



ANC Whip

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HERITAGE MONTH:

Celebrating cultural heritage for nation building and social cohesion

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ANC CHIEF WHIP

Our material (i.e. tangible) and immaterial (i.e. intangible) heritage are imbedded in the earthly and spiritual world respectively. The Spiritual and earthly realms are, however, each other's image. This reality is embodied in the maxim as above. In other words if we know ourselves and our environment we can know and respect the origins and nature of the spiritual or intangible reality that informs our spiritual and material existence. This is important because self-knowledge is a key requirement for holistic (i.e. spiritual and material) human development. The underdevelopment of black people and Africans in particular results, first and foremost, from the forcible deprivation of their intangible heritage, land and the natural resources from which they derived sustenance from time immemorial.

Heritage month is a time of renewal or rebirth, of our identity, values and rededication to what makes us human.

It is the time to recover our humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) and its value and principles of equality, freedom and justice for all. September is described as Heritage month, because it offers us the opportunity to understand our origins, identity and interrelationships, between our

spiritual and material existence. It also assists us to understand the critical importance of social cohesion and nation building, rural development and agrarian land reform as priorities for the current term of President Jacob Zuma's administration.

This strategic priority affords us an opportunity to restore our indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable development.

Historical Context

The founders of our democracy understood their spirituality and its relationship with the land and therefore waged protracted struggles to defend both. Even today there are sacred spaces such as Motoulong on the Maluti mountains in the Free State which need protection.

Our icon, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, traces the relationship between the African National Congress and the church to the 1870's, when the Ethiopian church movement was formed as a response to the rapid land dispossession from the 1800's. The African clergy sought to free themselves from the fetters of the missionaries by establishing African independent churches that came to be known as Ethiopian churches.

The role that the missionaries played in the accelerated African land dispossession of the late

nineteenth century, called for a response from the African people in general and African Spiritual / religious leaders in particular. The response took a political form on the one hand and a Spiritual form on the other.

On the Spiritual side the response was sparked by racially discriminatory practices and suppression of the African Cultural Heritage in the missionary churches.

This led to the secession of the African clergy from missionary churches and the founding of the Ethiopian churches.

The first break away was that of Nehemia Tile, who founded the Thembu National Church in 1884.

The most notable break-away was that of Mangena Mokone, called the Ethiopian Church of Africa, which was founded in Marabastad, Pretoria in 1892. This church is also Pan African in character and also gave moral support to Ethiopia in her 1896 war against Italy.

The Ethiopian movement was both a Spiritual and a Political movement.

Though its fundamental basis was the African interpretation of the Scriptures, it went well beyond the churches it had helped produce.

The fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian movement were self-worth, self-reliance and freedom.



African people were forcibly deprived of these values by colonialism and cultural imperialism.

Thus the wars of resistance and later struggles for freedom included the struggle for the recovery of the African Humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) and its inherent values of National identity, self-worth, self-reliance, self-help and a sense of development and progress.

These tenets drew the Ethiopian Christians, like a magnet to the growing Pan African nationalism of the early twentieth century. This Pan African movement was to produce provincial native Congresses, which culminated in the formation of the South African National Native Congress (SANNAC) in 1912, renamed African National Congress in 1923. It is in this sense that our icon, Nelson Mandela, traces the seeds of the formation of the ANC to the Ethiopian movement of the 1890's.

The Ethiopian Christians fought alongside traditional communities during the Bambatha rebellion which marked the end of the wars of resistance and the birth of liberation politics.

In his speech to the Free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa in Potchefstroom, 14 December 1992, honourable Nelson Mandela had this to say on African heritage:

"The Centenary of the Ethiopian Church should have been celebrated throughout the length and breadth of our country because it touches all the African people irrespective of their denomination or political outlook". He went on to say that the Ethiopian church "is the only surviving institution that is in the hands of the African people". This is a remarkable feature for which we have to give credit to the leaders of this church throughout the difficult years of final dispossession of our people. Indeed our people were not dispossessed only of their land

and cattle, but also of their pride, their dignity and their institutions". Honourable Nelson Mandela also appreciated the positive role that our religious heritage can play to advance social cohesion and Nation building.

In his lecture titled *Renewal and Renaissance: Towards a New World Order*, delivered at the Oxford Centre for Islamic studies on the 11 July 1997, Mandela pointed out that religion can provide Spiritual leadership in bringing about the social renewal of our continent and the world. He observed quite correctly that African history has also been profoundly shaped by the interplay between these three great religious traditions – Islam, Christianity and African religion. He went on to say that the way in which these great religions of Africa interact and cooperate with one another, could have a profound bearing on the social space we create for the rebirth of our continent.

