

MESSAGE FROM THABO MBEKI TO THE MEETING DEDICATED TO THE 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT: JUNE 26, 2009.

Dear friends:

I would like to thank ACTSA for taking the initiative to ensure that all of us come together to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Unfortunately, because we are currently involved in work to help bring peace to Darfur, Sudan, it has proved impossible for me to accept the kind invitation to attend today's gathering to celebrate the birth of the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

This important occasion will give us the opportunity to pay tribute to the many outstanding citizens of the United Kingdom, the organisations and the millions of people who engaged in a protracted struggle to help end the apartheid crime against humanity.

From a modest beginning on June 26, 1959, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement grew into a mighty voice for the liberation of the people of South Africa.

Beyond this, it inspired the birth of a global movement of solidarity which in many respects was unprecedented in terms of the numbers of people it mobilised into action and the number of years it ensured the engagement of these masses throughout the globe.

The people of South Africa achieved their liberation 15 years ago. Today there are millions of young adults in the UK and everywhere else in the world who have never read a newspaper report and never seen television footage of the apartheid system as it was.

These might therefore never fully understand what it was that inspired millions in the United Kingdom and billions across the globe to position themselves for many decades as determined fighters for the defeat of the apartheid system.

These young adults would never have seen the notices once posted everywhere in South Africa – “Whites Only”. They would not have seen white only rugby and cricket teams touring their countries or playing with their own national teams in South Africa.

They would not have read the regular reports of people being charged, tried and convicted to long terms of imprisonment for daring to say – no to racism, no to racial domination, no to white minority rule!

They would not have seen unarmed demonstrators being shot down in cold blood by a racist regime that was determined to sustain its tyrannical rule at all costs. Nor would they have read of freedom fighters being executed by hanging and of the systematic torture and the death in police stations of many of those who had been arrested for their opposition to apartheid.

These young adults would also not have been exposed to media reports recounting the enormous destruction the apartheid regime visited on many countries of Southern Africa as it tried to create a *cordon sanitaire* around its borders to guarantee its survival.

They would not have been exposed to the resolve of millions in the United Kingdom and their fellow combatants throughout the world to defeat the scourge of racism, of which apartheid South Africa served as the fountainhead.

Imprisoned within the paradigms of the Cold War, important Western governments in the United Kingdom and elsewhere refused to join the citizens to oppose and defeat a pernicious racist system which offended all morality and all human rights and international law.

When these governments spoke about apartheid South Africa, they claimed to speak for the countries they governed. The fact of the matter however was that in this country, for instance, it was the Anti-Apartheid Movement that truly represented the United Kingdom.

This was so because the millions of Britons took the noble position that the denial of the human rights and dignity to the black majority in South Africa constituted a denial of the same rights and dignity to themselves as well.

Thus did they, in struggle, assert the indivisibility of the human race, upholding the view that an injury to one was an injury to all!

The occasion of the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the foundation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement provides an opportunity to expose especially the younger generations to this history and thus to inspire and mobilise them to join a struggle that did not end with the defeat of the apartheid system.

I speak here of the struggle that must continue, to defeat racism wherever it raises its ugly head. I speak also of the challenging struggle that must continue, to eradicate the deeply-entrenched legacy of colonialism and apartheid not only in South Africa but also throughout Southern Africa.

In this regard, we must once more salute the establishment and the work of ACTSA, which confirm the determination of the British people to continue to act in solidarity with the peoples of South and Southern Africa.

The first objective for which the Anti-Apartheid Movement was established fifty years ago was realised when South Africa achieved her liberation fifteen years ago in 1994.

However, that struggle was not only concerned to end the system of apartheid. The millions who participated in it were also keenly interested to see the new South Africa take the lead in the establishment a truly non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic country, which would share its wealth equitably, to end poverty and underdevelopment as well as the gross imbalances in the distribution of opportunity, income and wealth which characterised apartheid South Africa.

Today's celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Anti-Apartheid Movement must therefore serve as a solemn occasion when both Britons and South Africans once more

reaffirm their common determination to continue to act together to build the new South Africa of which billions across the globe dreamt.

Thus would we continue to pay tribute to these billions who were inspired to act to end the system of apartheid because they visualised a world free of racism, intolerance, injustice, deprivation and social exclusion.

Please accept our best wishes as we, together, celebrate the historic occasion of the foundation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, fifty years ago today.

Thank you.