

First Raymond Mhlaba Annual Memorial Lecture delivered by the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 22 August 2008

Programme Director,
Mrs Dideka Mhlaba and the Mhlaba Family,
Chancellor of the NMMU, Judge Pius Langa,
Chairperson of the NMMU's Council, Judge Ronnie Pillay,
Vice-Chancellor, Professor Derrick Swartz,
The Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, Ms. Maphazi,
Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Lecturers, Staff, Students and Workers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On the day we buried Oom Ray, Raymond Mhlaba, on February 27, 2005, I had the honour to deliver the Funeral Oration. On that day I said:

"It is not possible to stand here, next to the still life of Oom Ray, without being awed by what his generation of freedom fighters did to give us our humanity."

Today, three-and-half-years later I have no choice but to pose the question - what then have we done with the priceless gift of humanity he and his comrades bestowed to us!

And therefore I start by asking the questions:

What is it that defines our society? What is it that makes for our identity as a people and a nation?

How do we, who live, and have been urged to describe ourselves as proudly South African, answer the questions - who are we? and what are we?

Wherever he may now be, given that he has departed the world of the living, what answer does Raymond Mhlaba give when he is asked the question - who are these people among whom you were born, grew and died!

Many in the mass media communicate deeply troubling and comprehensively negative messages, perhaps drawn from particular and actual incidents, that, among other things, as a people:

- we are prone to violent crime and corruption:
- we are driven criminally to abuse women and children:
- through heartless negligence, we have condemned millions to dehumanising poverty:
- as individuals and leaders of our people we are hungry for power and its abuse for personal gain:
- our leaders would corrupt the institutions of the democratic state for personal benefit, the destruction of the rule of law and the negation of democratic practice:
- we live in, and preside over a community defined by the collapse of all moral values, which, therefore, is in desperate need for moral regeneration:
- we live in a society that once showed immense promise, but which is now condemned to despair and eventual collapse, burdened by a leadership that is dishonest, self-serving and shamelessly selfish: and,
- rather than an African Renaissance, we face yet another false African start.

With all this in mind, and yet inspired by the noble example of what Raymond Mhlaba did to help give us our freedom, let us talk about ourselves both as Africans and as members of the human family.

And therefore I repeat after the African American poet, Maya Angelou, what she said in her poem, "A Brave and Starling Truth":

We, this people, on this small and drifting
planet

Whose hands can strike with such abandon
That, in a twinkling, life is sapped from the
living

Yet those same hands can touch with such
healing,
irresistible tenderness,

That the haughty neck is happy to bow

And the proud back is glad to bend

Out of such chaos, of such contradiction

We learn that we are neither devils nor
divines

And thus do I advise Oom Ray that he must tell his interlocutors that we, the people among whom he was born, grew and died, are neither devils nor divines.

But this I must also say, that he must tell the ancestors that we are determined constantly to strive to be more divine and less Satanic, rather than more Satanic and less divine.

What this says is that we, the political offspring of Raymond Mhlaba, are human, despite all prejudice and insulting arrogance that seek to suggest otherwise.

Human beings are of necessity social animals. Even at its most primitive stage, homo sapiens could not exist and survive except in communities, starting with the family.

Thus, logically, we must assume that the notion of social cohesion, however understood, has been, objectively and subjectively, an integral part of the formation of human society from the very beginning of the emergence of the animal species to which we belong, described as human beings.

This matter has been a subject of intellectual inquiry for many centuries. To illustrate this, permit me to cite a short excerpt from the famous treatise by Frederick Engels, "Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State."

Engels wrote:

"According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other.

"The lower the development of labour and the more limited the amount of its products, and consequently, the more limited also the wealth of the society, the more the social order is found to be dominated by kinship groups. However, within this structure of society based on kinship groups the productivity of labour increasingly develops, and with it private property and exchange, differences of wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labour power of others, and hence the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which in the course of generations strive to adapt the old social order to the new conditions, until at last their incompatibility brings about a complete upheaval. In the collision of the newly-developed social classes, the old society founded on kinship groups is broken up; in its place appears a new society, with its control centred in the state, the subordinate units of which are no longer kinship associations, but local associations; a society in which the system of the family is completely dominated by the system of property, and in which there now freely develop those class antagonisms and class struggles that have hitherto formed the content of all written history."