Last but not least, Mandela observed that the relationship of Islam and Christianity to one another and of these two to African Religion may be pertinent aspects of the African rebirth and renewal. He called on Muslims to harness the more inclusive strands in their own theological heritage in order to contribute to a more humane Africa, acknowledging the humanity of those traditions that are unique to the continent. In this regard Nelson Mandela observed:

"As with other aspects of its heritage, African Traditional Religion is increasingly recognised for its contribution to the world.

No longer seen as despised superstition which had to be superseded by superior forms of belief, today its enrichment of humanity's spiritual heritage is acknowledged.

The spirit of Ubuntu that profound African sense that we are, human only through the humanity of other human beings, has added globally to our common search for a better world".

In conclusion Mandela observed the strength of interfaith solidarity in action against apartheid which enabled each religion to bring its best forward and place it at the service of all.

He then challenged all the religions of the continent to walk a similar path in the reconstruction and renewal of our continent.

The struggle for preservation and development of our Natural Heritage

African people were not only degraded and dehumanised, but were also forcibly deprived of their land and its resources which formed the basis of their Natural heritage.

The convener of the founding conference of the ANC and an advocate of unity and cooperation, Pixley Isaka Ka Seme, responded by buying farms in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) to promote agriculture and ensure food security.

Seme's initiative was so successful that the white farmers called on the Union government to take away land from African people and prohibit them from buying farms.

This was achieved through the enactment of the Land Act of 1913, which only allocated 7% of the total land surface of South Africa to African people.

This percentage was increased to 13% in 1936. African people were then forced into Native reserves, which were too small and barren for agriculture and livestock.

This resulted in today's underdevelopment of African people which led to a variety of social ills.

The loss of land and its natural resources deprived Africans of skills in farming, indigenous knowledge systems and their underlying intangible heritage. This denied Africans the means for self-help, self-reliance and survival. Thus Africans were

forced to become mine, farm and domestic workers and to live in shacks and single-sex hostels. The resulting inhumane situation sparked off popular struggles for the recovery of African humanity, national pride, identity, self-determination, human and people's rights.

Thus the Ethiopian (i.e. spiritual) and Pan African (i.e. political) struggles of our forebears were intertwined.

For this reason, the founders of our democracy were both religious and political leaders. The founding president of the ANC, John Langalibalele Dube, for instance, called for a spiritual humane and prosperous Africa as early as 1892.

In 1905 Seme not only echoed these values, but also called for a unique civilization for Africa and Africans. The third president of the ANC, ZR Mahabane, articulated what became the ANC moral vision in his 1921 speech, titled, "We are not political children".

Mahabane observed that African people were landless, voteless, homeless, hopeless, degraded and dehumanised by colonialism and cultural imperialism. He maintained that in such circumstances the ANC had to strive to restore the humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) of the African people as a prerequisite for the restoration of the humanity of the people of South Africa as a whole. Thus the 1923 ANC National Conference adopted the first Bill of Rights on the African Continent, which reclaimed the African Humanity and the participation of African people in the economy. This Bill was amplified by the 1943 African claims and the 1955 Freedom Charter, which laid the foundation of a value-centred post Apartheid society.

The Freedom Charter was adopted under the stewardship of Inkosi Albert Luthuli, a worker, lay priest in the Congregational Church, cultural and traditional leader. Luthuli also reaffirmed the need for a unique African civilisation propounded by Seme.

The African New Year, in particular, provides a home-grown framework for cultural and agricultural festivals which are necessary for inculcating moral, social and economic values in our children

The African National liberation struggles were informed by spiritual, cultural and material conditions, including land dispossession.

Thus the struggle for land started long before the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Ubuntu values and principles found their way into both the 1993 and 1996 constitution.

This prompted president Zuma to say that we want to build a society based on Ubuntu values and principles.

The strategy and tactics (S & T) document adopted at the Polokwane Conference mainstreamed the spiritual philosophy of Ubuntu and its inherent values of human solidarity, equality, freedom and justice for all.

It calls for the creation of a truly united, democratic and prosperous South Africa in which the value of all citizens is measured by their humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) without regard to race, gender and social status. On the 23 September 2008, President Zuma delivered the Gert Sibande Memorial Lecture in Secunda where he asked the gathering to honour the memory of Gert Sibande, a revolutionary leader, by remembering that he was a rural activist who stood for the distribution of land to many rural people who were exploited by farmers.

