



ANC TODAY

ONLINE VOICE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Let us work together to speed up effective service to the people



It is now 98 years since the founding of our movement - the African National Congress. It has been 98 years of principled struggle for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

Under the banner of "WORKING TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE", we have particularly emphasised in our 2009 Election Campaign that faster change and faster improvement in the conditions of all our people, will be a defining feature of the new ANC administration.

We re-committed ourselves to make the ANC government more caring, responsive and interactive. Informed by the decisions of the Polokwane National Conference, we set ourselves the task of further strengthening the ANC, deepening organisational democracy and ensuring that it discharges its responsibility as the leader of the process of social change and consolidating national unity.

We committed ourselves to strengthening the Tripartite Alliance and our relations with SANCO, and at the same time building a broad front of forces of change. We are called upon to assess our progress with regards to these tasks, and very clearly to outline the major tasks facing our movement within and outside of government. The year 2010 is a seminal year for the country, and we will be celebrating several key milestones and anniversaries. Our country will be hosting the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. Let us unite the country and ensure that this opportunity leaves a lasting legacy that will endure for generations to come, both for our country and our continent.

This year we will also start preparations for the local government elections, which are due in 2011. 2010 also brings us closer to the ANC centenary celebrations in 2012. We must work hard towards 100 years by showcasing the proud traditions of this, the oldest national liberation movement in Africa

. As we prepare to mark this monumental milestone, we should mobilise the whole of our society to celebrate their struggles, their heroes and heroines, their resilience and their victories. The National Executive Committee has established a Centenary Task Team to prepare for the celebrations.

Provinces, working together with this Team, must establish provincial teams to coordinate this work and ensure broader participation by all ANC structures, the Alliance, mass democratic organisations and local communities. This year, we are also holding our National General Council, which will act as the platform for a mid-term review of the work done since the 52nd National Conference in Polokwane.

We shall also be commemorating the 55th Anniversary of the Freedom Charter, while the year also marks the 50th Anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre. We shall also celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the founding of COSATU, and the 25th Anniversary of the ANC Second Consultative Conference, held in Kabwe, Zambia.

WEEK IN REVIEW

ANC Parliamentary Caucus

rejects the proposed Bill | The Office of the ANC Chief Whip took note of the media reports pertaining to a private Member's Bill, drafted by the Democratic Alliance MP regarding the President's powers to pardon offenders. It asserted that Section 84 of the Constitution of the Republic lists a number of powers and functions of the President, amongst which, is "pardoning or relieving offenders". Various sections of the Constitution are replete with instances where the Constitution directs that legislation be enacted to give effect to the clause. There is nowhere in the Constitution where it is stipulated that such a proposed piece of legislation must be enacted in order to give effect to the Section 84(j), which deals with the President's prerogative to grant pardons or reprieve to offenders. The proposed Bill by the Democratic Alliance is not born out of any legal or factual basis and is tantamount to seeking to amend the Constitution. The proposed Bill is therefore either a product of poor legal advice or the work of an ignorant, publicity-starved MP. Any Bill that seeks to undermine the President and the Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic through cheap publicity stunts is not worthy of serious engagement, it said.

Among others, Kabwe reasserted the democratic nature of the ANC despite the difficult conditions in which it was operating. It entrenched the theory and practice of non-racialism in the organisational culture of the movement. It set out clear tasks on the intensification of all forms of struggle to speed up the demise of the apartheid crime against humanity.

2010 also marks the 20th Anniversary of the re-launch of the ANC Women's League, which continues to be the platform to ensure that the objectives of gender equality remain at the centre of our struggle for democracy, equality and prosperity for all.

We are also celebrating 20 years since President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was released from prison, and the ANC, SACP, PAC and other liberation movements unbanned. These were momentous developments, which were, above everything else, a consequence of the people's struggle.

Since 1912, the ANC has dedicated itself to the historic mission of uniting our people in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed black majority in general, and Africans in particular. South African revolutionaries have been fighting, one generation after another, to fulfil this mission.

We draw great inspiration from these decades of unbroken struggle, and re-dedicate ourselves to the cause of the National Democratic Revolution. We are today proudly a fast growing mass political movement, with more than 600,000 members. We are confident that we will achieve the goal of one million members before our centenary in 2012.

The ANC is found in each township and village, rooted amongst the masses of our people: the rural poor, the workers, professionals and business-people - young and old, male and female, black and white.

We have consolidated our rich traditions of internal democracy. The ANC belongs to its membership; and throughout its history it has sought to uphold the practice of democratic participation by the members. We have once more put the task of political education at the top of our agenda. Out of hundreds of thousands of our members, we seek constantly to develop cadres of a high quality with a high level of revolutionary consciousness, organisational discipline, and moral and political integrity.