In the end Engels is arguing that both to propagate itself through the process of human reproduction, and to maintain itself by producing food to eat, the human species needed to exist as a community, with the family being the first expression of such community. The later emergence of communities larger than the family, the division of society into classes, and the birth of the state, are but further advances in the process of the formation of the human community.

We must therefore make the assertion that, whether openly stated or otherwise, instinctively and from the very beginning, homo sapiens could not but ask itself the related questions - who am I, and what am I?

Answers to these questions define issues about identity and belonging, and therefore both consciousness of self and integration within, or, put differently, non-alienation from a larger whole. They speak to the sense of belonging without which no human being can find a sense of equilibrium.

Human society has survived and grown over many millennia, presumably based on some uniting sense of community.

And yet, less than a mere 50 years ago, in 1961, the African-American novelist, writer, thinker and activist, James Baldwin, could publish a book under the haunting title - "Nobody Knows My Name".

In this context, in 1965, James Baldwin said: "Now, leaving aside all the physical factors one can quote - leaving aside the rape or murder, leaving aside the bloody catalogue of oppression which we are too familiar with any way - what the (racist) system does to the subjugated is to destroy his sense of reality. It destroys his father's authority over him. His father can no longer tell him anything because his past has disappeared."

When oppression has destroyed the sense of reality among the subjugated, and ensured that their past disappears, they, like James Baldwin, cannot but tell the truth - Nobody Knows My Name!

Commenting on the absolute social alienation this statement describes, James Baldwin said:

"Most of us, no matter what we say, are walking in the dark, whistling in the dark. Nobody knows what is going to happen to him from one moment to the next, or how one will bear it. This is irreducible. And it's true of everybody. Now, it is true that the nature of society is to create, among its citizens, an illusion of safety; but it is also absolutely true that the safety is always necessarily an illusion. Artists are here to disturb the peace."

To disturb the peace of a society that deluded itself that it had achieved social cohesion, making it unnecessary for any body to ask the questions - who am I, and what am I? - James Baldwin decided to shatter the illusion by stating the fact that despite the pretence projecting the existence of a common and benevolent human neighbourhood - Nobody Knows My Name!

We have convened here today to celebrate a great hero of our people who no longer lives - Raymond Mhlaba.

At his death, in 2005, he would never have said - nobody knows my name! By then, surely, the nation knew both his name and what he had done.

Our democratic state decided to honour him by laying to rest his remains in an Official Funeral, to make the statement that not only did the people of South Africa know his name: they also celebrated him as a national hero whose life they were privileged to celebrate.

That was then, three years ago.

Today, we must ask ourselves the question - what justification is there that we convene at this important centre of research and learning once more to honour and speak about the late Raymond Mhlaba, as we did on the day we laid his mortal remains to rest at Zwile Cemetery in this city!

To answer this question, I would say that Raymond Mhlaba was and is one of our outstanding national heroes.

I would say that the Raymond Mhlaba Trust Fund and this Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University took a correct decision when they decided to institute a Lecture Series named after the national hero, Raymond Mhlaba.

In this context, I salute and thank the Mhlaba Trust Fund and this University for giving all of us the possibility to reflect on the life of Raymond Mhlaba, to speak about what his life and example mean with regard to the future of our nation - to prove the statement that though Oom Ray is dead, yet his spirit lives on!

At the beginning of this Lecture I spoke of questions whose answers "define issues about identity and belonging, and therefore both consciousness of self and integration within, or, put differently, non-alienation from a larger whole. They speak to the sense of belonging without which no human being can find a sense of equilibrium."

I also said: "Thus, logically, we must assume that the notion of social cohesion, however understood, has been an objective and subjective integral part of the formation of human society from the very beginning of the emergence of the animal species to which we belong, described as human beings."

