

Threshold of a New South Africa?

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Mr. Ramusi is Lebowa's Minister of the Interior. This speech was delivered at a ceremony to commemorate Sharpeville.

On March 21, 1960, the world was shocked with the painful news of the massacre at Sharpeville. On that day 69 South Africans of Black descent lost their lives and 180 were seriously wounded when fire was opened against them. Claims against the South African Government totalling R1 856 000 were lodged by the dependants of the dead.

This incident will be difficult to forget. We in Lebowa have been asked by our wise Chief Minister, Mr. C. N. M. Phatudi to learn to forget the bad memories of the past. We are advised that history is full of mistakes, serious mistakes which are better forgotten than remembered.

We are encouraged to use our best brains to contribute to a beautiful future for our people, a glorious future for mankind, a rich future for our country in which our children and our people may live in love and peace.

Friends, it was a grievous mistake to murder people in the black hole of Calcutta, it was a grievous mistake to murder six million Jews in Nazi Germany, it was a grievous mistake to hang people after the Slaughter's Nek rebellion, and it was a grievous mistake to shoot the people at Sharpeville.

It will always be a mistake to shoot people, particularly in time of peace and more particularly when we are a devoutly Christian country that is deeply convinced that the best form of government for us and God Himself is Democracy and not despotism.

Sharpeville has been recalled throughout the world time and again. I have been asked in many parts of the world how far Sharpeville was from my home. These questions were asked at places where I did not expect the people to have known of Sharpeville. I began to realise that the Sharpeville incident has assumed international significance.

On March 21, 1968 the British Consul General's offices were besieged and stormed by demonstrators in Lusaka, Zambia. The demon-

strators were commemorating the Sharpeville incident.

The next day, March 22, 1968, the South African Embassy in Washington DC was under heavy police guard when Negroes threatened it with violence. These demonstrators were also commemorating the Sharpeville incident.

Two years later, and this time in London, England, on March 21, 1970, in Trafalgar Square, Sharpeville was again recalled by thousands of demonstrators.

Here in South Africa we have never failed to observe and recall that tragic day. This will go down not only in the history of our time, but from generation to generation to the end of time.

Shooting incidents in any part of the civilised world will never be the way to stop people from demanding their rights:

- Rights to work where they can;
- Rights to feel secure;
- Rights to ownership;
- Rights to movement;
- Rights to speak out;
- Rights to govern;
- Rights to be concerned about the liberties of the individual;
- Rights to enjoy the blessings of the South African wealth;
- Rights to participate in the industrial boom of South Africa;
- Rights to criticise constructively;
- Rights to protection by the courts of law;
- Rights to participate in the government of our country as partners with our fellow-men;
- Rights to defend ourselves in the face of impending attacks;
- Rights of having petrol and oil;

- The right to stand together and play our part in South Africa;
- The right to healthy relations between the people of South Africa;
- The right to an equitable share of the land by all;
- The right to discuss;
- The right to be free from racial tension;
- The right to be freed from racial frustration;
- The right to live without fear of outside interference.

Allow me to refer to the constitutional developments of the homelands in order that you may appreciate what brought about the Sharpeville incident.

Allow me to refer to the responses of the Black people both in the rural and urban areas, as well as of our youth. Allow me also to refer to the responses of the rural and urban Whites so that Sharpeville may be viewed in its correct perspective.

The type of separate development envisaged by the Whites in the platteland is not the same as that seen by the urban Whites.

Rural Whites want physical separation of Black and Whites.

Rural Whites do not understand why African farm workers should be taken away and be resettled elsewhere. This is the way he feels. "*Wel, dit is my plaas. My Bantoe moet bietjie ver van my bly, maar op my plaas.*" He is very much spiritually attached to the Blacks living on his farm.

While the rural farmer fully supports the policy of separate development he does not understand why his land must be excised to give room for Blacks under consolidation plans, why his area can be declared a White spot in the Black area.

He quarrels with this. That is why some of them say — "*over my dead body*" and that is why the central government is finding it difficult to consolidate the homelands into a cohesive mass of land. Its own electorate does not understand the implications of their own party's policy.

This is "*give and take and take and give.*" I may add that we in Lebowa appointed a commission to consolidate the territory of Lebowa. During our investigations we met and spoke to many farmers who told us that they could not accept the fact that they must give

up their farms and in Lebowa many farmers have asked us to accept them as citizens of Lebowa rather than part with their farms and the people living on their farms.

We in the Lebowa Government are pleased to make it known that we accept them with open hands and guarantee them the hospitality and peaceful citizenship of Lebowa.

