**EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**IN MORONI, COMOROS,**

**LECTURE BY H.E. MBULELO BUNGANE, ON 27 OCTOBER 2017, CENTENARY CELEBRATION OF OLIVER REGINALD TAMBO**

**THEME: LEADERSHIP IN SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE; LESSONS FROM OR TAMBO**

Your Excellency, Vice President, Mr Abdallah Said Sarouma, Vice President in Charge of Transports, Post and Telecommunications, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Your Excellencies, Former Vice Presidents, Dr Mohadji, and Mr Mohamed Soilihi,

Your Excellency, Minister of Interior, Information, Decentralisation In charge of Relations With the Institutions Spokesperson of The Government, Mr Mohamed Daoudou

Your Excellency, Minister of Finances and Budget, Mr Said Ali Said Chayhane

Your Excellency Governor of the Island of Ngazidja, Mr Hassani Hamadi

Your Excellency, the Mayor of Moroni, Mr Cheik Ali Bacar Kassim

Your Excellencies other Members of the Cabinet,

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and Representatives of International Organizations accredited to the Union of Comoros,

Senior Members of Government, Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

Bariza Masihu

Bonsoir

Assalam Anleikoum

It is a great pleasure and honour for us to speak to you on this important occasion, the Centenary birthday of one of our greatest leader, Oliver Reginald Tambo. As mentioned already, if he was still alive he would have been 100 years today. Our Government declared 2017, the Year of Oliver Tambo in honour of his immeasurable contribution to the attainment of freedom in South Africa. We also want to use this day to once more say a big thank you to all of you, the people of the Union of Comoros and members of the international community. Without your support, we may not have ended apartheid in South Africa.

We decided to celebrate Tambo’s birthday under the **THEME: LEADERSHIP IN SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE: LESSONS FROM OR TAMBO.** We believe leadership plays a critical role in any society and hope that lessons from OR’s leadership will be of some use to all of us.

Oliver Reginald Tambo (OR) was born on 27 October 1917 in Bizana, Eastern Cape. He was very bright. In 1936, OR together with another African student passed his Junior Certificate with a First Class degree which made history in the whole country. According to one of his students, OR had tremendous humanity but at the same time logical and scientific. Even at high school, OR was already recognized and appreciated by his peers as a great thinker and listener, also very analytical.

From an early age, OR was concerned with the suffering of African people inspired the African values of Ubuntu which relates to generosity and humanity. OR's political consciousness was heightened by an assault of an African woman at Fort Hare in September 1941. She was assaulted by the Boarding Master but the authorities exonerated him after an enquiry. The incident enraged OR, even though he did not know her name. To him, she was someone's sister or mother or wife who was entitled to be treated with respect like all other women. In response to the incident, the students decided to boycott lectures. In 1942, OR was expelled from the University after he led the students on an issue that he believed religious principle for him.

After his expulsion from Fort Hare, St Peters, his former high school, in Johannesburg offered him a teaching post although he had not applied for it.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE YOUTH LEAGUE**

When OR arrived in Johannesburg in 1942, the President of the ANC was Dr Xuma. Together with others including Mandela, and Sisulu, OR argued for the transformation of the ANC to become more active at the grassroots level. They argued that it should however keep its tradition of African democracy, collective leadership and consensus decision making which ensured unity and provided a voice for African people. He conceived the idea of establishing a youth organization within the ANC. The ANC Youth League (ANCYL) was launched in September 1944. At its launch, it called on all youth in the sub-continent to rally around the national liberation movement to galvanize and vitalise the national struggle. He was selected as its first General Secretary. Although he saw people as people, and respected them regardless of their race, he embraced African nationalism. He wanted African people to be in charge of their destiny. The ANCYL developed its program of action in 1949 which became a turning point for the ANC. Its style of leadership was based on African democratic decision making, emphasizing collective leadership and a consensus seeking approach.

**PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES AND VALUES**

Oliver Tambo’s moral stance took shape early in his life, around 16 years. OR due to his early education at Christian schools, was deeply religious, and was always guided by prayer. He formed a strong bond with an Anglican priest, Father Trevor Huddleston who arrived in SA in 1943 from the U.K. His socially based sermons were popular with the Black community. He also developed an activist outlook which was aligned to OR's approach. He became a model priest to OR and influenced him to desire to become a priest.

He was a devout Christian who believed in the sanctity of life, the brotherhood of humanity which strongly opposed injustices. For him the human being in a person came first before ideology, creed, race, etc. He valued the intrinsic value of every human being.

OR was distressed about his observation that a culture of racism had become accepted by black people following race riots involving African and Indians in Durban in 1949. He asserted that the Congress Movement opposed all racism, including black racism against whites.

OR was one of a few people of his generation who were sensitive to gender issues. He urged women to break the glass ceiling. He called on them to liberate men from outdated concepts and attitudes about the place and role of women.

Tambo was a man of impeccable honesty and integrity both at a personal level and in public affairs. OR ensured that funding given by donors was not diverted to other ends. He did not want the goodwill and trust relations that he had built to be destroyed through the misuse of donor funding.

OR had a very strong work ethic. He also preferred to lead by example. He was a very humble person, he carried himself like an ordinary person. Early in Dar Es Salaam, he stayed at a guest house which was shared with other office workers. He cooked when it was his turn to cook, he slept on a mattress on the floor like everyone else. He also worked on improving their skills. He was always concerned with the welfare of ANC members, giving them individual attention. He was available to hear their concerns. He led by listening.

Throughout the history of his leadership, OR sought to maintain the moral high ground for the ANC. The military wing of the ANC, uMkhonto We Sizwe (MK) always minimized violence in its operations.

**SUPPORT FROM HIS WIFE, ADELAIDE TAMBO**

OR was private and discreet as a young man. He was very critical in choosing friends and associates. He preferred people with independent thinking and action oriented. He was attracted to people who challenged him intellectually. He met his wife Adelaide Tsukudu at an ANCYL event in 1948. Adelaide was 17 years old and a student. She was confident, assertive and determined. They were married on 22 December 1956. After their marriage, OR helped with household duties. He prepared breakfast for the family and made his bed. He also assisted with the children. He practiced what he had urged ANC members to do in 1955.

In April 1958, OR informed his wife of the ANC’s decision that the family should leave SA. When the Sharpeville Massacre happened on 21 March, the plan for OR's departure was accelerated. Adelaide agreed with the decision for OR to leave on 29 March. Before he left, he spent the whole night and the next day at the office finishing some files. Adelaide left SA in June and arrived in London in September 1960. When she arrived, OR did not have his own accommodation. They shared a room at a house belonging to another SA expatriate. Adelaide soon moved to a separate flat and found a job. She was able to provide for the family. Over the next 30 years, OR traveled extensively. They saw each other irregularly, sometimes once per year.

When Mandela was in London in 1962, he had a long discussion with Adelaide to explain that Tambo’s Mission was about to change and that she needed to support him. He would seldom spend time with the family at home.

OR was a selfless leader. He put the interest and concerns of others before his own. His concern for his comrades on Robben Island was enduring. On one occasion, he had an argument with Adelaide because she had complained that whenever he visited London, his time was always taken by political work and did not spend time with the children. In response he wrote to Adelaide, "I understood what you have said and I understand the difficulties. But the people in Robben Island don't come to see their children even for 30 minutes. So when I get a day or two, I am most grateful".

Adelaide once reprimanded OR for working too hard and he responded that he had other plans for his “But God had other plans for me. God’s plan was for me to fight in the political liberation for my people.” In his daily prayers, he continued to place his life in the care of God. He also once replied to Adelaide’s remarks that he may not see freedom as a result of his over exerting work schedule, “Perhaps I shall not live to see the Promised Land, but my people shall have reached it.”

