

Celebrating **100** Years
of self less struggle
Unity in Diversity

Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Tradition of Resistance in South Africa

by Dumisani Nduli



SOLDIERS



Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Tradition of Resistance in South Africa

I am not a violent man. My colleagues and I wrote to Malan in 1952 asking for a round table conference to find solutions to the problems of our country, but that was ignored. When Strijdom was in power, we made the same offer. Again it was ignored. When Verwoerd was in power we asked for a national convention for all the people of South Africa to decide on their future. This too was in vain. It was only then, when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us, that we turned to the armed struggle. (Nelson Mandela Statement, 1986)

Background

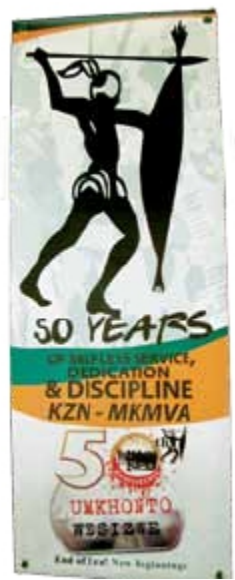
On 16 December 2011, the President of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Republic of South Africa, Mr. J G Zuma, graced the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) at Orlando Stadium in Johannesburg. KwaZulu-Natal uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) decided to follow this by celebrating the same anniversary at Ingwavuma, in the Northern Region of KZN and the only base of MK in South Africa during the days of struggle, on Saturday, 14 April 2012. The main address for this occasion was given by the KZN ANC Chairperson and Premier, Dr. Zweli Mkhize. Within the context of rounding off these celebrations, MKMVA felt it necessary to prepare this paper on Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Tradition of Resistance in South Africa before the end of the fifty years of MK celebrations on 16 December 2012.

The above quotation is from Nelson Mandela's message to the people of South Africa read on his behalf by his daughter, Zindiswa, at Jabulani Amphitheatre, Johannesburg, in 1986. In that message Mandela, the first and last Commander-in-Chief of MK, was rejecting President P W Botha's offer to release him from prison provided he renounced military resistance to apartheid. Nelson Mandela and his fellow ANC prisoners had embarked on the armed struggle when all of forms of resistance had been exhausted and crushed by the British colonial state,



The 50th anniversary of the founding of Umkhonto we Sizwe in Ingwavuma

and the apartheid regime in 1961. This booklet addresses itself, albeit briefly, to the Colonial Conquest and Primary Resistance of indigenous peoples of South Africa; the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906 to 1907; the formation of the ANC on 08 January 1912 and the use of secondary forms of resistance until its banning in 1960; the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe and its early days; the Wankie/ Sipholilo Military Expeditions of 1967 to 1968; the 1976 Soweto Uprisings and the revival of MK; the 1980s as the Decade of our Liberation; and the Negotiated Political Settlement.



Colonial Conquest and Wars of Resistance

Up until the 18th century African kingdoms were not organised in the sense of a modern political nation-state, but were rather small and scattered all over the African continent. This made it easy for the colonising European powers to conquer them piecemeal. The primary resistance of the African people was largely characterised by traditional armies and tactics using spears and fighting sticks in defence of their people and territory against European firearms.

The 'civilised' international powers and the so-called great powers of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Belgium used international law, in the sense of treaties between states, to give themselves powers to acquire African territories by downgrading them to *terrae nullius*, which meant territories belonging to no-one. This was coupled with depriving the local communities or their leaders of any international standing.

Goven Mbeki (1992) stated that the British conquest of the various ethnic groups and their chiefdoms in South Africa was a process that began after the 'discovery' of diamonds in Kimberly in 1868. Thereafter the British state and its colonial troops conquered African Kingdoms one after the other in quick succession: the Hlubi in 1873; Gcaleka and Pedi in 1877; Ngqika, Thembu, Mpondo, Griqua and Rolong in 1880; Zulu in 1879; Sotho in 1880; and Ndebele in 1883.

It has to be noted that the British troops did experience defeat at the hands of the Zulu nation in the Battle of Isandlwana in January 1879. After the 'discovery' of diamonds in 1868, the British state wanted a settled sub-continent in order to attract investments. However, the Zulu Kingdom, independent and autonomous, had no interest in advancing the cause of western capitalism. As a result the Zulu kingdom was invaded by the regiments of the British army supported by colonial Natal. On 22 January 1879, in one of the most

famous acts of primary resistance – rifles versus assegais - in imperial history, the Zulu army

inflicted a devastating defeat on the British invaders at the Battle of Isandlwana. Most historians regard this battle as one of the most humiliating defeats in the annals of Britain's military history. However, the Zulu army did not prepare for a British counter-attack which happened in July 1879. With more than 23 000 troops, Lord Chelmsford marched to the plains of Ulundi where King Cetshwayo's palace was mowed down by an overwhelming barrage of cannonball shells and bullets.

The British burned villages, massacred civilians, plundered homesteads and seized thousands of cattle. King Cetshwayo was tracked down in a hiding place at Ngome forest and finally imprisoned in Cape Town. Despite this military defeat and subjugation of the indigenous people of South Africa by the British colonial state, by means of oral history, the military victory at Isandlwana in January 1879 formed part of the history that was passed down from generation to generation and anchored the belief that white domination can be resisted by whatever means available to the people. The Bhambatha Rebellion was one of those events that demonstrated this and became part of the tradition of resistance stories in South Africa's oral history.

The Bhambatha Rebellion (1906-1907)

The last military resistance of the African people before the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 that used guerrilla warfare methods, was the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906 to 1907. The main precipitant was the imposition of £1 Poll Tax on all adult males in Natal at the end of 1905. Bhambatha (1865-1906) and his forces used the Nkandla forest as a base, where they were joined by a number of influential 'rebel' amakhosi (chiefs). The Natal Mounted Policemen who collected tax became legitimate targets, as four of them were killed by Bhambatha's men using guerrilla warfare tactics.

