. In order to refocus

these State-Owned Companies on their growth and developmental functions, the Pan-African Investment and Research Services offered the following recommendations to revive growth with an emphasis on defining a set of programmes and/or feasible interventions where SOCs could work together to create momentum for investments, industrialisation and job creation.

First, there is a need for clear ownership policy that defines the overall rationale for state ownership, the state role in corporate governance of SOEs, and how the government will implement its ownership policy needs to be in place.

Second, there should be constant monitoring and evaluation of these entities, with [the] focus on the manner of their operations, how they deploy capital, and their development effectiveness.

Third, SOEs should justify themselves before the rationale of value-creation for the public, and with clear development impact. Where there is no clear competitive advantage or potential to develop it, and where there is no developmental value yielded, such enterprises should be allowed to die rather than be on an expensive life support.

Fourth, at the minimum, these entities should abide by existing corporate governance norms, including the Companies Act, Public Finance Management Act, and King IV Codes of Good Governance. For this to be possible, boards should be selected on a merit-based system and made up of individuals known not only for tested expertise but also for their integrity and grasp of ethics.

Finally, as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Guidelines on Corporate Governance of SOEs suggest, these entities should have a disclosure policy that identifies what information should be publicly disclosed, and >>

clear processes on obtaining such information. Accountability and transparency should be proactive.

There is the general view that government ownership can have certain advantages such as furthering social outcomes as well as providing physical infrastructure. Yet, it is indicated that it is vital that a value creation approach be followed as it provides a framework when considering whether government should have and/or should retain an ownership stake in an enterprise. Ultimately, enterprises should be maximising value creation as well as profitability.

In addition to the recommendations to revive SOCs, it is important for us to look at alternative methods of driving sustainable and inclusive growth. A sense of leadership during troubled times compels us to think innovatively, venturing out into uncharted waters and bringing into the national fold new ways and eyes of looking into things that in the end drastically changes the lives of the people for the better.

At the 2019 Drakensberg Inclusive Growth Forum, we were left with a positive outlook that focused on South Africa's existing endowments as an important factor in economic transformation and revival. These include South Africa's strategic location, the potential of our Oceans Economy and the vast deposit of natural resources as a substantial geographic advantage.

Allow me to refer to the maritime world, the Blue or Oceans Economy, what Commander Tsietsi Mokhele; former SA Maritime Safety Authority CEO, referred to as "South Africa's 10th Province". With the discovery of oil on South African shores and South Africa being the only country on the African continent with such an expansive access and control over sea waters from the Atlantic Ocean in the west, to the Southern Ocean, the Antarctic and Indian Ocean in the east, our maritime potential is extensive and the economic benefits are boundless.

According to recent findings of the International Labour Organization, Green Economy policies could create around 40 million jobs worldwide in various sectors. Considering the Green Economy as part of our sustainable development path addresses the interdependence between energy production, economic growth, social protection and the natural ecosystem. Within this, the private sector and civil society must play a fundamental role.

These rich endowments of minerals, oil, gas, wind and sun, place South Africa in good stead as potentially becoming a continuing source of economic growth and influence in Africa, the Golden Goose of Africa.

The world's eyes are on Africa as the next big economic growth story, and it is vitally important to ensure that this growth benefits all Africans – our agility in this ever-changing terrain is a fundamental element in developing modern business strategy.

With South Africa's economic growth in the spotlight of emerging economies, we are the ideal springboard for the region to not simply be an observer of evolving technologies but to be a globally relevant participant in the 4th Industrial Revolution. Carving a space for public and private sectors to explore and design new workforce systems, we need to assist the workforce to adequately interact with new technologies, actively driving the digital era forward within all sectors.

Our new reality is controlled by digital technology, and access to this technology is a universal human right. Digital inclusion allows people to access the economy, communicate freely, be ready for the jobs of the future, enjoy the rights to education, freedom of expression, health and more. It quickly becomes obvious why digital inclusion is so important and considered a universal human right.

With the acceleration of digital technology driving change in every

market sector and the necessity to adapt to these new conditions reaching increasing speeds – we must develop young talent through educational platforms that boost access to technology and develop digital literacy.

Professor Ben Turok rebelled against the pitfalls and traditions of contemporary South African politics and made a move to formulate a new theory of how the world should work. He asked of us to root out and discard anything that, on reflection, results in negative influences to continually test and challenge our existing mindset and to refine and improve it at all times.

In comrade Ben, foresight and rebelliousness are equivalent in imbuing him with a sense of uncanny balance towards life. In his autobiography, "Nothing But The Truth", he concluded: "Indeed, it may be that throughout my political life in the ANC, I have been driven by ideas rather than practical politics, trying to move the process faster than objective reality allowed."

In his objective to offer fresh ideas and create a mindset change among leaders, he inspired a movement of innovation and creative problem solving – essential qualities necessary for the 21st century and the energy needed to invent sustainable solutions to the challenges that face our communities.

What Professor Ben Turok has left us with is an inheritance of ideas to assimilate, deliberate and meditate on for many years to come. A legacy of firm and clear-cut guidance that reflects the hopes and dreams contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. He and his peers made the ANC the conscience of the nation. They demanded of themselves the highest level of ethics, discipline, intellectualism and sacrifice.

Many thanks go to Aunt Mary and her family for sharing Professor Ben Turok with us and the millions of Africans and South Africans. **NA**