I believe that it is in this context that we must speak today about the national hero, Raymond Mhlaba.

Specifically, I would like us together to reflect on the critically important matter of the achievement by democratic South Africa of such social cohesion that none of our citizens should, arising out of a sense of social alienation, make the assertion - nobody knows my name!

Logically and inevitably, we must, in this context, ask ourselves the question - what are the driving forces that would give birth to such national social cohesion and national identity as would lead to the outcome that none among our citizens would make the assertion, as our kith-and-kin, James Baldwin, did, that - nobody knows my name!

In this context I would make bold to assert that any people that has no heroes and heroines would find it very difficult to achieve social cohesion and define its national identity, making it impossible that any citizen should make the claim - nobody knows my name!

Raymond Mhlaba is dead, and yet his spirit lives on!

It lives on because it is a vitally important reference point as we, South Africans, individually and collectively, pose to ourselves the questions - who am I, and what am I?

Let me then state the thesis I am advancing in a straight-forward manner, and therefore without any equivocation.

We constitute a community that is emerging out of three-and-a-half-centuries of division and racial conflict.

Informed by the concept and practice of national reconciliation, we are at work to achieve national and social cohesion, and the birth of a new South African national identity, with all of our citizens inspired by a new patriotism.

To achieve these objectives, which are central to the success of our country as a non-racial and non-sexist democracy, we need heroes and heroines whose sacrifices would communicate the message that what we seek to achieve is practically realisable, provided that, at all times and in all circumstances, we will remain loyal to principle.

Raymond Mhlaba is one of such outstanding national heroes.

The sacrifices he made, and the example he and his comrades set, constitute an integral part of the ethos which determines the sense and definition of our national identity, defining the relevant factors in the context of answering the questions - who am I, and what am I?

We celebrate Raymond Mhlaba as a national hero because his life and the example he set are central drivers of the process of defining a post-apartheid national identity which would:

- enable us to achieve national reconciliation;
- empower us to realise the objective of national unity in diversity;
- unite our diverse nation behind the realisation of the goal of creating a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous and new South Africa;
- ensure the achievement of the RDP of the soul and moral regeneration based on the ethos of Ubuntu;
- drive us to work together for a better life for all; and,
- inspire us to work for the Renaissance of Africa, so that Africans can occupy a place of pride among the peoples of the world.

What this means is that we revere our heroes and heroines because they serve as a source of education and inspiration as we strive to use the political victory of the Democratic Revolution to address the challenge of fundamental social transformation, focused especially on the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment and the elimination of our inherited racial and gender imbalances.

We revere our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, because they serve as a source of education and inspiration as we continue to work to develop the leadership cadre we need, further to advance the Democratic Revolution - a cadre of leaders which, in word and deed, is truly committed selflessly to serve the people of South Africa and Africa, as Raymond Mhlaba was.

We must therefore project and actively 'market' our national heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, precisely to build the sense of national cohesion and national identity which the further advance of the Democratic Revolution demands.

Stated simply, we must use the example set by our national heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, to establish a popularly accepted platform, a uniting vision, which the nation would use to propel

the country towards the achievement of the humane goals spelt out in our national Constitution and the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

I am therefore making the bold statement that as a Continent we cannot define our identity without reference to the past that gave birth to our historical heroes and heroines.

In this context, therefore, we meet here today to pay tribute to Raymond Mhlaba because we need heroes such as he, to help us decide what we must do, further to advance the objectives of the National Democratic Revolution, and inspire the masses of the people to take ownership of this process of fundamental social transformation.

We have gathered here today to speak about the national hero, Raymond Mhlaba. We have thus convened also to communicate the message that the example set by our heroes and heroines is critical to the birth and assertion of a new national identity and cultivation of our social cohesion.

These, together, will make it possible for all components of our nation to act in unity as honest partners in the struggle to defeat the common enemy of the dehumanisation which is the offspring of poverty as well as centuries of our definition by some as a sub-human Other.

