

Lecture delivered by Malusi Gigaba at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) on 3 October 2011 in Mazimbu, Tanzania

The poet TS Elliot decries April as a cursed month.

Indeed, as we reflect on history, TS Elliot is not wider off the mark.

On 6 April 1979, the apartheid regime in South Africa celebrated the 327th Anniversary of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and his band of colonial invaders by executing a gallant freedom fighter and a young patriot, Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu.

In so doing, as they thought they were permanently silencing him, their actions had the opposite effect to immortalise him and turn him into a martyr who still today, long after apartheid died, continues to inspire and to speak to us, lighting our path towards total emancipation from colonial domination.

Programme Director, I count myself profoundly privileged to stand on these grounds today, once a home to Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College ("SOMAFCO"), to deliver this keynote address this afternoon.

SOMAFCO towers like a living monument immortalising a selfless fighter for our people. An institution which President Oliver Tambo, the then President of the African National Congress, defined eloquently as one of the battlefronts for liberation.

As we gathered here this morning, our collective were drawn both towards Oliver Reginald Tambo and Solomon Kalushi Mahlangu, both of whose names speak to us of leadership, selfless devotion to the cause of African liberation from the Cape to Cairo and undying for our people all over the continent.

SOMAFCO provided a direct antithesis to apartheid education which sought to alienate the children of the then oppressed from their dreams and the dreams of a free South Africa. It provided a model for people's education which the progressive forces established throughout the 1980s to counter the retrogressive effects of bantu education.

I feel a special affinity to this institution and what it stood for owing to my academic training as a teacher and a deep sense of duty to the youth as former leader and President of the African National Congress Youth League.

The importance of adequate preparation of the youth for its future responsibilities can never be overstated. The youth of every nation remains the only promise for such nation's future and prosperity.

On the occasion of the ANC's 75th Anniversary, on January 8th 1987, Oliver Tambo, under whose tutelage the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College was founded, said:

"Of major importance is the need continuously to attend to the issue of raising the calibre of the leadership of the youth, to impart to them the skills that are necessary for them to carry out their tasks as the shock troops of the revolution."

This appeal underscored the ANC's long-held recognition of the importance of education and this need to raise the calibre of the leadership of the youth and impart to them the skills, knowledge and expertise requisite to prepare them to undertake their historical tasks as the very fulcrum of transformation.

The legacy of SOMAFCO can be traced from its founding principles which are rooted in the ANC.

The first ingredient underlying SOMAFCO's success was a bold leadership and vision – a vision able to see beyond the struggles and challenges of the time and to discern the need for the development of a leadership cadre able to take a post-Apartheid society forward.

It was a vision that was able to energise the transformation of a bush into a vibrant, significantly self-sufficient community. This vision required a significant investment in time and resources when there was a range of competing short term needs. It required a creative commitment to a long term possibility, a leap of faith in what the ANC was capable of achieving. The vision was personally and consistently championed by OR Tambo, who described SOMAFCO as part of the "battlefront for liberation".

SOMAFCO also required considerable initiative, creativity and sweat. The founders of SOMAFCO did not just sit around, waiting for someone to rescue them. The Tanzanian government donated an unused sisal farm to the ANC. It took the sweat of ANC cadres to transform the bush, into a living community.

The early ANC settlers rolled up their sleeves and picked up their axes and shovels and began the process of clearing and building. Having created an initial foundation, new initiatives were implemented and the scale and complexity of the community grew. The SOMAFCO legacy is based on an experience of concrete action, rather than theoretical ideas.

When OR visited SOMAFCO in 1984, he urged the students to cut the tall grass around the school in order to stem mosquito attacks and the malaria that followed as a consequence. This was, of course, premised on the ANC's long-established tradition of volunteerism as well as the notion that the masses of the people were their own liberators and masters of their own destiny.

The ANC was eager to teach the young self-reliance because central to being the master of your own destiny was the notion that you do things for yourself.

Thirdly, SOMAFCO epitomised African and international collaboration and solidarity. The Tanzanian government showed solidarity with the Anti-Apartheid struggle and supported the exiled community with the means at their disposal. Volunteers from around the world came to SOMAFCO to teach at the school and provide training to the various cooperative initiatives. Governments from both sides of the "communist curtain" provided material support to the process. Initiative and success became a magnet for support and SOMAFCO became a global symbol of human liberation.

I think it is critical that we build on this legacy in a number of ways:

Firstly, a fundamental tenant of SOMAFCO was that political liberation was meaningless without economic liberation. This was because colonialism entailed total oppression in terms of which political oppression went hand-in-hand with economic exploitation and plunder.

