



## **"Our African Heritage, Our Treasure", 15th Kgosi Edward Patrick Lebone Molotlegi Annual Memorial Lecture**

**Mogoeng Mogoeng, Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa 06 October 2012**

Programme Director, Dr Dan More

Your Majesty Mme Mogolo Dr Semane Molotlegi

Your Royal Highnesses Princesses Motswana and Tirelo

Honourable Judge President of the North West High Court, Madam Justice Monica Leeuw

Morena Seeiso B Seeiso, Principal Chief of Matsieng, Lesotho

Dikgosana present here today

Kgotla ya Kgosing

Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow South Africans

Good Afternoon

Africa and her people has contributed immensely to human development and world civilization. The ruins of Zimbabwe and the pyramids of Egypt bear testimony to the suppressed truth about Africa's rich heritage and her lost status and glory as a once upon a time world super power.

*Botho* or *Ubuntu*, which encapsulates the humanness, humility, regard for human dignity, generosity, hospitality and Godliness that are irreconcilable with the barbarism many would like to define Africa by; bear testimony to Africa's centuries-long regard for human rights. Ironically it is the observance of these human rights and our characteristic



spirit of sharing which must have moved our forebears to permit would-be colonialists to occupy our land only for them to abuse this dose of *Botho* later.

Our proverbs and idiomatic expressions reveal a lot about the wisdom of our forebears. Expressions like *Kgosi ke thotobolo e olela matlakala*, meaning leaders would be well advised to appreciate that not everybody would always be pleased with their leadership. Accordingly abuse would be hurled at them and they would do well to develop the capacity to absorb abuse, rudeness and even attempts at dethronement.

Of equal importance and relevance are expressions like “*Kgosi Ke Kgosi Ka Morafe*” which more appositely translated a King owes his leadership or kingship to his people. Collective leadership is a leadership style that is at the heart of true African traditional leadership. Dictatorships are therefore isolated aberrations to true African leadership.

Our leaders have always embraced the spirit of collective governance. They have always embraced the spirit of acting as a team, and they have always taken counsel from elders or headmen, before they could act. And permanent traditional structures have always been in place to ensure that the voices of the people, through their representatives are heard and are at all times factored into the decision-making processes.

Meetings have, as a matter of course, been convened at a clan-level and an all-inclusive “*kgotha-kgothe*” would occasionally be convened by the overall leader, not only for him or her to speak to the people, but to hear them out as well. Similarly, the adjudication of cases in an African traditional setting has never been a one person affair. Ours has by design,



always been a caring and a people's leadership.

And it is this caring, people's visionary leadership that King Lebone The First was an embodiment of. His fame reached me as a young boy growing up in a village located some 70 km west to where we are now. He was a highly regarded leader, not only in this province and country, but also in the neighbouring countries and probably some parts of the world as well. He was renowned for the developmental vision he had for his land and for the empowerment of his people. Members of the Royal Bafokeng nation under his leadership have for many years now been known for that insatiable appetite for education and commitment to excellence.

I know of no territory under the rulership of a king on this continent which has recorded the quality and extent of development, educational, economical and infrastructural; that rivals that of the Royal Bafokeng Nation under his leadership and thereafter. The Royal Palace, the Civic Centre that was and continues to be superior to Civic Centres of many towns and cities, the highly qualified teachers that have always been attracted to the schools in this kingdom, the excellent health facilities, the massive and beautiful houses build by citizens of this nation (on which people from many villages including Koffiekraal where I was born, modelled their own houses), the road infrastructures, the economic muscle of the nation and the bursary schemes that have been made available to the Bafokeng students all the way to university level; are some of the proofs of the caring and purpose-driven visionary leadership displayed by King Lebone The First.

It is fitting and important therefore that this memorial lecture be held annually, because signs abound that some people who know less about the African heritage and kingdoms, associate Africans with heartless



violence, backwardness and the somewhat innate and irresistible inclination or proneness to oppress others, especially the vulnerable.

This memorial lecture thus presents itself as the platinum opportunity to those of us who have made an effort to appreciate and to have tasted the goodness and richness of Africanness; to unveil the wealth of the life and enriching experience that Africanness and African royalty have to offer, for the betterment of humanity.

The legacy of many of our African leaders, *Botho*, our languages and rich cultural norms, standards, customs and traditions; are virtually disappearing before us with our eyes wide open. We, especially the baTswana people, speak more English, Afrikaans, seSotho and isiZulu than we speak our own language. From whom then will our children get to know about their roots, themselves and their language? A high number of people suffer from a debilitating identity crisis.

Traditional leadership or Royalty is fast treading behind the footprints of a dinosaur, as if to embrace the dinosaur status or fate of extinction. What then should be done to recapture our rich heritage, to preserve identity and the institution of African Royalty?