Gert Sibande's life therefore was about the fundamental changing of the socio-economic relations between farmers and farm workers. He stood for the

redistribution of land to those who worked it.

In conclusion the President stated that September, our heritage month: "marks the beginning of Ramadan for the Moslem communities, the beginning of the new year for Jewish and African communities. Many African indigenous churches for example, the Zion Christian Church in Moria also celebrate their New Year in September." The President used his memorial lecture to congratulate all cultural and religious communities, which have been celebrating their festivals and invited all South Africans, both black and white, to take part in the heritage month celebrations.

At the Presidential Religious Summit held on the 27 November 2008, President Zuma told the delegates that: "Nation building and achieving social cohesion are some of the most important responsibilities of the ruling party. Central to the two tasks is the need to re-affirm and recommit to the moral vision and the value system of our nation as outlined in various historical documents and the constitution of the land. The ANC has always valued the interaction with faith communities because its history and moral vision are rooted in the religious sector.

" We therefore, would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mcebisi Xundu on his election as the president of the national Interfaith Leaders Council. September marks the beginning of a New Year rooted in the spirituality of many ancient nations, including Africans, which transcends race, class and gender. The African New Year, in particular, provides a home-grown framework for cultural and agricultural festivals which are necessary for inculcating moral, social and economic values in our children.

An adoption and mainstreaming of the African and related calendars would realign our spiritual and material existence

and make us a truly value-centred society.

We need new ways of celebrating our national holidays and of using them as instruments for imparting moral and social values to our youth. A short exposition of the African Calendar will illustrate the desired realignment of our spiritual and material existence. The African Calendar embodies the intangible heritage of African people that cannot and will not be understood without African history and languages. Sir Seretse Khama, first president of Botswana and paramount Chief of Bammašgwato, emphasised the importance of reclaiming our cultural heritage in emphatic terms:

“We were taught sometimes in a very positive way, to despise ourselves and our ways of life. We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of... It seemed we were in for a definite period of foreign tutelage without any hope of our ever again becoming our own masters.

The end result of all this was that our self-pride and our self-confidence were badly undermined.

Sir Seretse Khama challenged us: “to try to retrieve what we can of our past.

We should write our own history books to prove that we did have a past that was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. We must do this for the simple reason that a Nation without a past is a lost Nation, and a people without a past, is a people without a soul”.

The African soul is embedded in its intangible heritage that today calls for our attention.

Western philosophers and scholars succeeded to convince us and the world that we have no history and heritage, by cutting us off from the ancient Ethiopian and Egyptian past and by attributing the achievements of Maphungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, Meroe and Axum in Ethiopia to foreigners. It is for

this reason that Sheik Anta Diop said that the history of Africa will not be complete until it is connected to that of Egypt. Pixley Isaka Ka Seme connected it in his public lecture titled “The Regeneration of Africa (1905), Seme called on us to “Come with him to the ancient Capital of Egypt, Thebes, the city of one hundred gates, whose grandeur and venerable ruins and the gigantic proportions of its architecture reduce to insignificance the boasted monuments of other nations.

“We were taught sometimes in a very positive way, to despise ourselves and our ways of life. We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of...” - Sir Seretse Khama

“The pyramids of Egypt are structures to which the world presents nothing comparable. The mighty monuments seem to look with disdain on every other work of human art and to vie with Nature herself. All the glory of Egypt belongs to Africa and her people.

These monuments are the indestructible memorials of their great and original genius. It is not through Egypt alone that Africa claims such unrivalled historic achievements. I could have spoken of the pyramids of Ethiopia, which, though inferior in size to those of Egypt, surpass them in architectural beauty, their sepulchres evince the highest purity of taste and of many prehistoric ruins in other parts of Africa.

In such ruins Africa is like the Golden Sun, that, having sunk beneath the Western horizon, still plays upon the world which he

sustained and enlightened in his career”.

To these ancient ruins Nelson Mandela added Carthage, Maphungubwe and Great Zimbabwe. Near home with have Lwandali (now Tsheudehulu) and Thumamela.

The most decisive affinity between the ancient Egyptian tangible and intangible heritage and our own could be found in the languages, religion, astral sciences and indigenous knowledge systems.

Language and Heritage

Ancient Egyptians traced their cradle land to the source of the Nile in Burundi and Uganda.

This area was called Punt or Bunntu (i.e. land of the embryo), Khantu, Afura (Ophir), Ukara or Sakara (i.e. the Land of the Sun): Ancient Ethiopians, forebearers of modern Africans, claim that ancient Egyptians are their descendants and that they derived their sciences and hieroglyphic alphabet and religion from them.