After two uneven battles at Bobe Ridge and Mome Gorge, the colonial officers killed 3 000 'rebels' and embarked on scorch earth tactics where people's crops and homesteads were torched and cattle were confiscated. By July 1906, the colonial forces had crushed the rebellion with the assistance of volunteers from other colonies. A



Chief Magadu Bhambatha

total of 3 000 Africans and about 24 whites were killed and 7 000 Africans taken prisoner.

Many captured combatants faced the firing squads while protesting and praying to their ancestors to receive their spirits.

King Dinizulu ka Cetshwayo was arrested and brought to trial in 1908 on 23 charges of high treason. Although found guilty of complicity, the ANC supporting King of the Zulus was exiled and in 1913 died in Middleburg, Transvaal. In all his trials and tribulations, King Dinizulu was supported by the first President of the ANC, Dr. John Langalibalele Dube, through speeches, and articles he wrote in his newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal*. This marked the beginning of secondary resistance which culminated in the mass resistance of the 1950s and the banning of the ANC in 1960.

The African National Congress and Passive Resistance

Formation of the ANC on 08 January 1912

The creation of the African National Congress is historically linked to Pixley Ka Isaka (son of Isaac) Seme of Inanda Mission Station, outside Durban, of the American Board of Foreign Missions or American Zulu Mission (AZM), now the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). Rive (1995) states that during 1911, Seme, at the age of thirty-eight and an African lawyer with a growing legal practice in Johannesburg, together with fellow lawyers Alfred Mangena, George Monstioa and Richard Msimang, took a major initiative in organising a nation-wide congress of the African people's representatives. In his historic call, he emphasised the necessity for African unity:

The demon of racialism, the aberration of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basothos and every other native must be buried and forgotten...We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of woes and all our backwardness and ignorance today.
(Rive: 1995: 9)

On 08 January 1912, his hope was realised when personalities from the African community of southern Africa converged on Bloemfontein (Mangaung) and Seme gave the keynote address where he stated the following:

Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race, we have gathered here to consider

and discuss a theme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discussed that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the Union of South Africa – a Union in which we have no voice in the making of laws and no part in their administration. We have called you therefore to this conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national unity and defending our rights and privileges. (Rive: 1995:10)

Seme then proposed that the delegates and royal households represented from all over southern Africa should form and establish the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). His motion was seconded by Alfred Mangena, a fellow lawyer, who had been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, London. Thus the African National Congress was born. Seme was elected Treasurer-General, Mangena one of the four Vice-Presidents and in absentia, Seme's cousin, the Reverend John Langalibalele Dube of Inanda in Natal, was elected the President. The clarion call given by Seme was that Africans from the sub-continent had to unite and defend their rights and privileges taken away by the British Colonial onslaught and subjugation.

The chain of the colonial project, with its civilising mission through the Christian church and education, was beginning to show its weakest link as Christian mission school educated Africans were challenging their rejection by European modernity associated with the liberal values of Christianity, such as the equality of all human beings before the eyes of God; all human beings being created in the image of God; and so forth. Among the royal personages, whose forebears had led armies of resistance to occupation and seizure of their lands during 18th and 19th Centuries, were: Solomon ka Dinizulu of the Zulus; Montsiwa of the Barolong; Lewanika of the Lozi of Zambia; Letsie II of Lesotho; Loba Ntsibeni of Swaziland; Dalindyebo of the Thembu; Sekhukhuni of the Pedi; and Khama of Botswana. This marked the connection between the mission school educated intellectuals and the ordinary people of the sub-continent.

ANC and its Programmes to 1960.

The SANNC started off its campaigns, by focussing on the plight of the African people who had lost almost all their rights after conquest, especially with the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The SANNC wanted to ameliorate the African people's economic plight and to secure the extension of political rights, especially the vote to all races. The SANNC (which changed its name to African National Congress in 1923) was unashamedly middle class and relied on prayer meetings, petitions, deputations and meetings

with government officials for their course. In its second year of existence, it faced one of its most serious challenges when the white government passed the Native Land Act (No. 27) of 1913 that gave Africans access to only 7 per cent of the land surface of the Union of South Africa (This was increased to 13 per cent through the 1936 Native Land Act). The ANC's response was to send a deputation to London to protest against the provisions of the Native Act to the British monarch. The delegation believed her majesty's govern-



The deputation to London

ment would intervene on the African people's behalf and withhold assent to the Act. South Africa was the British Dominion whose laws had to be ratified by the crown. The delegation was of no avail, as would be the case with other protests and deputations. Whilst the deputation was in London, a wave of protests against an attempt by the Orange Free State administration to impose passes on African women swept through that province.

Between 1910 and 1948 South Africa was ruled by a succession of white governments that slowly gravitated toward right-wing Afrikaner nationalism. The ANC was weak and divided during the 1930s and did not respond adequately to imposition of the 1936 Representation of Natives Act and Native Trust and Land Act. The All African Convention (AAC) formed to resist the disenfranchisement of Cape Africans through the creation of the Native Representation Council (NRC) had no effect. In fact ANC leaders decided to take part in the NRC as a conduit for registering African complaints to Parliament via four white Senators. This did not work and was abandoned by the ANC in 1946 after the violent crushing of the African Miners' Strike of the same year. At the same time, the Indian Community that had been brought to South Africa as indentured labour from 1860, had embarked on a passive resistance campaign (*satyagraha*, or firmness in truth) against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill. This was also violently crushed and their leaders imprisoned.

The ANC Youth League that had been formed in 1944, together with the ANC Women's League, decided to impress upon Dr Alfred Bitini Xuma, President of the ANC between 1940 and 1949, that it was time for the ANC to become a mass movement of the people and embark on a Programme of Action that involved strikes, civil disobedience, boycotts, non-co-operation and other militant methods. The Programme of Action affirmed that the ANC's fundamental objective was to achieve national freedom from white domination and rejected the concept of segregation, apartheid, trusteeship or white leadership. Dr. Xuma was against this approach, hence he was ousted from the Presidency of the

ANC and replaced by Dr. James Moroka. The ANC adopted the Programme of Action

proposed by its Youth League, led by Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and other African young revolutionary intellectuals, in its conference of 1949. This was against the backdrop of the National Party having been swept to power in the 'whites only' General Elections of 26 May 1948 on the apartheid ticket.

