



**14<sup>th</sup> Chief Albert Luthuli Memorial Lecture**

*“The challenges relating to the ownership of land and  
its use in the African Continent”*

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I have been made to understand that the objective of the Chief Albert Luthuli Memorial Lecture is to promote the principles and values that he stood for and upheld like peace, human rights, justice and the harmonious co-existence of people regardless of race, colour or creed.

And the theme of this year is about the challenges that the African Continent is facing, especially the ownership of land and its use. Some reflections on what is to be done to secure a future where peace and shared prosperity will reign in the African continent, is what I was called upon to do.

We all know that Chief Albert Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace prize because of his unwavering commitment to the resolution of challenges, however taxing or frustrating, by peaceful means. To address challenges relating to land use and land ownership in Africa, the solutions we propose in his memory must be inclusive and geared at securing enduring peace, stability and shared prosperity.

But our starting point in that journey ought to be a reconnection with his views on land and an appreciation of the relationship between landlessness on the one hand and poverty and homelessness on the other. Chief Albert Luthuli said:

**“These rights could and should be extended to all people in an integrated society for each to use voluntarily according to his inclination and capabilities. Apartheid in the Reserves will not give the people more land and yet scarcity of land is one of the paramount needs”**

African people needed more land back in the fifties already and land was one of their paramount needs. The Nobel Laurette also said:

**“You will agree that the masses of the African people live in abject poverty in both rural and urban areas and so many Africans find themselves landless and homeless”**

Highlighting the need to soldier on until this inhuman treatment of the African people in their ancestral land is reversed, Chief Albert Luthuli observed:

**“Since Union we have witnessed a decided deterioration in making available to [African people] opportunities for full development. Must we fold our hands in despair when we see our people drift to ultimate impotence and perpetual slavery? God forbid that we should be so untrue to Africa and the cause of freedom”**

Chief Albert Luthuli's philosophy of freedom, landownership and poverty eradication transcended the borders of South Africa. It was truly Pan-Africanist in character. It is therefore not surprising that the theme for this year is geared at securing lasting solutions in relation to landownership and land use for the entire African continent. Modern day South Africans should similarly be consumed by the desire to find solutions for the land issue for the entire African continent. This is so for at least two interrelated reasons. In the Preamble to our Constitution we pray, typical of the spirit of the man of God Chief Albert Luthuli, **“Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika; Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afrika; Hosi Katekisa Afrika.** We also sing **“Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika”** in our National Anthem.

We have thus committed ourselves to the well-being of the entire African continent. And it is therefore fitting that we pour out our energies and collective wisdom in endeavours that would result in sensible, humane and just land ownership patterns, sustainable and beneficial land use by all, shared prosperity and enduring peace.

It bears emphasis that the major challenge that confronted almost all African countries, is the land issue. In fact, one would not be exaggerating the significance of the land issue if one were to say that the struggle was primarily about the dispossession of African people of their land. Gross

injustices took place in relation to the land issue. And as Chief Albert Luthuli put it **“One cannot separate the issue of race from the argument about ownership at present, because one race insists on exclusive ownership”..**

He went on to say:

**“With the exception of a small number of voices crying in the wilderness, the overwhelming majority of whites reply that South Africa is exclusively owned by three million whites..... It does not stop, either, with ownership of land and wealth, and participation in government. In this view whites, because they are whites, extend their possession of ownership of the remaining eleven million people, who were expected to regard themselves as fortunate to be allowed to live and breathe - and work in a ‘white man’s country’.”**

This position obtained in virtually all African countries. As a result, land and wealth ownership in Africa is overwhelmingly in the hands of our former colonisers or their descendants. This would explain why justice and genuine peace, talk less of shared prosperity, is hard to come by in Africa. The natives of Africa are largely landless, poor, marginalised, ignored and at times even despised by those whose ancestors through

unjust and indefensible means, acquired their land and left them with comparatively nothing of consequence.

In honour of the memory of Chief Albert Luthuli, we must resolve this historic challenge - this monumental injustice - this abuse of the fundamental human rights of the African people.

Mr Loren Cunningham first gave a moving description of the breathtaking beauty of the African landscape, rivers, lakes, animals, mountains, waterfalls and then said:

**“Our great artist God has displayed these and other wonders in Africa. What are His plans for this continent and this people? He hid more gold here, more diamonds, plutonium, and copper than in any other place on earth. Africa has enough arable land to feed a large portion of the earth. The continent has more hydroelectric potential than all the rest of the world put together, as well as abundance of coal and oil.**

**Wisely used by and for Africans, the continent’s resources could contribute significantly to new health and prosperity. Unfortunately, for too long Africa’s people have been enslaved, raped, abused, dismissed by prejudice, hated, or just ignored. Their rich resources**

**have often been collected and used by others – even stolen- with little if any benefit going to the Africans. Instead, their value has attracted foreign exploitations enriching dictators and warlords, bringing bloodshed, starvation, and even modern forms of black-on-black slavery”.**

Within an African context it then makes a lot of sense to conclude that landownership accompanied by a properly guided and funded diligent usage equals wealth ownership. As Loren Cunningham correctly observed, Africa is rich in minerals, fertile soil, rivers with abundant water, a wide variety of much treasured game, vast-tracts of land and unrivalled electricity generating potential. How then are we to resolve the land ownership and utilisation issues?