In other words, and once again, we need our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, because they help us to define a national identity that affirms our humanity and our human dignity.

In a 1999 article on 'Kyrgyz National Identity', Professor Iraj Bashiri wrote:

"Often a nation's national identity is summed up in the character, personality, or actions of one of its many native sons. Cyrus the Great, Alexander the Great, Abraham Lincoln, and Alexander Solzhenyitsn represent ancient Iran, ancient Greece, the United States, and Russia in this respect. Kyrgyzstan is proud of its own native son, Chingiz Aitmatov, known in some circles as 'the man who walks on water'."

Earlier than this, in his famous 1935 poem, "Questions From a Worker Who Reads", the German playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht, had written:

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will read the names of kings.

Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?...

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?

Caesar defeated the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?

Philip of Spain wept when his armada went down.
Was he the only one to weep?

Frederick the Second won the Seven Years War.
Who else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?

Every ten years a great man.
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

Brecht was right to pose these questions, to demand a more realistic and people-based presentation of all historical processes. We are fortunate that we have never defined our own heroes and heroines apart from the masses of the people they inspired and led.

Where Bertolt Brecht says "In the books you will read the names of kings", we can respond, truthfully, that our own book of heroes and heroines is not one of kings as individual makers of history, making it necessary to ask the question - Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock...used to build Thebes of the seven gates.

Thus would we assert that Iraj Bashiri was also correct to draw attention to the role that heroes and heroines play in the making of the identity and cohesion of nations, including our own.

Whereas in the passages we quoted Frederick Engels presented an argument about the objective necessity for the formation of the human community, and thus human society, in this Lecture we seek to address the equally important dimension to the very existence of this human community and society - the subjective!

We accept that objectively the human species cannot exist except in community. In addition, we wish to assert that out of this objective reality is born the subjective understanding that that objective reality, which combines human beings, who have the capacity to think, is sustained by universally accepted subjective propositions that constitute an intellectual justification of the existence of the community.

In his famous book, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism", first published in 1983, Benedict Anderson said:

"I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...It is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."

We can, of course, contest this definition of the nation as being incorrect because it treats the subjective as absolute, and altogether banishes the objective factors about the formation of nations immanent in the observations made by Engels in the passages we cited.

However, as the saying goes, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. Accordingly, we must consider seriously the Anderson thesis about the subjective expression of the nation, which is, after all, nothing more than an explanation of what already exists, an intellectual substantiation of objective reality.

In any case, as actors in the actual world of human existence, we know that nations do achieve national cohesion and therefore a shared patriotism, by defining themselves in particular ways - by giving themselves a distinct character that, in many instances, is little more than an "imagined political community", which imagination might indeed be based upon and derive from an extrapolation drawn from some instances of objective reality.

Perhaps one of the best known examples of the imagined political community of which Anderson wrote is encapsulated in the proposition about The American Dream, which millions of US citizens accept as a true reflection of their nation, and the essence of what defines them as a people, the very basis of the patriotism that guarantees the national cohesion of the United States of America.

As part of its public education responsibilities, the US Library of Congress has sought to educate the US public about what is meant by The American Dream.

Under the heading, "What is the American Dream?", it said:

"The term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* which was written in 1931. He states:

"The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

In their article, "Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Alive and Well?", Isabel Sawhill & John E. Morton wrote:

"For more than two centuries, economic opportunity and the prospect of upward mobility have formed the bedrock upon which the American story has been anchored - inspiring people in distant lands to seek our shores and sustaining the unwavering optimism of Americans at home. From the hopes of the earliest settlers to the aspirations of today's diverse population, the American Dream unites us in a common quest for individual and national success."

For me, perhaps the best presentation about The American Dream was made by the eminent African-American and Esteemed Member of the Order of Companions of O.R. Tambo, Martin Luther King Jr.

I trust that you will bear with me as I quote from a sermon he delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, on 4 July 1965, entitled *The American Dream*. In his inimitable style, he told his congregants:

"And so this morning I would like to use as a subject from which to preach: "The American Dream."