**HIS LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES AND STYLE**

The leadership qualities of Tambo were identified during his high school days. According to one of his head masters, Tambo was a very deep thinker. Because of his personality, OR skillfully declined the offer of being a Head Prefect at St Peters in 1936 and instead proposed that he be a Deputy Head Prefect. He did not like to be in the limelight. He was not attracted by prestige, power and authority.

OR had a very sharp strategic mind. He always focused on the big picture. OR understood the strategy of "acting right" which entailed being unthreatening in tricky situations, to show maximum affability and minimum arrogance without compromising his integrity. He had to balance these considerations through great self-control. According to Mandela, OR as a university student was outstanding in debates, had a disciplined mind, and was a clear thinker who could see both sides of a problem.

OR articulated the strategic objective of the ANC as the seizure of power by the people and the use of that power to build a united, democratic, non-racial and peace loving South Africa as visualized in the Freedom Charter.

Tambo was deeply impressed by Dr Xuma's style of leadership. In his selection of people to work with, Xuma did not favour relatives or homeboys nor people who were connected to famous people. He selected ordinary people. He was also struck by the participatory and democratic style and accountability to his people by Chief Albert Luthuli.

OR respected organizational procedures including taking mandated positions. On 8 January 1965, Tambo called for a consultative conference due to the leadership gap that had arisen following the sentencing of Mandela and others. He also called another Consultative Conference in 1969 to respond to complaints against the leadership. The purpose was amongst others to re-examine strategy and tactics. In his Presidential address, he acknowledged that there were problems which threatened to derail the struggle. He was at pains to encourage open discussions. He advised other delegates that he would be participating as a fellow freedom fighter and not as President. During the course of the conference, OR resigned his position. He was persuaded to rejoin the Conference and was unanimously re-elected together with a new committee. A revised strategy was adopted and leadership structures were revised. ANC membership was opened to all races except on the NEC.

His style of leadership was based on consensus decision making. During his meetings, everyone would be listened to and their views taken into account. He would not suppress any views. During debates, all were equals. He was regarded as one of the greatest listeners.

OR was keen to nurture a generation of future leaders with practical skills to run SA and its economy when apartheid ended. He preferred to teach by example. He also personified the virtues of discipline, punctuality and sobriety. OR encouraged the ANC to learn from other experiences elsewhere. For example, in 1978 he led a delegation of ANC leaders to Vietnam to learn about their struggle methods. Soon upon the return of the delegation, he set up a team to review the strategy and tactics.

The ANC in exile faced many challenges. MK like the rest of the ANC was also infiltrated by agents of the regime. All these issues at different times led to mutinies by the soldiers. An example was in December 1983. In response to this mutiny, OR established a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the causes. He later called a Consultative Conference in 1985 to deal with these challenges and other organizational issues. OR had a high sense of justice even against those who committed serious crimes against the ANC. Proper procedures had to be followed before action was taken against them. He argued that they be treated humanely. Where warranted, they should be rehabilitated and not severely punished. Delegates argued at the Conference that the ANC could not be as vicious as the regime itself. Human rights had to be respected by the ANC. Structures and systems were put in place to deal with disciplinary issues properly. A Code of Conduct inspired by the Freedom Charter was put in place.

**ROLE IN THE ANC**

During 1952, OR was Acting General Secretary of the ANC. He was instrumental in changing the ANC into a mass based organization. In 1954, he was elected Secretary General of the ANC. OR was elected as President of the ANC by the NEC in 1967 in his absence. He was disturbed by the decision and raised his concerns with the leaders on the Island. They confirmed him as the President in 1976.

OR helped the ANC to internationalize the liberation struggle. International support in the form of sanctions and international public opinion helped to balance the superior military force of the regime. Some of his diplomatic efforts led to the OAU to establish the liberation committee to help decolonize Africa. OR worked systematically on the diplomatic front with each country approached differently for support (arms versus humanitarian and moral) based on its situation.