In the last 16 years we have accumulated much experience in governing. Our electoral mandate has now been popularly and democratically renewed for the fourth term. We are deeply humbled by the people's ongoing confidence in our movement. We are a movement that constantly seeks to connect with the people. We have improved the practice of listening to the people, understanding their concerns, and practically taking up the issues they have raised.

You will recall that we decided in 2009 to focus on five strategic developmental priorities, namely: the creation of decent jobs, ensuring quality education and health care for all, promoting rural development, and combating crime and corruption. To achieve this, we must build a developmental state.

We have to build a strategic planning capacity, through the creation of a National Planning Commission and the performance monitoring and evaluation capacity within the Presidency in government. We must strengthen government structures to provide effective and efficient services to the people.

In addition to the reconfiguration of government structures to ensure the effective provision of services to the people, much more needs to be done to align the mandate of the state-owned enterprises, development finance institutions and other state agencies with the priorities of government.

We must combat corruption in the public and private sectors. Corruption undermines our struggle to build a caring society. It erodes the moral fabric our society. We will also see to it that all cases involving the violation of discipline are thoroughly investigated and dealt with. We will ensure that all involved in corruption, regardless of their position or status in the organisation and society, are severely dealt with in accordance with the laws of the land.

CONTINUED

Drop in the overall Matric pass rates | The Department of Education released the 2009-matric results in all provincial Schools. A total of 620 000 candidates wrote examination from 10 500 centres across the country. According to the statistics revealed by the Ministry of Basic Education, a positive feature of the 2009 exams is that more learners registered for Mathematics (296 659) than for Mathematical Literacy (284 309). However, the general matric pass rate across all provinces declined from 62.5% to 60.7%.

ANC leaders visit injured Togolese soccer player | Jackson Mthembu and Mam' Winnie Madikizela-Mandela visited the injured Togolese soccer player, Kodjovi Obilale, at Milpark hospital to offer words of encouragement and sympathy. Obilale was injured when rebels in Angola ambushed the Togolese soccer national team. The bus driver and assistant coach died on the scene of crime.

SA rescue team off to Haiti | The first South African search and rescue team left for Haiti to assist scores of people trapped in the rubble following a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January 2010. Another team of trauma specialists is expected to make the trip soon. Death toll is estimated to be in the region of more than 50 000. President Jacob Zuma has conveyed his condolences to Haiti's government and people.

We need to develop a new public sector cadre. There are those placed in positions of responsibility that do nothing to address the concerns of the people they are meant to serve, either through incapacity or unwillingness. Where people are found to be incapable of performing the tasks assigned to them, we must work with speed to either capacitate such people or replace them with more capable people.

The ANC, working together with our allies, will engage public sector trade unions and clarify our respective roles in building a new public sector cadre for a democratic developmental state. In 2010 we intend to make local government the key focus for service provision. A strong and disciplined ANC with capacity on the ground is a necessary condition to make local government more effective and efficient.

This includes the implementation of the ANC Councillors' Code of Conduct, and the creation of standards and requirements for councillors in preparation for the 2011 local government elections. The ANC commends the majority of councillors, who continue to serve our people with integrity and dedication.

We urge our councillors to form strong links with the communities they serve. One of the challenges in local government is the confusion between political and administrative roles. We are of the firm view that senior municipal officials should not hold leadership positions in political parties to avoid conflict.

We will work even harder this year in enhancing work in our five strategic development priorities. To create more jobs, decent work opportunities and sustainable livelihoods, we must pursue an inclusive economic growth path based on a comprehensive industrial strategy. We are committed to the implementation of the Framework for South Africa's Response to the International Economic Crisis, which was developed and agreed to, at NEDLAC in February 2009.

It sets out principles and programmes to tackle the effects on South Africa of the global economic crisis. Within scarce resources, heavily affected by the world crisis, we have put in place programmes to absorb the unemployed through the use of labour intensive programmes linked to infrastructure expansion and meeting social needs.

We are confident that the progress made in the past nine months in implementing the expanded public works programme, will lay the foundation for the attainment of our target to create 4-million work opportunities by 2014.

There are some early indications that we may be recovering from the worst of the crisis. But this recovery may be slow and perhaps even temporary. It should also be expected that the creation of new jobs on a massive scale will lag behind the economic recovery.