"It wouldn't take us long to discover the substance of that dream. It is found in those majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by God, Creator, with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." This is a dream. It's a great dream.

"The first saying we notice in this dream is an amazing universalism. It doesn't say "some men," it says "all men." It doesn't say "all white men," it says "all men," which includes black men. It does not say "all Gentiles," it says "all men," which includes Jews. It doesn't say "all Protestants," it says "all men," which includes Catholics. It doesn't even say "all theists and believers," it says "all men," which includes humanists and agnostics.

"Then that dream goes on to say another thing that ultimately distinguishes our nation and our form of government from any totalitarian system in the world. It says that each of us has certain basic rights that

are neither derived from, or conferred by the state. In order to discover where they came from, it is necessary to move back behind the dim mist of eternity.

"They are God-given, gifts from His hands. Never before in the history of the world has a socio-political document expressed in such profound, eloquent, and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of human personality. The American dream reminds us, and we should think about it anew on this Independence Day, that every man is an heir of the legacy of dignity and worth.

"Now ever since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this dream in all of its magnificence - to use a big word that the psychiatrists use - America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself. On the one hand we have proudly professed the great principles of democracy, but on the other hand we have sadly practiced the very opposite of those principles.

"But now more than ever before, America is challenged to realize its dream, for the shape of the world today does not permit our nation the luxury of an anaemic democracy. And the price that America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro and other minority groups is the price of its own destruction. For the hour is late. And the clock of destiny is ticking out. We must act now before it is too late.

"And so it is marvellous and great that we do have a dream, that we have a nation with a dream; and to forever challenge us; to forever give us a sense of urgency; to forever stand in the midst of the "isness" of our terrible injustices; to remind us of the "oughtness" of our noble capacity for justice and love and brotherhood."

Martin Luther King Jr affirmed the powerful motivating force of the "imagined political community" presented as The American Dream, which unites the US population around a common patriotism, saying - "And so it is marvellous and great that we do have a dream, that we have a nation with a dream.. to remind us of the "oughtness" of our noble capacity for justice and love and brotherhood."

In this sermon, Martin Luther King Jr referred to the 1776 US Declaration of Independence, and therefore the authors of this important document -the heroes - such as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, as the fountain of the national and defining identity of the American people, which enables them to act in unity as a nation.

Thus have the Americans defined themselves - as a country of liberty, justice, love and brotherhood, equal opportunity, a welcoming home to all human beings, a humane habitat that provides freedom to everybody, without discrimination, to achieve his or her highest aspirations.

When Martin Luther King Jr preached about what he called "oughtness", he drew attention to the fact that the African-Americans were systemically excluded from The American Dream. At the same time, he affirmed the reality of this Dream, provided that it expressed itself as it was intended to - It doesn't say "some men," it says "all men." It doesn't say "all white men," it says "all men," which includes black men. It does not say "all Gentiles," it says "all men," which includes Jews."

To come home and talk about our own imagined political community, let me quote what an outstanding patriot, an Esteemed Member of the Order of Luthuli, Anton Lembede, said more than 60 years ago in an article "Know Thyself", published in the "Bantu World" on June 30, 1945. Lembede wrote:

"Know Thyself: These few words pithily synthesise or epitomize the teaching of the ancient Greek philosopher - Socrates - who lived about 400 B.C "As it is with individuals, so it is with nations. Each nation has its own peculiar unique character which no other nation in the world possesses or can possess. Each nation has thus its own peculiar talents and potentialities to develop and to realize. Each nation has as its own peculiar contribution to make towards the general progress, welfare and happiness

of mankind. This eternal law of variations and individual differences among organisms and species was re-discovered and re-emphasised by Charles Darwin about 2 000 years after Socrates"

"Africans too, cannot be mere doers and imitators of other nations and their ideologies. Africans can borrow and assimilate what is good from elsewhere but they must at all costs retain and determinedly preserve their own essential character and identity. This is the basic teaching of Africanism, and is in line with the ideas of the great thinkers, for, with a few exceptions, Socrates and Darwin are the highest peaks of human intelligence. Know Thyself."