Shortly upon arrival in Tanzania in 1960, Tambo and the other leaders met Nyerere. Tambo later travelled to Tunis and to Accra to meet Nkrumah. Soon he travelled to Copenhagen and later London. He addressed a May Day rally and called for the boycott of SA goods which were made cheap as a result of cheap African labor. In London, he was met by Trevor Huddleston at the airport. He also met Canon Collin and was accommodated by the latter for some time.

OR attended a meeting in Addis Ababa in June 1960. It was attended by Heads of State of the newly independent African states. The SA presentation was well received. The boycott of SA was agreed up which included the denial of African air and shipping spaces. In October 1960, OR addressed the UN. He called for economic sanctions.

On 16 December 1961, MK was launched through a series of bomb attacks in SA. Following the launch, in early 1962, Mandela traveled to Addis Ababa to brief OR personally so that the latter could communicate with the international community. It was a major change in strategy and OR's wholeheartedly supported it. Mandela knew that if OR supported it, he would not waver in its pursuit. OR and Mandela worked out a program for the ANC in Exile under the new environment.

Soon upon his return to SA, Mandela was arrested. The MK High Command was also arrested in August 1963. Tambo was shattered by the news of the arrest in Rivonia. His immediate task was to save their lives. On 8 October 1963, on the eve of the Rivonia trial, OR was granted permission to address the Special Political Committee at the UN. This was the first occasion that a leader of a liberation movement was granted such an honor. He appealed to the UN to take action to stop repression and political trials in SA. He appealed specifically for urgent action to protect the accused in the Rivonia Trial. On 11 October, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning SA and requesting it to stop the Trial and unconditionally release all political prisoners.

Despite differences with some African leaders about their relations with apartheid SA, OR was always discreet and expressed appreciation of their support at every occasion. He was always courteous and respected his hosts and their hospitality.

One of the tactics that OR utilized in the struggle against apartheid was to mobilize members of the public against the regime especially in Western countries. Civil society organizations were mobilized. OR did not lose sight of the main objective which was to increase pressure on the regime through sanctions. This objective became the main focus of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) which was founded by Trevor Huddleston in 1959.

The support for the struggle in the US grew slowly compared to Europe. From an early stage, OR sought to clarify that the struggle in SA was not a civil rights movement but a struggle against colonialism albeit of a different type. The colonial power was not separated by geographic space but by colour.

OR continued to make inroads in the West. He established relations with Willie Brandt and Francois Mitterrand through the Socialist International (SI). In 1977, the SI recognized the ANC as the authentic liberation movement in SA. He was invited to Bonn by the Social Democratic Party. He impressed his audience who became convinced that the ANC was competent to transform and run a democratic country.

OR had strong personal ties with other leaders in Southern Africa such as Samora Machel that were able to withstand the strains brought by the regime’s destabilizing campaign. In 1984, Mozambique signed the Nkomati Accord with the regime that called upon each country not to support each other’s enemies. Samora was greatly distressed about his decision, members of the ANC saw it as a betrayal. However OR took a strategic approach and argued that the decision by Mozambique should be looked at not how it affected the ANC at that point in time but also in the future and more importantly, the future that it was seeking to build.

The international struggle against apartheid that OR led, sensitized the international community and laid foundations for other struggles for democracy and respect for humanity in its diversity.

In the 1980s, the struggle inside SA intensified on all fronts, militarily MK launched numerous attacks against enemy targets. Unfortunately, some of the targets did not fall within ANC policy. Civilian targets were hit. OR highly concerned about these developments, called a meeting of the top military people to discuss the situation. He reminded them that the ANC’s strength was its moral high ground and it should not be undermined by short-sighted actions.

Following his January 8 statement, declaring 1983, as the year of united action, by August of the same year, the United Democratic Front was established drawing together 700 organizations. It led mass action across the length and breadth of SA. The UDF soon adopted the Freedom Charter as its policy document and other organizations followed suit.

By 1984, there was pressure exerted on both the ANC and the regime to hold talks. To prepare for the eventuality of negotiations, OR in 1987, initiated a process to put forward a document that elaborated on the kind of SA that the ANC wanted, based on the Freedom Charter.