Apartheid Government

The National Party of D F Malan was made up of some *Ossewa-Brandwag* (oxwagon-sentinel) members who had been incarcerated by the Jan Smuts government during World War II (1939-1945) for supporting Nazi Germany and making attempts to sabotage the country's war effort. Among these was B J Voster, who later became Prime Minister (after Dr Hendrik Verwoerd's death in 1966) between 1966 and 1978, and State President from 1978 to 1979, and General Hendrik van den Bergh, who became the Chief of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Both men, among others, became the leading lights in making apartheid South Africa a police state. Essentially apartheid policy advocated for effective separation of racial groups and treating African grievances as 'swart gevaar' or black danger to white domination. Apartheid state policies gave legislative face to segregationist policies that were pursued by the British dominated South Africa and extended the boundaries of application to every aspect of black life.

Between 1948 and 1958 the basic legal structure of apartheid was created: the Suppression of Communism Act, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Bantu Authorities Act and others were passed. The Pass Laws were refined and basically the colour a person's skin determined what life's opportunities that person had. The policies of successive National Party governments, underpinned by the ideology of white racial supremacy, were developed into a rigorous race-based legal framework of the old South Africa.

The ANC had to respond to this unprecedented onslaught on African people's rights. One of the proposals of the Programme of Action was that there should be a national strike. On 1 May 1950, there was a strike that was confined to the Transvaal, in protest against the banning orders imposed on various Communist Party leaders, including Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and J B Marks. It was a successful strike, but marred by the shooting of eighteen demonstrators in the evening. After this, the ANC called for a national strike on 26 June 1950. It was also successful, especially in Port Elizabeth where it was reported to be a 100 per cent success.

After the 1950 General Strike, the movement began to plan for civil disobedience which Walter Sisulu called The Defiance Campaign of Unjust Laws. The plan was hatched and was finally presented to the ANC annual conference by Nelson Mandela, who became the volunteer-in-chief for the campaign. Large numbers of recruited volunteers for freedom (AMADELAKUFA) were to court arrest by defying racial laws and minor regulations, hoping that this would disorganise the state by filling prisons and courts to capacity. The campaign used the *satyagraha* or passive resistance methods, introduced by Mahatma

Ghandi when he was in South Africa between 1893 and 1914, as a technique of struggle.



Leaders of the Defiance Campaign outside the Johannesburg Magistrates Court

The Defiance Campaign was to start on 06 April 1952, when whites were to celebrate the tercentenary of the arrival of Jan van Riebeck in South Africa in 1652. The Defiance Campaign was finally crushed by the apartheid regime using very harsh laws, which included whipping, against the volunteers for freedom. Many leaders were charged and convicted under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and Public Safety and Criminal Amendment Acts and banned from active participation in ANC activities. Dr James Moroka, the President of the ANC, lost his position to Chief Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli in December 1952, because he distanced himself from the collective of volunteers and organised his own defence.

The main achievement of the Defiance Campaign was the spread of popular support for the ANC and its membership increased from 7 000 in 1952 to 100 000 by the end of 1953. Chief Albert Luthuli's "The Road to Freedom is via the Cross" Speech, issued on 12 November 1952, captured this era of passive resistance.

As for myself, with full sense of responsibility and a clear conviction, I declared to remain in the struggle for extending democratic rights and responsibilities to all sections of the South African community. I have embraced the non-violent Passive Resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further aspirations. (Chief Albert Luthuli)

In the 1953 Conference the ANC adopted a resolution calling for the convening of the Congress of the People, which drew up the Freedom Charter for a democratic South Africa of the future. The call for the Congress of the People was put into action and people's demands collected by members of the Congress Alliance which comprised the ANC, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO) and the Congress of Democrats (white comrades). On 25 June 1955 the Congress of the People adopted the Freedom Charter in Kliptown, Johannesburg and on 5 December 1956, 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance were rounded up and charged with High Treason. The Treason Trial went on from 1956 to 1961 when all the leaders were finally acquitted.

Formation of uMkhonto we Sizwe in 1961

From about the time of the brutal crushing of the Defiance Campaign in 1952, many people, both inside and outside the Congress Movement, were beginning to question the method of non-violence and civil disobedience and beginning to call for a return to the tradition of military resistance, albeit in changed circumstances. The Mau Mau rudimentary armed resistance in Kenya and the independence of Ghana in 1957 were part of international developments that encouraged this thinking. At this time there were sporadic incidences of violence in most rural areas, against the introduction of the Bantustan system, cattle culling and so forth. This was largely in Pondoland (Eastern Cape), Zeerust (North West) and Sekhukhuniland (Limpopo). For example, Justice 'Gizenga' Mpanza used to talk of their sabotage action of burning sugar cane fields of the white sugar barons of Natal which they started in 1957 and continued until 1959 when the ANC leadership stopped them. However, the massacre of 69 anti-pass laws protesters in Sharpsville on 21 March 1960, the subsequent banning of the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) on 31 March 1960 and the declaration of the State of Emergency by the apartheid regime, made leaders like Nelson Mandela consider it futile and useless to continue talking peace and non-violence to a regime whose reply was always savage attacks on an unarmed and defenceless people.

This led to a call to arms. The secretly formed South African Communist Party (SACP) leaders met with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Moses Kotane and others in December 1960 and in this meeting held in Emmerentia, Johannesburg, they passed a resolution which stated that armed resistance would have to replace non-violence as an instrument of the struggle to overthrow the regime and that the Central Committee would have to take all steps necessary to establish military units. Subsequently, in an underground June 1961 ANC's National Executive Committee meeting held in Tongaat, (KwaZulu-Natal) at Walter Singh's sugar cane farm, and presided over by Chief Albert Luthuli, it was decided that Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) should be formed as

an independent and separate organisation from the ANC to be led by Nelson Mandela. This was a tactical decision as MK was, for all intents and purposes, the armed wing of the ANC.