In these words Anton Lembede stated his own and his generation's imagination of ourselves as a political community.

39 years earlier, in 1906, a predecessor liberator to Anton Lembede, Pixley ka Izaka Seme, had gone further in identifying Africa's particular contribution to the elevation of human society. In the article, "The Regeneration of Africa" he wrote:

"The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilization is soon to be added to the world. The African is not a proletarian in the world of science and art. He has precious creations of his own, of ivory, of copper and of gold, fine, plated willow-ware and weapons of superior workmanship. Civilization resembles an organic being in its development -it is born, it perishes, and it can propagate itself. More particularly, it resembles a plant, it takes root in the teeming earth, and when the seeds fall in other soils new varieties sprout up. The most essential departure of this new civilization is that it shall be thoroughly spiritual and humanistic - indeed a regeneration moral and eternal!"

Speaking in 1961, 55 years after the publication of the Seme article, a successor liberator to both Seme and Lembede, Albert Luthuli, further enriching our imagination of ourselves, said:

"Still licking the scars of past wrongs perpetrated on her, could (Africa) not be magnanimous and practise no revenge? Her hand of friendship scornfully rejected, her pleas for justice and fair-play spurned, should she not nonetheless seek to turn enmity into amity? Though robbed of her lands, her independence and opportunities - this, oddly enough, often in the name of civilization and even Christianity, should she not see her destiny as being that of making a distinctive contribution to human progress and human relationships with a peculiar new African flavour enriched by the diversity of cultures she enjoys, thus building on the summits of present human achievement an edifice that would be one of the finest tributes to the genius of man? She should see this hour of her fulfilment as a challenge to her to labour on until she is purged of racial domination, and as an opportunity of reassuring the world that her national aspiration lies, not in overthrowing white domination to replace it by a black caste, but in building a non-racial democracy that shall be a monumental brotherhood, a "brotherly community" with none discriminated against on grounds of race or colour."

What Pixley Seme, Anton Lembede and Albert Luthuli did was to bestow to us our own African Dream, giving back to us our unique identity and pride, providing us the possibility to determine what imagined political community we wish to be!

Thus have we had no problem in answering the questions - who am I? and what am I? Neither, in this context, have we had to carry the painful burden embedded in the cri de coeur - nobody knows my name!

Our past public intellectuals have done what they had to do to help us regain our national identity, without which we cannot reassert our humanity.

Our contemporary public intelligentsia is confronted by the challenge to build on this heritage, to give further substance to our imagined political community. This must tell us, in our millions, who and what we are, and therefore inspire us to coalesce, as a nation, around a new and shared patriotism.

It must therefore project a national programme of action which puts on a high pedestal the perspective of optimism about the future and united national action, rather than a pessimistic view about what tomorrow portends and a vision of a fractious society, condemned to be perpetually at war with itself.

Every year we observe September 24 as our national Heritage Day. To honour this important day, four years ago, in 2004, I made some comments I will now take the liberty to recall. I said, then:

"For the (Heritage) month, our government has put forward the theme -'Celebrating our Living Heritage in the Tenth Year of our Democracy.'"Our living heritage consists of all the objects and practices that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, (which) is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity"

"We too, (like those in the African Diaspora whose ancestors were transported from Africa as slaves), have had to contend with an historical reality that deliberately sought to deprive us of our sense of identity and continuity. Colonial and apartheid oppression sought to rob us of our "cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, (which) is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history".

"Deliberately, this racist system sought to destroy everything that would give the indigenous majority a sense of identity and continuity. This entailed not only the military defeat of this majority and its political subjugation.

"It also meant the total transformation of the life conditions that would give the African majority the possibility to maintain its identity and its living heritage. The Africans lost their land and therefore the possibility for an independent economic existence. But this also meant the virtual loss of the intangibles, of such cultural norms as communal life, human solidarity and ubuntu, which were the non-material expression of the material conditions of pre-colonial society."