On the diplomatic front, the ANC was continuing to make inroads. At the Commonwealth Summit held in 1985, it called for the dismantling of apartheid, lifting of the state of emergency, release of political prisoners and the unbanning of the ANC.

In response to calls for Botha to release Mandela, Botha demanded that the latter renounced violence. Mandela rejected the call and reaffirmed his membership of the ANC. On OR, he said, “Oliver Tambo is more than a brother to me. He is my greatest friend and comrade for nearly 50 years. If there is anyone among you who cherishes my freedom, Oliver Tambo cherishes it more, and I know that he would give his life to set me free.”

OR saw the continuation of the armed struggle as well negotiations as complimentary tactics and not contradictory, both aimed at the achievement of the strategic objective of dismantling apartheid. He put together a team to prepare the ANC’s positions on negotiations. He advised the OAU that he required the involvement and ownership of the South African people. He actively briefed ANC members in the camps. Once the draft document was ready, it was sent to the leaders of ANC in prison and others. Key African leaders especially those in the Frontline states were also consulted. OR personally led consultations with these leaders. Because of the pressure to present the document to the meeting of the Frontline States, OR worked tirelessly over a short period of time. The consultation process to produce what became known as the Harare Declaration came at a huge cost to his health.

On 9 August 1989, OR suffered a stroke. He had previously suffered a mild stroke in 1982 in Dar Es Salaam. By 1985, he had publicly admitted that he was ailing. He had told delegates at the Kabwe meeting, “Comrades, my health is not good; but, what remains will be consumed in the cause of the struggle.”

On 2 February 1990, Mandela was released from prison. On his release, he said, “I salute our President, Comrade Oliver Tambo, for leading the ANC even under the most difficult circumstances.” He soon visited him in hospital.

OR and the family returned to SA in December 1990. At an ANC Consultative Conference held shortly thereafter, he told the delegates, “I have devotedly watched over the organization all these years. I now hand it back to you, bigger, stronger -intact. Guard our precious movement.”

On 10 April 1993, Chris Hani was assassinated on the driveway in his home. OR was very saddened by this incident. OR passed away on 23 April 1993. In his funeral oration, Mandela remarked, “A giant, who once strode the globe like a colossus, has fallen. A mind whose thoughts have opened the doors to our liberty has ceased to function. A heart whose dreams gave hope to the despised has forever lost its beat. The gentle voice whose measured words of reason shook the thrones of tyrants has been silenced. Peoples of the world, here lies before you the body of a man who is tied to me by an umbilical cord which cannot be broken. We say he has departed, but can we allow him to depart while we live? Can we say Oliver Tambo is no more, while we walk this earth? Oliver lived not because his blood flowed through his veins. Oliver lived because he surrendered his very being to the people. He lived because his very being embodied love, an idea, a hope an inspiration, a vision...”

**CONCLUSION**

In 2012, Thabo Mbeki delivered an OR Tambo Lecture. He admitted that there were leadership mistakes committed in South Africa including by himself and his team whilst still in government. He then proposed the following selection criteria for future leaders to fulfill the demands of the National Democratic Revolution:

• accept completely never in any way to abuse state power to advance their personal interests;

• conduct themselves informed by a commitment to serve the people;

• conduct themselves in their personal lives so that at all times they do not betray ethical standards that have been set by the people;

• commit the entirety of their intellectual and other capacities to pursue the objectives of the National Democratic Revolution;

• have the strategic ability to lead the country to ensure that it remained focused on achieving the fundamental goals as spelt out in our Constitution;

• respect the truth and take actions that respond to objective realities of the country, and not informed by narrow party political and otherwise partisan objectives rather than national goals; and,

• at all times communicate credible messages of hope to all the people, regardless of race, colour, gender, ethnicity and age, which gives the nation an authentic and real sense of certainty about its future.

**Amb Bungane**

**South African Embassy : Moroni**