With Nelson Mandela as Commander-in-chief and Joe Slovo as his assistant, they went about planning for the launch of MK and setting up sabotage units from the High Command



Cadres of Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, in training.

Head Quarters in Lillies Farm, Rivonia in Johannesburg. By December 1961, MK could count some 250 operatives. These cadres were trained in homemade explosives by white SACP members who had returned from World War II with some engineering knowledge and could manufacture these explosive devices. These included people like Joe Slovo, Jack Hodgson, Arthur Golgreich and Harold Strachan. The first bombs were made in plastic bottles with charcoal, sulphuric acid, permanganate of potash (for ignition) and saltpetre. For sabotaging of railway lines, the units used pipe bombs, with gelatine capsule as an igniter and, at the very last minute, put a few drops of sulphuric acid and eyedropper and then sealed the capsule into the positioned pipe. The cadres trained inside the country were reinforced by cadres who were trained in China and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Mac Maharaj was one of the first ANC cadres to be trained in the GDR in sabotage.

Submit or fight?

The time comes in the life of every nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom. The government has interpreted the peacefulness of the movement as weakness; the people's non-violent policies have been taken as a green light for government violence. Refusal to resort to force has been interpreted as an invitation to use armed force against the people without any fear of reprisals. The methods of Umkhonto we Sizwe mark a break with that past.

(Umkhonto we Sizwe Manifesto, 1961)

The above statement was issued by the MK as it announced its existence on 16 December 1961 through a series of bomb explosions in a number of major cities. It was a highly symbolic date as it marked the anniversary of the defeat of the Zulus by the Afrikaners at the Battle of Encomé or Blood River. To the Afrikaners it was known as Dingane's Day or Day of the Covenant. Sabotage campaigns that targeted electricity pylons and other infrastructure was to be MK's first form of action. MK sabotage operations were not an end in themselves, but aimed at driving the apartheid state to a compromise. This, however, did not stand in the way of grand plans, like **Operation Mayibuye**, being drawn up, that envisaged the overthrow of the government by revolutionary means. However, there was a setback for the ANC High Command when, on 11 July 1963, Lieutenant Willem van Wyk of the South African Police (SAP) Special Branch unit, raided Lillies Farm after a tip-off by a police informer.



This resulted in the arrest of most leaders of MK High Command and seizure of many documents which were used against the accused in what became known as the Rivonia Treason Trial (1963-1964). They were charged with High Treason, but were finally found guilty of 202 acts of sabotage and sentenced to life imprisonment. Whilst all black prisoners, namely Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni and Ahmed Kathrada were sent to Robben Island, Denis Goldberg was sent to Pretoria Central Prison's white section.



Joe Slovo and Yusuf Dadoo offer support at the Rivonia Trial

Their lawyers, and in particular Advocate Bram Fischer, were disappointed that they did not want to appeal against their sentences. This setback did not stop the recruitment drive for people being sent out for military training nor did it stop other units from carrying out more sabotage activities against the state.

This eventually resulted in what was dubbed "The Little Rivonia Trial" where Mac Maharaj, Wilton Mkwayi (Commander), David Kitson, Laloo Chiba and John Matthews were arrested

in a mopping up of the remnants of MK that escaped the 'Rivonia' net. They were accused of sabotage which was, however, as was the case with Mandela and his fellow accused, not directed at human life. They were sentenced in December 1964. Wilton Mkwayi got a life sentence and Mac Maharaj got the shortest sentence of them all, twelve years, which he served on Robben Island. The Natal "Little Rivonia" netted the following combatants for sabotage and were sentenced to various prison terms on Robben Island: Billy Nair (**20 years**); Curnick Ndlovu (**20 Years**); Natherwal Babenia(**16 years**); Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim (**15 years**); Kisten Moonsamy (**14 years**); Gerja "Sunny/Bobby" Singh (**10 years**) ; Shadrack Msizeni Maphumulo (**10 years**); Albert Duma (**10 years**); Riot Mkhwanazi (**10 years**); Zakhile Mdlalose (**10 years**); Siva Pillay (**8 years**); Matthews Meyiwa (**8 years**); Joshua Zulu (**8 years**); David Ndwandwe (**8 years**); George Naicker (**14 years**); David Mkhize (**5 years**); Bernard Nkosi (**8 years**); and Dan Kistensamy (**14 years**). The other ANC Political prisoners on Robben Island included cadres like Jacob Zuma, Judson Vusumuzi Khuzwayo, Andrew Mandla Masondo and many others who were arrested before they could jump the fence into Botswana. This was over and above the PAC political prisoners and some hardened criminals.

The Wankie/Sipholilo Military Expedition of MK (1967-1968)

For those who succeeded in escaping into exile for military training, most of them ended up in Kongwa, an ANC military camp, in Tanzania after being trained in African states and former Eastern bloc or socialist countries. At this time South Africa had a *cordon sanitaire* of colonies and states ruled by white minority regimes, namely Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), South West Africa (Namibia), and the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique. Zambia and Botswana became independent in 1964 and 1966 respectively. They were therefore still too weak to be used as a springboard to attack both Rhodesia and South Africa.