And so must I now return specifically to the principal subject of this Memorial Lecture - our national hero, Raymond Mhlaba.

We are meeting here today to celebrate Raymond Mhlaba because what he did, during six long decades, helped the black oppressed of our country to sustain their sense of identity and continuity.

We have convened here today to celebrate Raymond Mhlaba because what he did, during six long decades, made it possible for the black oppressed to retain for themselves and to bestow this as a legacy to our nation as a whole, such cultural norms and practices as communal life, human solidarity and ubuntu.

We celebrate Raymond Mhlaba because what he did over six decades, as, simultaneously, a member of the ANC, a member of the Communist Party and a trade unionist, made it possible for us to answer the questions we posed at the beginning:

What is it that defines our society? What is it that makes for our identity as a people and a nation?

How do we, who live, and have been urged to describe ourselves as proudly South African, answer the questions: who are we? And what are we?

To answer these questions, let me repeat what I said earlier, that our national identity, our South African Dream, is characterised by:

- national reconciliation;
- unity in diversity;
- democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism and shared prosperity;
- the RDP of the Soul and moral regeneration;
- a better life for all;
- the Renaissance of Africa; and,
- a cadre of leaders, in all spheres of human activity, that genuinely honours its compact with the people to act solely and exclusively as servants of the people.

If we agree that these should be the defining elements of our national identity, we must then, together, carry out two important tasks.

The first task is to continue the further elaboration of these defining elements, spread their message to our people, promote them and ensure that they form part of the national consciousness.

The second task must then surely be that we constantly evaluate the progress we are making in our efforts to realise these defining elements of our national identity, so that we celebrate our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, not through public celebrations, but by actually building a new South Africa that in its actuality reflects the South African Dream which we owe to our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba.

Our country continues its advance from what was to what will be. Many in our society know what was. Hopefully, the critical mass among us knows what is. But certainly, the majority of our people do not know, and are concerned to know what the future will be.

Thus must we, together, the entire echelon of the leadership of our country and people, to honour our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba, communicate the message to the masses of our people that the South Africa of tomorrow, the future, will be defined by the South African Dream whose birth we owe to our heroes and heroines, such as Raymond Mhlaba.

The indigenous language spoken in this part of our country has gifted our nation with the expression - isiziba siviwa ngodondolo!

Those who would cross rivers therefore knew that udondolo was their guide and the guarantor of their safety.

As our nation crossed the rivers to reach our own land of freedom, it has relied on its heroes and heroines to serve as udondolo.

Through the sacrifices they made, the vision they advanced, always loyal to principle, and the example they set about what it means to be a revolutionary cadre and a leader of the people, these heroes and heroines have taught us what it means to be udondolo - the guide to, and guarantor of a future of happiness for the masses of our people.

We have convened here today to salute and pay a well deserved tribute to a national hero, Raymond Mhlaba - udondolo lesizwe.

Together we see ourselves as inheritors of the legacy he left behind, generations that have readily picked up the spear which dropped from his hand when the time came for him to take his leave of the world of the living.

As holders of that spear, who describe themselves as cadres of progressive change, we have the obligatory task constantly to ask ourselves the questions:

- are we, in the practice, promoting the realisation of the South African Dream which Raymond Mhlaba helped to define; and,
- are we, in the practice, udondolo, as Raymond Mhlaba and our other heroes and heroines were udondolo lesizwe!

Today, Raymond Mhlaba sits in his honoured place at the kgotla at which our ancestors have convened in a permanent congress.

As we meet here today, to honour his life and his example, we must let him and the kgotla of the ancestors know that we, the bearers of the spears they handed to us, are determined to implement their command, to do what must be done to give our nation and people their identity, ready to serve as udondolo!

No greater honour can be bestowed upon us than this - that we are charged to act as the loyal offspring of the national hero, Isithwalandwe, Raymond Mhlaba.

I thank you for your attention.