On the other hand the urban Whites see the urban Blacks as a threat to their comfort in the urban areas because of the numerical strength of the Blacks and hence they would support any policy that would take the Blacks back to the rural areas.

Here they find that their gain is twofold:

- They prefer and accept Black workers on cheap labour contracts making the responsibilities of the municipality less and less.
- They feel very secure when Blacks are fewer or are absent from towns and cities. That is why they feel that towns should even be White-by-night. That is why influx control regulations make sense to urban Whites and not to urban and rural Blacks. While the Africans will always feel aggrieved when Sophiatown, Ladyselborne, District Six, and many other areas are destroyed, the Whites are not concerned. These are the issues which led up to Sharpeville.

The responses of both urban and rural Blacks towards their respective homeland governments are the same. Here we find two poles agreeing in every respect on the form of government they would like to have.

All of them would like to have "the government of the people, for the people and by the people." In other words they feel that they must be given a chance to manage or mismanage their things.

This is the way they demand the government they want. They do not want anyone who wastes their time. They are demanding change. They have nothing but contempt for any homeland leader who is a stooge. They have no confidence in any homeland leader who is a stooge. They have no confidence in any homeland leader who indulges in double-talk.

They have nothing but absolute high regard for their leaders who are doing everything in their power to represent them admirably. They admire those leaders who are leading them without fear, leaders with foresight,

leaders who identify themselves with the cause of their people. The leaders who tried to echo their master's voices have been overthrown in the homeland governments and those who are still dubious cannot hope to survive.

Youth is very impatient, both in the rural areas and the urban areas. The youth has but one mind, one direction, one desire, one aim. That is, a change in their lifetime.

They are so impatient that the universities are full of students who want a government that is not blind to fact, and that facts are of course love and peace — freedom for all.

It is not that the students do not want the homelands, but that they are too slow and wasting their time in bringing change.

That is why the Black power movement is so meaningful for them; that is why they do not believe in the evolutionary process of change and that is why there is so much student unrest in the different universities and their desire is to effect change at all costs.

This is the very thing that brought about the Pan Africanist Congress which brought about Sharpeville. PAC thought that the African National Congress and even its youth league were too moderate to bring about effective political change. So PAC broke away.

Saso at its conference at Hammanskraal, refused to co-operate with any homeland government. When one keeps the impatience of our youth in mind, then one can understand why the youth is not impressed.

It is for the leadership in the homeland governments to convince the youth that they can lead them to complete political freedom.

And we hope and trust that this mood of our youth will not be met with another Sharpeville. If that happens, we will have another dark page in the history of our people in South Africa.

The homeland leaders at their summit meeting at Umtata last year had the privilege of discussing the envisaged federal state of South Africa. At East London a conference of repre-

sentatives of homeland governments, universities, the Press, Indians, Coloureds and others was held.

From these two conferences and from statements from our outstanding leaders such as our Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, Dr. Helen Suzman and the Progressive Party, C. N. M. Phatudi, the SA Institute of Race Relations, the Christian Institute, Nusas, Verligte Action groups, progressive university leaders and all peace-loving citizens of South Africa, I gather the impression, and I am convinced that we are on a threshold of a new South Africa.

The South Africa in which the great ideals and noble visions are about to be realised. We move forward to a great future for South Africa, a South Africa in which we will live as one family, where we shall not kill as at Sharpeville. Here in South Africa we want to save and not to destroy our fellowman, we want to give every soul in this country a better chance for the doctrine of militant violence has been rendered nul and void.

Let Sharpeville never occur again, for the people of KwaZulu want to be left alone; the people of Lebowa want to be left alone; the people of the Transkei want to be left alone; the people of Gazankulu want to be left alone; the people of the Ciskei want to be left alone; the people of Vendaland want to be left alone; the people of BophuthaTswana want to be left alone, so that Sharpeville must never occur again.

Here in South Africa a new thing is coming. It will not be Black, it will not be White, it will not be KwaZulu, it will not be Gazankulu, it will not be Transkei, it will not be Ciskei, it will not be Indian, it will not be Coloured, it will not be United Party, it will not be Progressive Party, it will be a new thing.

It will be love and it will be peace. Here we stand in Lebowa. Here we will stand in the new South Africa in which racial hatred and racial strife curse us no more.

OFFICIALS had tea or shook hands with Blacks in order to protect the White nation, the director of homelands and senior deputy secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. C. J. Grobler said yesterday. He assured 165 Afrikaans schoolchildren at the Sabra Youth Congress that it was not an infringement of apartheid. It was a sacrifice for the sake of the people.

Rand Daily Mail, July 20, 1974.