The ANC was confronted with the problem of creating a route to South Africa for its trained cadres. This resulted in discussions with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) on creating an alliance between MK and the Zimbabwean People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) for purposes of establishing an infiltration route to South Africa through Rhodesia's Matebeleland. The Luthuli Detachment, the MK unit led by the late Chris Thembisile Hani, together with ZIPRA, embarked on this joint military campaign. As they were about to cross the Zambezi River into Rhodesia, Acting President



of ANC, O R Tambo, gave them inspiration from the tradition of resistance of their forebears when he said:

Fight valiantly like your forefathers did before you. Remember the heroes of Africa ... Makana, Dingane, Bhambatha and Sekhukhune. Remember the great Mzilikazi and Lobengula. Remember the great Chaminuka and Nehanda who gave their lives in defence of the freedom of the African people



Chris Hani

Two groups were created from the combined MK and ZIPRA. The first group was to create an eastern front in Sipholilo and the other group headed for the western front, the Wankie National Park and Game Reserve area. The Sipholilo Campaign, under the command of Ike Maphoto, that aimed at setting up a base at the Sipholilo District of Southern Rhodesia, were forced to retreat after suffering serious military setbacks on 13 August 1967. Ike Maphoto was actually captured by Rhodesian Security Forces and ended up serving a life sentence in Rhodesia. The Wankie Group led by Cde. Chris Hani fought the Rhodesian Security Forces on 20 and 21 August 1967. In both battles they emerged victorious.

Two commanders of the Rhodesian Army platoon were killed by MK/ZIPRA soldiers and their forces chased by the Luthuli detachment, who later helped themselves to their weapons, uniforms and supplies. After these battles and other skirmishes with the Rhodesian and South African Security Forces, the Luthuli detachment were running low on ammunition. Resupply from Lusaka was out of question, and fearing that the Rhodesians would return with an even larger force, they decided to cross into Northern Botswana after burying their dead. Chris Hani with 12 men, ended up in a Botswana prison for carrying weapons of war. And after serving seven months of their six years sentence, they were deported back to Tanzania.

Daluxolo Luthuli was captured by the South African authorities, sold out by Leonard Nkosi aka Cde. Derick, who was at this time already working for the Special Branch of the South African Police (SAP). Nkosi was killed by an MK unit in September 1977 at his house in Ntuzuma Township, Durban. Thula Bopela, Ralph Mzamo, Ike Mathopo and others were captured and sentenced to death in Rhodesia. This was later commuted to life imprisonment and these cadres were released in 1980 when Zimbabwe gained its independence. Joseph Ntulizwe Nduli managed to escape to Swaziland via Johannesburg. Essentially, this was not a successful military expedition, but as Mzala observed:

For the first time since 1906, the time of the Bhambatha (Rebellion) in Natal, the colonial forces of South Africa were met with fire-power from the oppressed community.

However, the political lull of post-Rivonia arrests, bannings, banishments and imprisonment of anti-apartheid activists inside South Africa, was broken by the advent of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) from 1968, and the revival of the Trade Union Movement after the 1973 Durban strikes. This, to some extent, dictated the political mood of the people.

1976 Soweto Uprisings and Revival of MK

Black Power is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organisations to resist racist institutions.

(Stokely Carmichael, Black Power:1967)

The Soweto uprisings became the high water mark of the BCM era, bringing to the fore a younger generation of primary and secondary school student activists, who invigorated the liberation movement, further demonstrating the



indomitable nature of the human spirit. It was an ideology that was influenced by the anti-segregation Afro-Americans' Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States of America, but adapted by Steven Bantu Biko, first President

of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) for the South African situation. "Power to the People" became a rallying cry in the USA, and also became a relevant slogan for the Black People in the South African resistance movement to apartheid subjugation from the late 1960s. These struggles complemented the resurgence of worker militancy and continued insurgency by underground operatives of the outlawed ANC, now invigorated by a new and younger generation.

The June 16 **Soweto Uprisings of 1976** can be attributed to a few factors that came into play from the late 1960s into the mid-1970s. Whilst it is true that the immediate cause of the students' Soweto uprisings was the apartheid government insistence that Afrikaans be

used as a medium of instruction for half the secondary school syllabus, there were other contributory factors. Among these was the influence of the BCM among the Black people, namely Africans, Indians and Coloureds. Although BCM started off as a mobilising factor for Black students in their universities through SASO, it had spread into Black townships of South Africa via the South African Students' Movement (SASM) and the Black People's Convention (BPC). Also, the liberation of lusophone states, especially Mozambique and Angola in 1975, rekindled the idea of liberation among Black people of South Africa. In fact BCM organised the Viva FRELIMO Rallies at Turfloop University in Limpopo and at Curries Fountain in Durban in 1975. The two rallies were brutally crushed by the apartheid state and leaders of BCM detained or fled to exile. This was also the time when Black workers began flexing their muscles, and beginning in 1973, a series of strikes broke out largely because of poor wages and the biting depression of the early 1970s. The apartheid state Minister of Labour was reported in the 1977 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa to have told Parliament that in 1974 alone, there were 194 illegal strikes involving almost 39 000 workers.

Before the 1976 Soweto Uprisings erupted, a group of MK/underground activists of the ANC who were sentenced to ten years in 1964 began to trickle back into RSA political life from around 1974 and 1975. Among them were J G Zuma, Mac Maharaj, Harry Themba

Gwala, Shadrack Msizeni Maphumulo, Matthew Meyiwa, Joe Gqabi and many others who came out of prison and began to recruit for MK as instructed by Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and other leaders of the Rivonia High Command. Harry Themba Gwala, one of those arrested and convicted, was unapologetic and clear that they aimed at overthrowing the rule of the apartheid regime. Gwala, with some of his comrades, was sentenced to life imprisonment in December 1976. J G Zuma, and others, managed to escape to exile to continue with the struggle. In Soweto, Joe Gqabi, and many other cadres of the ANC underground, assisted in guiding the youth of Soweto towards the ANC. Joe Gqabi, later fled the country and was murdered by the agents of the apartheid regime in Zimbabwe in 1981. However, Tambo noted that the ANC was not strong on the ground to take advantage of the events of the 1976 Soweto Uprisings.

What started off as a peaceful students' march against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, soon turned ugly when the SAP fired live ammunition on unarmed and defenceless students. This angered the Black community and the uprisings became nation-wide and because of the repression, a lot of students ran to exile to join the liberation struggle. Before the student revolt was suppressed, at least 1 000 people had been killed by the security forces. The ANC had not anticipated the uprisings, but gained from them as most of these students swelled its ranks in exile.