It all begins with the leadership. What moved most of us to treat King Lebone the First with utmost reverence, was his respect for others, great and small, rich and poor, his genuine humility, his respect for himself and for his family, the esteem with which he held the position into which he was born (as evidence by the way he comported himself in accordance with Royal etiquette and protocol) and his obvious respect for the institution of traditional leadership.



His devotion to personal development and to ensuring that he was well equipped to govern; his passion for the education of his people, as exemplified by the bursary scheme and centres for academic excellence in his jurisdiction, undergirded by the prestige of the institution of traditional leadership; all explain the esteem in which he continues to be held.

In the days of King Lebone the First you would never see true Royalty parading the streets whilst he was in a questionable state of sobriety. They were generally very neat, honourable and in their sound and sober senses in public. Additional to ever-available in-house training on matters Royal; there were Royal academies to deepen the understanding of African Royal etiquette and protocol, and other governance related-matters.

I think the re-establishment of properly resourced and re-structured Royal academies would go a long way to restoring the lost glory and wash traditional leadership of the reputational damage that it has and in certain respects continues to suffer.

I therefore urge, with a deep sense of humility, our leaders and their institutions, to seriously work towards the re-introduction of these institutions.

It bears repeating that our current situation cries out for this more than ever before because the conduct and performance of some of our traditional leaders, and again I say it with utmost respect as their subject; leave much to be desired and continue to bring Royalty into disrepute. Ways must be found by the collective leadership in traditional communities, to address proactively, the perennial contest and litigation



in relation to who the true traditional leadership of the various communities are. This is fast becoming a source of great embarrassment. Let traditional leadership family trees be properly worked out, documented and made known to the affected peoples and the general public. Our leaders ought to know by now that the documentation or digitisation of any document of importance is the best way of preserving that information.

If recent developments in relation to disputes over traditional leadership is anything to go by, then there are many indications that unrecorded positions, customs and traditions, protocols, leadership styles, strategies and principles as well as history are all bound to fizzle out of memory, and give rise to disputes, about the correctness of what is alleged to be the correct position. And this is the weakness on which saboteurs of the African Renaissance would probably capitalise on to undermine our institutions, and who we are.

Now is the time for African people themselves to write books about their history. The many inaccuracies or distortions written by people who know nothing or little about us, must be sorted out. Our poems, our clan-praises, our proverbs and idiomatic expressions; our customs and traditions, our Royal etiquette and protocol, leadership structures and principles as well as our justice system which lays more emphasis on reconciliation and restorative justice; must be widely documented in seTswana, English and other languages to set the record straight.

Let us urge the baTswana people in this country, to speak seTswana at least to the same degree that our brothers and sisters in Botswana do, and to also write about their language themselves. Mmemogolo Molotlegi will



tell you that, had it not been for the anticipated multi-lingual audience which always grace events of this great Kingdom, my entire speech would have been in seTswana.

We salute King Lebone the First for his visionary leadership, his wisdom and passion for academic excellence as borne out by the educational facilities and centres within the Kingdom at the helm of which towers the prestigious College of International standing named after him and the bursary scheme alluded to above as a result of which many academic and intellectual giants have emerged out of this great nation.

Important institutions and projects in this nation are led by the sons and daughters of this great nation, because education is prioritised and national pride is properly inculcated.

We celebrate our beloved King's opposition to the apartheid system at the time when many lacked the courage to do so. We also honour his respect for women. I do not make this remark lightly, because I am convinced that the very wise, articulate and powerful leader that our beloved Mmemogolo that we have come to know, would have degenerated into insignificance, had the King not given her the well-deserved space to unleash her potential and demonstrate her leadership capabilities as the Queen of this great nation.

I have served with Mmemogolo on a least one Board of Directors. Her presence, depth of knowledge, wisdom and visionary leadership saw us through many challenges. It was then that I appreciated; even better, this paraphrased expression that behind every successful and great personality is an equally great and successful spouse or partner. I have learnt to



honour, respect and admire Mmemogolo as a trans-generational leader and an institution in her own right.

I know this occasion is not about her, but I will be failing in my duty as a son of the soil if I were not to acknowledge her role in the fight against apartheid, in the leadership and amazing prosperity of this great nation, as well as the invaluable contribution she made in the establishment of a provincial structure that brings together wives of traditional leaders to discuss matters of mutual interest. This gives you but only a taste of the immeasurably strong support base that King Lebone the First had in Mmemogolo during his extraordinary successful reign.

*Mokoena o mogolo one a le, ebile otswelela gonna mogaka wa rona rotlhe.*

*A pula e le nele baKwena!*

I thank you all for listening.