South Africa has challenges in the energy sector that require comprehensive solutions. These are broader than the tariff increases. There are issues of our energy mix, environmental sustainability, distribution mechanisms, surcharges by local municipalities and the role of the private sector. We will intensify our work in this area this year.

The ANC recognises that poor communities will bear the brunt of the effects of climate change. Together with other developing countries we have contributed to the accord adopted at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit. Although it does not go as far as required, it is an important step in the right direction in that it commits all countries to respond to climate change. We will work hard with our international counterparts this year to achieve a legally binding treaty.

To take forward rural development and land reform during 2010, ANC cadres must work with comrades in organised labour to ensure that we improve the living conditions of farm workers and farm-dwellers. They continue to be among the most exploited citizens of our country.

Regarding education, we can pride ourselves that we have achieved almost universal access. We must applaud ourselves for the fact that South Africa has surpassed the millennium development goal targets for the girl child. However, we are concerned about the academic achievements of our children. Both national and international assessments continue to reveal that both the numeracy and literacy levels of our learners remain unacceptably low.

The two percent drop in matric results also indicates that we must work even harder to turn the corner. Let us ensure that ANC structures mobilise all adults who cannot read or write to join the Kha Ri Gude Adult Mass Literacy Campaign. This is one of the country's most successful mass campaigns. -

We reiterate the non-negotiables in education. Teachers must be on time, in class and teaching for seven hours every day. We will intensify efforts to build a movement for quality education involving learners, teachers and parents alike. We must strengthen public school management. Last year we met with school principals to discuss ways of improving the performance of our schools.

We aim to pursue further interactions in the period ahead, to assess progress made in implementing the recommendations from our first meeting. The process of creating a single post-school higher education and training system for youth and adults is also now underway.

The ANC government has put in place a ten-point plan to improve access to health care and to reduce inequality in the health system. We are determined to press ahead this year with the establishment of the National Health Insurance system. We will ensure that all stakeholders are consulted before the passing of NHI legislation.

On HIV and AIDS, part of our response, as announced recently, encompasses a massive campaign which includes a voluntary National Testing and Counselling Week to encourage our people to know their HIV status, as well as the integration of TB and HIV and AIDS treatment sites.

The ANC government will also provide anti-retroviral treatment to all people co-infected with TB and HIV, to HIV positive infants under 12 months of age and pregnant HIV positive women. However we must emphasise that taking personal responsibility is key in both the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS.

With regards to crime and corruption, we spoke in our Manifesto of establishing a new modernised, efficient and transformed criminal justice system to develop the capacity for fighting and drastically reducing crime levels in real terms. There are several concrete measures being undertaken. These include improving the performance of our courts with regards to trials and proceedings.

The South African Police Service is currently embarking on a programme to increase its personnel over the next three years, and put special emphasis on visible policing, detective and crime intelligence personnel. The number of detectives had increased by 19% by the end of 2009. The government will not, by itself, address the crime problem. All South Africans are expected to form part of the efforts to address crime and corruption.

In our quest to build a caring society, the ANC is determined to create a comprehensive social security system. From April 2010, the equalisation of access to the state old pensions will commence, providing for eligible men of 60 years to qualify, subject to the means test. In the next three years, an additional two million children from poor households, aged 15 to 18 years will benefit from the child support grant.

The ANC is the strategic political centre. Therefore, we have to address the political and organisational capacity of the ANC, if we are to succeed in building a developmental state and successfully implement our priorities. Since the 52nd National Conference we embarked on an organisational renewal process. This seeks to ensure that the ANC remains a mass-based, multi-class and disciplined force of the left, which is unashamedly biased towards the working class and the poor.

The unity of the ANC is paramount. All our members must be united behind a programme of action developed by the ANC and its Allies. Everything we do must be aimed at improving the living conditions of all South Africans, especially the poor and the working class.

In doing so, all structures and members of the ANC must vigorously adhere to our principles of unity, selfless service, collective leadership, democratic centralism, internal debate, humility, honesty, hard work, constructive criticism and self-criticism, discipline and mutual respect.

LATEST STATEMENTS

ANC sends its condolences to the people of Haiti, 14 January 2010
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2010/pr0114.html>

Motlanthe wants development in the Northern Cape, 7 January 2010
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2010/pr0107.html>

Sol Plaatje Memorial Lecture statement, 6 January 2010
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2010/pr0106.html>

Statement of the ANC Northern Cape Province on the ANC 98th Anniversary Celebrations, 4 January 2010
<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2010/pr0104.html>

The ANC will continue to take firm action against ill-discipline, corruption, incompetence and abuse of power in its ranks. In particular, we will be consistent and firm in acting against abuse of leadership positions for personal gain or factionalism.