SOMAFCO had the role of equipping future leaders to play a part in growing and transforming the South African economy. It was thus the duty of all students to take advantage of the education opportunities offered at SOMAFCO as an intrinsic part of the liberation struggle.

This would be pivotal in the aftermath of liberation and underlined the fact that the ANC, even as it was involved in the struggle and the demands and challenges of the moment, had its eyes firmly gazed on the future and how the post-apartheid South Africa was going to be created. We were sure of victory!

Indeed, it was precisely for this reason that the ANC said on its 75th Anniversary, in the midst of widespread school boycotts in South Africa that the youth had to "proceed from the position that our task is to win a revolution", and that accordingly we had to "fight the enemy for the right to be at our respective institutions of learning, within which we should build and organise our democratic structures and within which we should introduce the system of people's education which is a decisive element in the future of our country and people."

In its Statement on this occasion, addressing itself to the youth, the ANC said:

"To return to school must therefore be seen as a revolutionary act which puts us in a better position further to advance the struggle for a people's education in a society in which we, the people, shall govern. How difficult this struggle is, is of course, epitomised by the fact that, as nowhere else in the world, we have heavily armed soldiers and police inside and outside our classrooms trying to deny us the right to learn and teach, and attempting to impose on us a surrender we will never accept."

Right in the midst of widespread class boycotts, when populism would have been an easy resort and earned it easy and cheap popularity with the militant youth, the ANC leadership chose the hard and principled road to order the youth to return to class and view this as a "revolutionary act" which was a decisive element in the future of our country and people, and critical for the building of a society in which the people shall govern.

Defeating apartheid required a different set of skills, often less complex, than the ones required for constructing a national democratic society.

For, the task of building and living in the new society, which inexorably would be the task of the younger generation, required that this younger generation conquer new and modern knowledge, skills and technology, which they could only do through attaining education.

The most urgent obstacle before the African youth today is that of unemployment, lack of skills and broader economic opportunities.

In Tunisia and Egypt, the youth shook off their apathy or complacency and placed their hands on the arch of history to help restore democracy to their countries.

There can be no doubt that youth political and democratic participation has been glaring by its absence during the height of the globalisation period, as a consequence of which democracy and elections became spectator sports, the pastime of the rich and affluent whilst the masses either became cannon-fodder or just stayed away from this that they regarded as a farce.

We must succeed to restore both youth political participation as well as youth economic participation as the two are evidently related one with the other.

Secondly, SOMAFCO highlighted the importance of political education as a key means of ensuring the continuity of values in the ANC, of building a bridge between the older and younger generations.

SOMAFCO recognised the critical importance of education in equipping the next generation of leaders with the historical insight and theoretical frameworks to provide substantive leadership. Our youth organisations need to build on this legacy and SOMAFCO graduates have a pivotal role to play in this regard.

The reason that the ANC had to and still must pay close and urgent attention to the mobilisation, organisation and education of the youth is precisely because it is neither given that the youth are inherently progressive nor that they will naturally be drawn towards progressive ideas and actions on their own without an external influence and, so to say, nudging.

There is nothing inherently militant, radical or progressive in the youth. Indeed, they have in the past, owing to their inexperience and youthful exuberance, been mobilised behind acts that run contrary to their own interests, such as when they supported fascism, Nazism, genocide in Rwanda and many white youth that actively supported apartheid and joined in its repressive campaigns and participated in its cross-border raids.

So that they are not susceptible to wrongful influences and enticed en masse to adopt social and cultural value systems alien to their own interests, the correct and proper political education of the youth is an urgent and vitally important task. The ANC considered it the duty of the elderly to educate, cultivate and nurture the youth and imbue them with the correct political consciousness pivotal to the undertaking of their revolutionary tasks.

Youth militancy had to be tempered with revolutionary discipline in order to give it (this militancy) the necessary meaning and direction. The ANC needed the youth to understand that *militancy and discipline are two sides of the same coin* and for them to know that militancy without discipline is anarchy and discipline without militancy is reformism.

Militancy consists in outlining an agenda for far-reaching radical change without which apartheid could not be defeated, because that system could not be reformed, but had to be overthrown. At the same time, discipline made it possible for the forces of liberation to move together as a united force, able to thwart the manoeuvres of the regime and not engage in acts that would, in the face of it, seem militant and yet, in practice and content, were self-defeating, reactionary and wholly counter-revolutionary.