Chief Albert Luthuli was convinced about the effectiveness or potency of a peaceful means as a weapon to resolve challenges that appear to be intractable. African people must wake up to the reality that the objectives the likes of Chief Albert Luthuli struggled for and died pursuing are far from being realised. Some of the peaceful strategies effectively employed to wage the liberation struggle should not have been abandoned when the right to vote and the opportunity to occupy high government positions was realised. An earnest pursuit of the peaceful resolution of the land and economic issues should have been continued to be embarked upon.

Concomitantly, there must be a worldwide united campaign to conscientise the global community about the injustice and devastating effect of the landlessness and virtual exclusion of the African people from meaningful participation in the mainstream economies of Africa. The exploitation, collection and exclusive enjoyment of Africa's wealth by all others but Africans, must also be campaigned against. The likes of Free Nelson Mandela Campaign and other similar advocacies must be seriously pursued until it becomes apparent that poverty eradication, restoration of good health and longevity, peace, stability, sustainable economic development and growth in Africa, and shared prosperity will never materialise as long as the economic justice-oriented fundamentals are not put in place.

War is not an option. Strategies that militate against peace and stability are not an option. But silence and inaction in the face of life-threatening and dehumanising migration, abject poverty and landlessness are also not an option.

As Chief Albert Luthuli would have done, African people must pursue meaningful, purposeful and truly intentional dialogue with those who own land and the sworn defenders of the *status quo*, internal and global campaigns must also be waged concertedly and tirelessly until normalcy is restored.



Even in those African countries where the State or indigenous people own land, the terms and conditions for the use of that land by investors must be revisited. True no nation can thrive without significant foreign investment. But any land use or investment that is not mutually-beneficial is not worth it. The greed-driven heartless exploitation of Africa's mineral and other natural resources must be tampered with or ended. It is grossly unjust. And it can only generate strife and instability to witness a lot of economic activity on home soil that benefit foreigners or only very few citizens, when the overwhelming majority dies in abject poverty, disease and crime. It is indefensible.

African leaders must wake up to their real responsibilities, which entail making good on all the good promises they routinely make when they seek high political office. African mineral and other natural resources, fertile soil, fauna and flora, and labour must also benefit Africans. African people have been feeding on empty promises and rousing speeches for far too long. The conditions of abject poverty and attendant migration challenges have reached crisis proportions. It is time to act more and talk less.

To achieve all of the above requires selfless, ethical and truly servant leadership that is not imprisoned by greed and a never-satisfied appetite

for money and material possessions. Smooth or polished modern-day dictators who pretend to care about the plight of the people when it is really themselves, their hidden masters, funders or handlers that they seek to serve, must be seen through and rejected.

That way workable solutions to landownership and mutually-beneficial and sustainable land use as well as shared prosperity would become a realisable dream. Tangible evidence would begin to emerge but only if you have a Luthuli-type of leadership in Africa. Let us each play our part in our own circles of influence, pursuing national unity and reconciliation without sacrificing the urgent need to take African people out of landlessness, homelessness, ignorance, sickness and debilitating poverty. Properly contextualised we ought to sacrificially say as he did that:

**“This stand of mine which resulted in my being sacked from the chieftainship might seem foolish and disappointing to some liberal and moderate Europeans and Non-Europeans with whom I have worked these many years and with whom I still hope to work. This is no parting of ways but ‘a launching farther into the deep’. I invite them to join us in our unequivocal pronouncement of all legitimate African aspirations and in our firm stand against injustice and oppression”**

Investors must be made to honour their social responsibility contracts. Never again must the African soil and resources be exploited, with the connivance of greedy African leaders who occupy positions of high responsibility, in return for only a few classrooms and boreholes. A genuine win-win investment is what Africa needs and deserves in return for the exploitation of its minerals and other natural resources as well as its labour force. The positive and tangible impact of investment on the lives of the African people is what we must all insist on. There must be transparency on the terms and conditions of investment and they must be published, and so that citizens can know how investments plow back into the State or land-owning rural communities or State. Tax evasion, harmful and predatory business practices must be fought most vigorously to end poverty and both public and private sector corruption.

Our environment is our future. The African forestry and the big five especially rhinos and elephants have been targeted by greed. Our rivers have been polluted to the detriment of our health, lifespan and future in the name of job creation and economic growth. Look at climate change or climate-warming that have given birth to devastating phenomenon like hurricane Micheal. Enough is enough!

As the President of the Brahman Farmers Society in Namibia, Mr Ryno Van der Merwe - a white brother – said that the landownership question

will not be properly resolved until our white compatriots are willing to sacrifice and share. I agree. This they must do, not out of guilt or a sense of self-condemnation but a sense of justice, purpose and commitment to sustainable peace, stability and national unity and healing.

Injustice is unsustainable. In recognition of this reality our pursuit of peace and justice must not be grounded on a false or shaky foundation. We must first internalise the truth outlined in the Preamble to our Constitution and the aspirations we have all committed ourselves to realise. The quality of life of all citizens must be improved and the potential of each person must be freed through amongst others the envisaged landownership patterns and the transparent and responsible manner in which we allow land and all its treasures to be used. Greed and heartless disregard for the centuries-old disgraceful plight of the poor African masses must not be allowed to be sustained by nice-sounding and clever business lingo any longer.

**NOW IS THE TIME! KE NAKO**