The youth of 1976 and those who came in the 1980s were largely trained in Angola between 1976 and 1988. Initially the instructors were from Cuba and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The initial camp, situated in the south of Angola, Nova Katenga, was evacuated after an SADF air raid. New camps were opened further north of the Angolan capital, Luanda. These were Quibaxe, Funda, Fazenda and Caxito, and later Pango and Caculama. The latter two camps were opened in early 1980s. Pango was

used for cadres who were prepared for infiltration back to South Africa. The initial training lasted for six months and then a specialisation course followed that lasted for three or more months, depending on the nature of the course undertaken. Military Combat Work (MCW) was compulsory for those who were going to be deployed back into South Africa. The course focused on intelligence, counter-intelligence



work and the theory of the revolution, which included building of the revolutionary and political army. The purpose of the course was to teach cadres clandestine techniques and how to build underground structures.

This increased ANC political and military activity both inside and outside the country. The inspirational spirit of self-sacrifice and revolutionary discipline displayed by the units of the Luthuli and June 16 MK detachments, led the ANC to declare 1979 “The Year of the Spear”. President J G Zuma, on the occasion of celebrating the Centenary of the ANC on 08 January 2012, explained this as follows:

At this time, the ANC was faced with the challenge of continuously escalating the military offensive against apartheid state with the support of the people. It was in this context that we declared 1979, the Centenary of the Battle of Isandlwana, The Year of the Spear, to be a massive propaganda campaign, co-ordinated by a sub-committee established for the purpose in the Office of the President. The armed actions which we had resumed in 1977 were having political impact we desired. In the light of that reality, we undertook to popularise the armed struggle, taking advantage of centenary by evoking the heroism of our forebears in the wars of resistance to colonial domination.

Of some 1 500 attacks between 1977 and 1989, among the most spectacular were those on the Sasol Oil Refinery in June 1980; the Grad-P or 122mm rocket launchers attack on the South African Defence Force (SADF) headquarters in Voortrekkerhoogte Pretoria in August 1981; the planting of bombs at Koeberg nuclear power station in December 1982; and the car-bomb that exploded outside the air force Command Centre in Pretoria in May 1983 and killed 19 military personnel. These military operations were not aimed at defeating the apartheid state's military machine, but mobilising the oppressed people to go back to the tradition of resisting apartheid oppression.



The 1980s: A Decade of our Liberation

On 8 January 1986, Oliver Reginald Tambo, the President of the ANC, declared the 1980s the decade of our liberation. This was informed by various developments inside South Africa itself. To begin with the apartheid regime had been struggling with winning the 'hearts and minds' of the South African Black population with some half-hearted reforms that were backfiring in every instance. The so-called Tri-cameral Reforms that President P W Botha announced in 1983, led to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the same year. In this scheme of things, the Indians were going to have a House of Representatives; the Coloureds the House of Delegates; and whites to remain in the main Houses of Parliament. There was a strong emphasis on "own affairs" and a white executive President. The Africans were to be serviced by the Bantustan system and Black Local Authorities (BLAs). These reforms precipitated wide-spread resistance. The promise of reforms created expectations, but the actual reforms were regarded as trivial, insulting or irrelevant.

Formation of the UDF

The UDF was formed by representatives of over 475 'grassroots' organisations from across the country and launched at Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town on 20 August 1983. Within six months it became a non-racial, anti-apartheid umbrella body of about 650 organisations, with a membership of about 2.5 million people. It became

unashamedly associated with the ANC and adopted the Freedom Charter as its policy document and vigorously promoted it. The emergence of the UDF began to challenge Inkatha's claim to be a legitimate partner of the ANC in the tradition of resistance to apartheid. Its elected patrons, Nelson Mandela amongst them, and office bearers namely Archie Gumede, Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha, Curnick Ndlovu and others, could legitimately lay claim to the ANC's tradition of resistance. This led Buthelezi of Inkatha to claim, in 1984, that it was cowardly of the UDF to deny its connections with the ANC, when the two bodies were the same. However in December 1985, the 12 UDF leaders who appeared in the Pietermaritzburg High Court, charged with treason, were found not guilty and discharged.

Inkatha had been revived by iNkosi Buthelezi in 1975, then Chief Minister of KwaZulu Bantustan, as the National Cultural Liberation Movement with the tacit approval of the ANC. However, in the London meeting of the two organisations in 1979, it became clear that Inkatha did



not approve of the ANC's policy of armed struggle and economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa. The relations were strained further in the 1980s when Inkatha chose to fight on the side of the apartheid regime and against the people of South Africa. However, this did not deter MK and the people from focusing on the apartheid state infrastructure and to some extent, their security personnel, as legitimate military targets.

The state of emergency

An uprising which began in the Vaal Triangle townships in 1984, south of Johannesburg and spread country-wide, was largely a protest against the BLAs that African people in the townships rejected as illegitimate. It was, in part, a response to the imposition of increased service charges on residents by new township authorities and for a brief period, some townships were beyond police control. The army was drafted in to aid the police in suppressing the revolt. As a result of harsh repression, including the imposition of successive States of Emergency in 1985 and 1986, the revolt was brought under control. In 1985 alone, nearly two-thousand black people were killed by vigilante groups that were supported by the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the SAP. The 1986 State of Emergency, under which thirty-six thousand people were detained, slowed, but did not halt, mass demonstrations. This resulted, in part, in a second major wave of South African youth joining the ranks of MK in neighbouring states and an increase in military operations against the apartheid state as indicated above.