These are attested by classical Greek and Roman writers.

The identity of ancient Egyptian language and indigenous African languages lie in the common monosyllabic words (i.e. ka, ba, ta, pa) and concepts like Ntu in Ubuntu, Punt (u), and Bunntu (or BNNT).

In Africa, south of the Sahara, there are about 400 languages and 2 000 dialects, belonging to the Bantu family of languages from which the ancient Egyptian language derived.

By neglecting our indigenous languages, we lose our past and intangible heritage.

Language and Religion are also motive forces for nation building and social cohesion.

We can preserve indigenous African languages by prescribing an indigenous language for every degree and entry into the public service.

This will restore respect for and enhance the development of African languages and lead to the

re-opening of Department of Languages at all universities.

Language and Social Cohesion

All people in Southern and Western Africa, like ancient Ethiopians and Egyptians, trace their origins to the Area of Great Lakes and they share the intangible heritage of Ntu, which has variants throughout the length and breadth of Africa.

The cradle land of the Bantu languages is in the Niger-Kordofan (formerly Naphta) province of ancient Ethiopia. African migrants from central Africa to Southern Africa, brought names like Naphta, Mutapa, Mwanamutapa, Burundi, Mohale, Kalanga or Karanga from the north.

These names are critical for Nation building and social cohesion. For instance, the name rundi in Burundi is found in:

- Lundi River (Zimbabwe)
- Rundji (God name for Zimbabwe)
- Lundi (ancient name of Limpopo)
- Undi (another name for Limpopo River)
- Odi (region of Gauteng)
- Maluti Mountains (Free State and Lesotho)
- Malundi Mountains (KZN)
- Ntaba za ka Lundi (Eastern Cape)
- Ulundi (KZN)

These place names derive from Rundji-Ntare, the son of Mohale, the Goddess that is revered throughout Southern Africa and beyond. Her name survives in Magaliesberg (Thaba Mohale) and Mohalesnek. The name Mohale has the following variants:

- Mwalinkulunkulu
- Mwari (Karanga / Shore)
- Muali (Khelobedu / Khelozwi)
- Nwali (Venda)
- Mwari (Tsonga)

In the African popular religion, Mohale and Lundi / Luti are the Black Modonna (i.e. Divine

Mother) and child depicted on the full moon to show that humanity descended from the celestial spheres.

Here it is evident that through language and popular religions we are able to establish the cultural unity in diversity of African peoples. Introduction of focussed African Cultural and Languages studies could contribute to Pan Africanism, unity, peace and harmony in Africa.

There is a need to teach Swahili as a Pan African language to promote intra African communications.

African Cosmology and Social Cohesion

The proponents of the African "otherness" convinced us that Africans have no literacy culture and intangible heritage. Thus why our cultural and natural heritage in Maphungabwe, Lwandali, Lake Funduzi, Thulamela, Timbavati and elsewhere in the Kruger National Park are reduced to national Parks and Tourism attractions with total disregard to the intangible heritage, embedded in these sites. There is an urgent need to review the history and cultural heritage of these sites to remove the distortions which are hampering the recovery of the African soul embedded in these Cultural and Natural heritage.

The Educator's guide to the UNESCO General History of Africa deals with the time line of the history of gold, rather than African Heritage. The time lines of African history must be revisited in the light of the astronomical findings showing that astronomy has had a major effect on various cultures throughout Africa since the dawning of recorded time. The UNESCO Educator's guide show how certain African Cultures have evolved through their understanding of the cosmos, and how that cumulative astronomical knowledge and history affects us today.

African cosmology is embedded in the Zodiacs of Maphungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, Meroe (ancient Ethiopia) and Dendere (ancient Egypt), which are substantially the same.

An analysis of these zodiacs reveal the cultural unity of African people especially in terms of their philosophy of origins and being, religion, spiritual, cultural and agricultural festivals.

The recovery of these Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) or intangible knowledge and its application to our day to day life will establish a new paradigm for the next 100 years that we call the African Century.

In South Africa these intangible knowledge systems can be found in the Maphungubwe Zodiac which is substantially the same with those of Great Zimbabwe, Meroe, Matendere and Dendera. The Maphungubwe Zodiac is inscribed on a round wooden slab.

On its rim with find twelve characters corresponding to those of the Zodiac of Dendera and the Greco-Roman Zodiac derived from it. At the centre of the Zodiac we find a turtle (haramanuba) or crocodile (Nyambe) symbolising the Solar (Kara) principle.

This Solar principle is also called hamptah or Champtah (i.e. the word of the first Cause) that is called God.