Much as it is the responsibility of the elderly generations to educate the young, it is also the obligation of the young to listen to and accept education and correction, mindful of the fact that they are young and inexperienced. And, much as youth is a militant and learning-by-doing-and-mistakes stage, youth must also be conscious of the fact, and be humble enough to know and accept, that they are young and learning, and hence they must accept the guidance and guardianship of the elderly. After all, revolutionary movements establish youth organisations, amongst other things, to bridge the gap between the younger and elderly generations of the movement.

Thirdly, we need to build on the tradition of African and human solidarity. African economic integration is an important strategic priority for South Africa. Trade is a mechanism that allows a country to invest at scale in areas that are considered strategic to the building of a highly competitive domestic economy, whilst importing at the best possible price those goods which the domestic economy is ill-equipped to produce.

Investment integration allows for the flow of capital between partner countries so that economic opportunities in the region as a whole can be exploited even if an individual country has limited capital availability. As a medium-sized economy, South Africa is at a structural disadvantage in building our

industrial base given our remoteness from major global markets. This hinders our ability to invest in adequate economies of scale, realise technology learning curves and build robust clusters that are the backbone to a competitive industrial economy.

However, in relation to the African market, South Africa has a locational advantage – by failing to foster high levels of economic cooperation and integration in Africa, we are effectively imposing limits on the growth of the South African economy. The considerable priority that European governments have given to the building of an economic union suggests the importance of an analogous project in Africa.

Infrastructure is a key enabler of trade and economic integration. Logistics infrastructure enables the efficient movement of goods; telecommunications enables commercial activity whilst an integrated energy grid enhances security of power supply for all participants. Hence, the building of African infrastructure is a key stepping stone to regional integration and South Africa can contribute significantly to African infrastructure development through enabling access to our core logistics, telecommunications and energy infrastructure as well as providing specialised technical and commercial skills.

For example, just through providing access to our electricity grid, we will enable neighbouring countries to invest in energy generation at a far larger scale than they would do in isolation. This will provide business with the confidence requisite to make further investments in these countries.

As a starting point we need to enhance the operational collaboration between our infrastructure companies and projects. We need to see our ports as an integrated network and support the building of volumes, and consequently trade, within the network. Similarly, we need to build a solid alliance between our airlines and airports to enhance the development of business relationships and tourism in our countries.

However, the scale of the infrastructure asset deficit in Africa is immense. It is estimated that significant amounts of finance is needed to get infrastructure in Africa on track. An Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic estimates annual investment needs in infrastructure in Africa at US\$38 billion a year over the next ten years, with two thirds of this required from the energy sector. More recent studies suggest that water infrastructure requires US\$10bn per year, while energy requires US\$42,6bn per year over the next ten years.

We need to be realistic about the resources available in South Africa to contribute to the African infrastructure challenge. We have a significant infrastructure gap in South Africa that needs to be funded and while our development finance institutions can contribute to the African challenge, we clearly need to partner with players that have greater quantities of resources at their disposal. Consequently, we need to build on the ethic of international collaboration in tackling the building Africa's infrastructure networks and economies. We need to build partnerships with both established economies and the emerging giants on the economic stage in BRICS.

What we are looking for is a new model of development from emerging markets, particularly from Africa, which will catapult our continent to new heights of prosperity and thus help rescue our people from the quandary of poverty and build for them a better life. The Washington Consensus has been a dismal failure and the consequences of its actions in Africa have been disastrous, and Africa is accordingly duty-bound to lead the way to a new and different paradigm.

Africa must work hard and collaborate to end its status as the global supplier of raw commodities to that of value-added products. When seeking trade globally, Africans must cease engaging in an ugly beauty pageant about who is better than the other; but we must sell our collective strengths.

Another reason to continue to focus on increasing Africa's capacity to produce value-added goods is so that we can increase intra-African trade to, at least the level of intra-Asian trade of 40-50 percent or at best, intra-EU trade of 80 percent.

This is a moment for difficult decisions and hard work and we must harness Africa's natural resources and the fact that the bigger economies are vying for these resources, as well as our rising GDP, populations, middle classes and the overall significance of emerging markets in the global economy, especially during this crucial time of the financial crisis and the threat of a double-dip, in order to take the next steps.

In conclusion, I wish to congratulate the SOMAFSCO Trust on their vision and initiative in rebuilding the SOMAFSCO brand and ethic. The experience of SOMAFSCO will constitute an important element of the centenary celebrations of the ANC, to celebrate the totality of the experiences of our struggle which

made ours an admirable and supreme struggle, and positioned the ANC as the genuine representative of our people as well as the microcosm of the new society we were fighting for.

I see SOMAFCO building an important bridge between our past and our future, between the youth and parent organisations and between South Africa and its neighbours. I wish SOMAFCO all the strength for their future endeavours.

I thank you very much.