At this time, the apartheid regime was condemned internationally as never before and widespread sanctions were imposed against South Africa. In the area of financial sanctions, the Chase Manhattan bank and other banks refused to roll over South Africa's short-term debts. By cutting off the country's lifeline to international credit and withholding agreement on the rescheduling of debt, the international community slowly choked off the oxygen of capital inflows into South Africa. Without them the economy could no

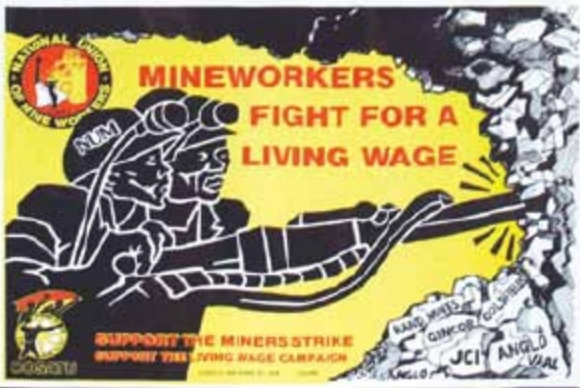


COSATU - Durban 1985



longer breathe. Between August 1987 and October 1988, South Africa spent almost half of its foreign exchange reserves just to service existing loans. This state of affairs was worsened by the creation of another actor in the UDF fold, namely, the Congress of South African

Trade Unions (COSATU) that brought together most of the country's black trade unions, representing more than seven hundred thousand (700 000) workers, under one organisational umbrella. In August 1987, one of the COSATU affiliates, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) organised a three-week strike involving some 250 000 black miners. Nine mine workers were killed and nearly a thousand were injured or arrested. Losses to the mines were estimated to hover



around \$125 million to \$225 million. The UDF and COSATU began to synchronise their activities and that synergy was a catalyst to the formation of the broad-based Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). The MDM was a loosely formed resistance front to apartheid, made up of COSATU/UDF/ANC supporters with no permanent or formal structure, hence it was difficult for the apartheid state to ban or restrict it. Apartheid South Africa's economy was becoming another terrain of struggle.

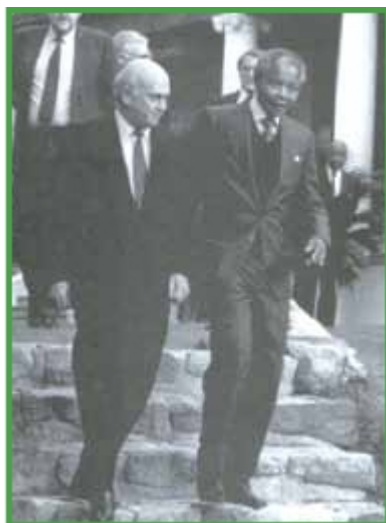
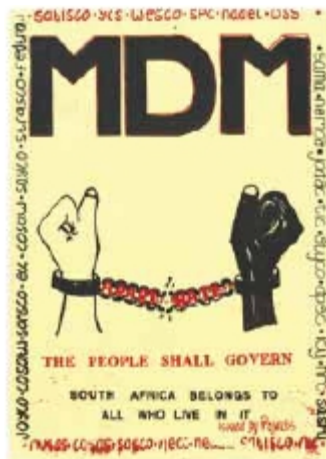
The struggle had now reached a point where the four pillars of struggle, namely: the armed struggle, mass struggle, underground political struggle and international pressure, had to be made to work in sync with one another. For example, the ANC had called for the people to render South Africa ungovernable and apartheid unworkable, but on the ground, this mass action needed to be guided by the political underground machinery and at the same time defended by MK. This gave birth to the idea of sending some members of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and Politico-Military Council (PMC) inside the country to co-ordinate the activities of all the arms of the struggle. The PMC had replaced the Revolutionary Council (RC) which had been created by the 1969 Morogoro Conference. Both structures were chaired by the President of the ANC. This decision was taken at the ANC Kabwe Conference held in Zambia in 1985.



Senior Comrades, that is, Sathyandranath Ragunanan, 'Mac' Maharaj and Siphwe

'Gebhuza' Nyanda, were selected for Operation Vula (shortened from the Zulu word Vulindlela or "open the way") and were to work in the Natal Region as Commander and Deputy Commander respectively. However, any ANC operative who was in any region of the country at the time, was deemed to be part of Vula. This was the case, for example, with Christopher Manye (Little John/Bricks) and Charles Nqakula who had to be inside the country to prepare for Chris Hani's infiltration back to South Africa. However, between August 1988 and May 1990, Vula embedded itself in Natal and to a lesser extent in the Witwatersrand area. Huge quantities of arms were smuggled in and stored across the country in preparation for a day of national insurrection or people's war. It is in this regard, that Sphiwe Nyanda concentrated on military training of those who volunteered to serve in the ranks of MK. This was in line with the dictum of MK cadres multiplying themselves among the people inside the country.

A core committee of the MDM consisting of Cyril Ramaphosa, Rev. Frank Chikane, Sydney Mufumadi and Father Simangaliso Mkhathshwa was established. This committee set the political agenda for COSATU/UDF in consultation with Lusaka via Mac. It has to be pointed out that the Vula operatives were not part of this committee nor any other MDM committee, but provided advice and guidance. Vula also established a direct and secure communication line between Mandela and Tambo. Using his secure communications between Mandela and Tambo, Mac was able to send the draft Harare Declaration document to Nelson Mandela for his comments and also in preparation for his meeting with President P W Botha.



The Harare Declaration document was written by the ANC and set the pre-conditions that the apartheid regime had to meet before negotiation for a political settlement could begin and included the ANC's own draft Constitutional Guidelines. The document was first discussed and adopted by the leaders of all the Frontline States which formed the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and later the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and finally, the United Nations Organisation (UN). From May 1988, Mandela was in regular talks with

Mandela with F.W. de Klerk

leaders of the apartheid government on a negotiated political settlement and finally saw President Botha in July 1989 and his successor, F W de Klerk in December of the same year. The negotiations were initiated by the National Intelligence Services (NIS) who had come to the conclusion that a negotiated settlement would stave off the economic collapse of South Africa.

