

SPEECH BY CITY OF JOHANNESBURG EXECUTIVE MAYOR, CLLR  
MPHO PARKS TAU AT THE CONFERMENT OF THE FREEDOM OF THE  
CITY TO THE HONOURABLE ANDREW MLANGENI AND ADVOCATE  
GEORGE BIZOS, MALANSHOF, 20 APRIL, 2016

Madame Speaker, Councillor Connie Bapela

The Honourable Andrew Mlangeni and family

Advocate George Bizos and family

Chief Whip of Council, Councillor Prema Naidoo

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Fellow Councillors

City officials

Dignitaries

Ladies and gentlemen

On this very day 52 years ago, no more than a few kilometres from where we stand, a statement which came to define the moral core of the struggle against apartheid became a global rallying cry from the dock. These were the words of former president of the republic and global icon, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela- himself later to be named a freeman of our city – when he said:

*“during my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die”.*

The two men upon whom we today confer the honour of Freeman of the City of Johannesburg were both there to hear those powerful words in person. One as a defendant, the other as a member of the defending legal team.

We bestow this honour, not only in recognition of their being amongst those who made that noble, supremely principled stand at Madiba’s side, confronting the logic of a deeply illegitimate system with profoundly democratic clarity and eloquence – risking the death penalty and persecution to do it.

We also honour the service they gave - and continue to give - to the very democracy that they helped lead the struggle to create.

And, through them, we honour the values enshrined in our constitutional order, the great refutation of the system our honourees gave their freedom – and risked their lives – to bring down.

Honouring those values to the fullest will be the work of several generations yet. We have not yet escaped the long shadow of the systems that the Rivonia trial exposed to the world as so profoundly unjust.

To truly honour the recognition we bestow today, to truly consecrate their status as freeman of this City, we must commit as we confer the status of

Freeman that we will redouble our fight against the consequences of the system they helped bring down.

Our cities remain a patchwork of race and class-based ghettos that would have troubled Verwoerd and the architects of grand apartheid not at all. Only now, the costs of transport and housing are enforcing the divisions once enforced by the pass laws, the group areas act and the Native Laws Amendment Act. So we must intensify the efforts under our corridors of freedom programme to lead the private and public sector alike to cast transformation in glass and concrete; to invest in mixed-use, mixed income realities along our transit corridors and in our new transit nodes.

The statistician-general has just this week reminded us of the scale of the educational and skills deficit still being experienced by those historically disadvantaged. So we must continue, as the City, to drive the powerful response we have initiated through the Vulindlel'eJozi programme – our far-sighted partnership with Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator to break down barriers to opportunity for 200,000 young people – both through placement into opportunities and through state-of-the-art, market-defined skills development channels.

Johannesburg's economy is now twice the size it was in the first year of our Democracy, but the economy remains highly concentrated in the hands of the few. So we must not shirk from the transformation commitment, which is epitomised by the City's Jozi@Work programme, to empower and develop thousands upon thousands of community-level enterprises. Such enterprises allow the many to capture the value and opportunity growing our township economies represents. The people of our townships must reap much more

of the billions in value that they spend on goods and services each year. The City must be firm in its commitment to build pathways for all to opportunity and prosperity to help them do it.

So we honour Ntate Mlangeni and Ntate Bizos most explicitly not by ceremonies and lunches, but by continuing and intensifying this important work.

By paying heed to the values that they epitomise.

I ask myself: what makes these two men so exceptional? The answer is not only their values, but that they uphold them in all circumstances. They are not deflected by this or that event, but rather act, as they have always acted, in terms of their fundamental beliefs. We know their personal characteristics well – their courage, honesty, integrity, fortitude, as well as endurance – but underlying these are the commitments that drive them.

I believe that their deep-seated belief in human equality is fundamental to who they are. From this stems their unremitting fight against racism and discrimination, and their belief that skin colour, gender and everything else that superficially distinguishes one man or woman from another must never obscure their essential equality and humanity, and, further, that religious and other beliefs, even if one differs from them, are irrelevant to the dignity and

worth of every individual and the respect that is each man and woman's right and due.

Closely linked to their commitment to human equality is their belief in freedom. This is a value that every generation must define in terms of its own circumstances. But it means being able, within limits set by accepted standards of decency and without infringing on the rights of other people, to speak and to write without restraint or fear. This value implies freedom of speech; a free press; freedom of association – the very things that our constitution enshrines. But it goes further: true freedom is exercised in a context. How free can a man or woman be if they are oppressed by poverty? The two men we are honouring today have also fought long and hard for the conception of freedom as freedom from want.

Ladies and gentlemen: I hope I have made it clear that bestowing the 'Freedom of the City' on Advocate Bizos and the Honourable Mlangeni has a particular resonance. They are men who have fought consistently for freedom and equality, and our great city is proud to recognize their lifelong commitment to these values. We hope, without arrogance or presumption, to follow them in the path that they have opened for us, and to commit ourselves to working for personal and social freedom as they have done so outstandingly.

Honourable Mlangeni and Advocate Bizos, as South Africans, we aspire to walk in your footsteps and realize the ideals and values that you represent: Advocate Bizos you acutely state that in the democratic dispensation "the

struggle has become far more nuanced, taking on different shapes in various sectors of society”. Here are some of the problems and challenges that we need to deal with as a nation, taking a leaf from your experiences:

Advocate Bizos, as a human rights activist we need to listen to your words as racism and xenophobia threaten our society. This brings us to the issue of the National Question. A lot still needs to be done to understand race relations in South Africa especially as we emerge from the captivity of apartheid. Racism and class and gender discrimination is unfortunately very much present in South Africa to this day. As a nation we need to unite in ensuring that the dream of a non-racial South Africa is realized, freed from these scourges or racism and xenophobia.

We come from an apartheid past where freedom of speech and of the press were under bitter attack. But today we live in a constitutional democracy built on the values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom of speech and of the press. In that regard we need to ensure that these freedoms remain a constitutional right for all South Africans.

Honourable Mlangeni you rightly pointed out in 2012 that unless we address the challenges of poverty and unemployment, “our people will never be free. They will continue to feel imprisoned and reduced to their lives of impoverishment and suffering”. We live in one of the most unequal societies in the world, where some of our people do not know where the next meal will

come from. Even some of our children do not know their shoe-size because they have never worn shoes. It is efforts such as the City's comprehensive food security programme which continue the fight against these most severe forms of deprivation and hunger.

Fundamental human rights such as freedom from poverty are the most powerful legacy of the struggle that our honourees fought for.

Madame Speaker, I would like to thank our recipients, the Honourable Mlangeni and Advocate Bizos, for accepting the Freedom of the City. Advocate Bizos, an unexpected visitor to your home may find you digging in your garden. They will certainly notice that the celebrated advocate is modest and straightforward. On my recent visit to your office, I was similarly inspired by your simplicity and humility, which banished all unnecessary formality from the conversation we had. I am equally humbled by the simplicity and modesty of the Honourable Mlangeni. We cherish the support we've received from you during our various charitable events, including our golf days.

And in spite of the many years serving our people as human rights activists, neither of you has clamoured for high positions in government or elsewhere. We are inspired by such humility. As a city and a nation we look up to you, men of principle guided by truth, justice and honesty. We recommit ourselves to emulating you, confronting the challenges of our own day in the spirit of the towering example that you have set for us.

You are indeed the living embodiment of the the statement by the Rev. Martin Luther King that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice".

Thank you