This sun God is surrounded by four triangular slabs representing the four light beings (Kheru) before the throne of the solar principle that is called God.

These light beings symbolised by Holy Beasts are:

- Mundu / FaHam ((W)oman)
- Mutapa / Omphtha (eagle)
- Mwanamutapa / Momphta (lion)
- Amun / Amen (Bull / ox)

These four Holy Beasts are known as cherubim in Judaism and Al Karibuyan in Islam. In all three traditions they mean messengers.

The Solar (Kara) principle also represents the ether or fifth

element while the four Holy Beasts or light beings represent the four elements of water (manu), fire (Aakhut), earth (Rastau) and air (Amenti). The four triangular slabs also represents the four quarters of the universe which unfolded themselves into the twelve divisions of heaven that are called the houses or signs of the Zodiac. These houses also represent the body of the Sun God from which human souls derive.

The Zodiac constitutes the eight sphere of heaven that leads into the Ennead (i.e. nine emanations of the First cause).

The eight sphere is linked to the earth and humanity through the seven outer planets which make out the ladder through which human souls descend from and ascend to their maker.

Thus the Maphungubwe and related Zodiacs provides a framework for a holistic (Spiritual and material) world-view.

The socio-cultural commonalities between African and other cosmologies bring us closer to a spiritual world-view that transcends race, gender, class and religion.

A development of this spiritual world-view could contribute to social cohesion and begin to address the problem of global polarisation.

The African Calendar

African people divide the year into four quarters which corresponds to the four cardinal points of the universe which surround the central sun (or star) that symbolises God.

The Godhead and the four cardinal points, represented by four Holy Beasts, are encircled by the seven Pleiades or circumpolar (khelemela) stars which appear in September to announce the beginning of the New Year. All major religions, including African religion, share a belief in the four Holy Beasts before the throne of God.

The African year is divided into three seasons of four months each. These seasons are

summer (September to December), autumn (January to April) and winter (May to August). The African Calendar is an instrument for inculcating moral, social and economic values.

The appearance of the Pleiades or circumpolar stars in September is a reminder to the traditional leaders and healers to cleanse the land in preparation for rains and ploughing period. In October, rain-making ceremonies are held to thank family and royal ancestors, intermediaries between humankind and God, for rains and fertility of the soil. During this month, ploughing starts.

It would promote water conservation to institutionalise rain-making ceremonies in October every year.

In November the seeds germinate, animals reproduce, flowers blossom and nature is generally reborn after a long winter.

Thus November trees may not be cut, female animals may not be killed and the whole of nature is sacred.

The December new moon announces that preparations for first fruits celebrations should start. These celebrations start with the full moon and reach their peak between the 21-25 December, which mark the birthdays of our primal ancestors. The 25 December, in particular, is the birthday of the God of light and life, symbolized by a first fruit, born of a universal virgin mother. Thus December 25 is not only a Christian holiday, it is a universal holy day which was celebrated in the solar temples of Great Zimbabwe, Maphungubwe, Mutokolwe (Lwandali), Meroe and various Egyptian temples. The God of light and life is also symbolized by a black bull which is sacrificed to God and royal ancestors at the beginning of January to welcome the harvesting period (January to April).

The beginning of the harvest properly begins between the 21 – 22 March when the sun crosses

the equator on its return to the northern hemisphere.

This period also coincides with the Jewish pass-over and Easter weekend. On this dates the sun enters the zodiacal sign Amun (i.e the lamb of God that is sacrificed to nourish humanity).

According to the African Calendar the 1st of May is a spiritual holiday on which traditional communities celebrated the nativity of Mohale, the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

Now the 1st of May is only a workers holiday because the African Calendar has been suppressed for too long.

The revival of African religion opens the door for the celebration of this spiritual festivals.

This would enhance solidarity between the faith communities and workers.

On the 25th May, now Africa Day, the star canopus (kanuba) appears before sunrise to announce the beginning of winter and initiation ceremonies which take place between May and August.

These spiritual, cultural and agricultural festivals give expression to the intangible African heritage and impart moral and social values.

They are ways of life which sustained the African moral and social fibres and enhanced social cohesion and nation building.

The suppression of African spirituality, culture and traditions, weakened the African moral and social fibre.

The current values in education and moral regeneration programmes have neglected indigenous African values which are embraced by the overwhelming majority of the people and thus failed to stem the tide of moral degeneration in schools and communities.

There is an urgent need for the social cluster, the legislative sector, cultural and religious organisations to come together to review the situation and take appropriate action.

■ **Chief Whip's address to the National Assembly during the debate on Heritage Day.**