As the negotiations were going on at two different levels, namely between Mandela and the apartheid regime on the one hand, and the Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma team negotiating with 'Afrikaner intellectuals' at Mells Park, near Bath in the UK on the other, the war was raging on at **Cuito Cuanevale in Angola**. What is referred to as **The Battle for Cuito Cuanevale** began in 1987 in the south of Angola where the SADF and UNITA (Uniao Nacional Para Independencia Total de Angola) forces were engaged in a ferocious battle against the alliance of Angolan government forces (FAPLA), PLAN, (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) and the Cuban forces. In July 1987, FAPLA attacked the UNITA stronghold in Mavinga, about 300 km from Jamba, a sanctuary of Jonas Savimbi, the UNITA leader. The SADF hastened to UNITA's rescue and forced FAPLA to retreat to Cuito Cuanevale. A contingent of 120 Cuban troops rushed to the area to help FAPLA forces to re-organise their defences and doggedly held out until a force of 1 500 elite troops arrived from Cuba in December 1987. For five months the SADF threw everything at the beleaguered outpost, pounding the defensive ring relentlessly with 155mm G5 guns. However, the end of the SADF offensive was signalled on 27 June 1988 when a squadron of MiGs (USSR-built Jet fighters) bombed the Ruacana and Calueque installations cutting the water supply to Ovamboland and its military bases and killing 11 young military white conscripts. The SADF was effectively marooned at Cuito Cuanevale and the war was effectively over. Fidel Castro of Cuba could have ordered his troops to march into Namibia and declare it free, but decided to exercise restraint and allowed negotiations to follow.

It has to be noted that as the battle for Cuito Cuanevale was raging, the MK cadres together with FAPLA, were defending the 'Northern Front' in the north of Luanda, against UNITA incursions. The UNITA forces, supported by the USA, France's Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE) and Moboto Sese Seko's government in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) on 10 October 1988 claimed to have killed 61 FAPLA combatants in ambushes, which included 28 killed in Ucuva in northern Luanda province. These were attacks



The battle of Cuito Cuanevale

against joint FAPLA-MK convoys that were moving logistic supplies from Luanda to various camps and villages in the north of Luanda.

The camp and villages included Pang camp, Camps 32 and 13 in Quibaxe, the forward military base in Quibaxe town and the various front bases in Pareta village, Phiri and Ucuva towns alongside the route from Luanda, Caxito and Uige. The Young Lions Detachment of MK fought gallantly, repulsing these UNITA attacks and in defence of the Angolan territory. This allowed the FAPLA-PLAN-Cuban Forces to concentrate on fighting effectively against the SADF-UNITA offensive in Cuito Cuanevale.

The FAPLA-PLAN-Cuban forces victory in Cuito Cuanevale led to: (1) total withdrawal of the SADF from Angola and Namibia through the implementation of UN Resolution 435 of 1978; (2); Namibian independence celebrated on 21 March 1990; (3) the serious negotiations for a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa.

After 13 years (1975-1988) of defending Angolan sovereignty, the Cuban soldiers (Volunteers or AMADELAKUFA) took nothing home except the bones of their 2 070 fallen comrades and the gratitude of the people of Southern Africa. Paying tribute to Cuba and its troops on the occasion of celebrating Namibian independence, the recently released Nelson Mandela said:

Your presence and the reinforcement of your forces in the Battle for Cuito Cuanevale was of truly heroic significance. The crushing defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanevale was a victory for the whole of Africa! The overwhelming defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanevale provided the possibility for Angola to enjoy peace and consolidate its own sovereignty! The defeat of racist army allowed the struggling people of Namibia to finally win their independence! The decisive defeat of the apartheid aggressors broke the myth of invincibility of the white oppressors! The defeat of the apartheid army was an inspiration to the struggling people inside South Africa! Without the defeat of Cuito Cuanevale our organisations would not have been unbanned! The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanevale has made it possible for me to be here today! Cuito Cuanevale was a milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation! Cuito Cuanevale has been a turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our country from the scourge of apartheid!

The negotiated political settlement and MK

The ANC and other organisations were unbanned in February 1990. The leaders and activists began to return home and political prisoners on Robben Island and other places were released and negotiations for a democratic dispensation began in earnest at the

Convention for a Democratic South Africa on 20 December 1991. An Interim Constitution was agreed upon and parameters for a Government of National Unity (GNU) set out.

In some respects, the years 1991-1994 became a test of wills, in which the people's tradition of resistance triumphed against the apartheid culture that had become moribund. To paraphrase Antonio Gramsci's interregnum, the old order was dying and the new was being born.

MK cadres had to accept and agree to integration into the new South African National Defence Force as was the case with Zimbabwean independence and that of Namibia. This was an accepted outcome of a negotiated political settlement. The MK cadres who did not integrate into the SANDF were demobilised and either joined other government departments or the private sector. They became Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) of the ANC. Essentially

this means no person can be a member of MKMVA without being a member of the ANC, thus confirming that MK was a military wing of the ANC. The Patron-in-Chief of MKMVA is President of the ANC and the country, Mr J G Zuma, a tried and tested erstwhile leader of South Africa's struggle. MKMVA, together with other Non Statutory Forces veterans of struggle shall aim at improving the lives of struggle veterans and their dependents. This has been assisted by the creation of the Department of Military Veterans and the enactment of the Military Veterans Act (No.18) of 2011 which spells out the welfare benefits of military veterans.

Conclusion

Guerrillas never win wars, but their adversaries often lose them.

(Charles W Taylor in, *Guerrilla*: 1963)



On 27 April 1994 all the people of South Africa were able to exercise their political right to vote. On 10 May 1994, Nelson Mandela, **the first and the last Commander-in-Chief of MK** and the first Commander-in-Chief of SANDF, was sworn in as the country's first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa. MK had played a critical role in the ushering in of democracy to South Africa. As a political army of the struggle, MK had played its role in armed propaganda. Every limpet mine explosion, landmine blast, hand grenade attack and direct combat involving MK soldiers, was celebrated by the oppressed people of South Africa. What we are celebrating is the 50 years of selfless service, dedication and discipline on the part of those who chose to be the volunteers - AMADELAKUFA - for people's freedom. Let us celebrate MK in its fiftieth anniversary for what it was: a force that kept the hope of freedom alive and inspired thousands upon thousands to risk life, limb and a lot more, in pursuit of a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.



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