We will also manage the deployment and redeployment of cadres in a more objective and transparent fashion through our internal monitoring and evaluation processes.

We will promote moral regeneration. The ANC has recognised that human development has both spiritual and material aspects. It will therefore continue to mobilise interfaith, cultural and traditional organisations, for the creation of cohesive, caring and sustainable communities.

We will step up the political education within our movement. We will focus on building the culture of umrabulo, particularly in preparation for the National General Council. We must build capacity for ANC-led campaigns. This year we will embark on a mass campaign programme to complement government's implementation of our Election Manifesto.

This will focus in particular on education, health, combating crime and corruption, and vukuzenzele activities. As resolved at the 52nd National Conference, the Veterans' League was launched in December last year. We salute all our veterans and pledge to give them organisational support to expand their membership.

Building and defending the revolutionary Alliance is one of our major organisational tasks for 2010. Working relations amongst Alliance partners have greatly improved. We consult each other and work together on key issues and programmes that affect our people.

However, much more needs to be done to improve the alliance relations at national and sub-national levels. The ANC has a historic responsibility to lead the revolutionary Alliance. The Alliance partners have a responsibility to ensure that the ANC remains strong and united. The most effective and concrete way of building the ANC-led Alliance is through a common programme of action based on our shared strategic objectives. The Alliance is expected to produce such a programme this year. This will provide the line of march for every cadre of the Alliance.

The ANC remains part of the progressive forces for change internationally, working to achieve a more humane and equitable world order. Our movement remains committed to the pragmatic realisation of an African union government through ensuring the spread of democracy in our continent, and the strengthening of AU organs.

We will further continue to support the NEPAD in eradicating poverty and ensure economic recovery throughout Africa. We will continue to support and participate in conflict resolution.

The ANC will work to strengthen our relations India, Brazil and China, politically, socially and economically. This is in line with our objective of strengthening south-south cooperation. We reaffirm our solidarity with those that are still struggling for the attainment of national self-determination.

In particular we will continue to support the campaign for the self-determination of the Western Sahara under the progressive leadership of Polisario. We continue to pledge our support to the Cubans in their campaign to end the economic blockade against their country.

We will continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Cuban Five. It is our belief that each country has a right to pursue its own path of economic development. Our organisation continues to support the calls for finding lasting, just and humane solutions to the Israeli-Palestine question. We firmly support the two-state solution that recognises the principle of Palestinian and Israeli self-determination in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The ANC will also continue to push for the reform of multi-lateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and United Nations along more democratic and developmental lines.

LATEST SPEECHES

Address delivered by the President Jacob Zuma at the pre-98th ANC anniversary gala dinner, 8 January 2010

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/history/zuma/2010/jz0108.html>

Address by President Jacob Zuma on the Occasion of the Release of the 2009 National Senior Certificate Results as well as The Northern Cape Matric Achiever Awards,

7 January 2010

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/history/zuma/2010/jz0107.html>

Statement of ANC Treasurer General Cde Mathew Phosa, on the occasion of the Joe Slovo Memorial Lecture, 6 January 2010

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2010/pr0106a.html>

Message by President Jacob Zuma on the passing of Mike Louw,

4 January 2010

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/history/zuma/2010/jz0104.html>

2010 New Year's message to the Nation by President JG Zuma

<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/show.asp?include=president/sp/2009/sp1231130.htm&ID=2060&type=sp>

In six months time, starting on June 11th, the world's most popular sport will be played on our soil. We have built new stadiums and revitalised existing ones, and we have upgraded our transport and accommodation facilities. We have demonstrated our pedigree by successfully hosting the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup and the Final Draw for 2010. These have inspired us to make this tournament a truly African World Cup. We urge all South Africans to support our national team, Bafana Bafana.

We must also take the time to salute all our comrades who have passed on during the past year. These comrades have made a lasting contribution to the struggle for freedom in South Africa and reconstruction and development.

On behalf of the National Executive Committee, it is my privilege to declare 2010: "The Year of Working Together to Speed Up Effective Service to the People".

Amandla!

Jacob G. Zuma

WEEKEND PROGRAMME OF THE NEC

The ANC NEC will over the weekend meet at Essellen Park in Ekurhuleni to discuss a plan on how to take forward the President's January 8 Statement delivered in Kimberley during ANC's 98th Anniversary celebration under the theme, "2010 - The Year of Working Together to Speed Up Service to the People."

VIEW POINT | BY BATHABILE DLAMINI

What are YOU doing?



President Jacob Zuma led from the front on the World AIDS Day on December 01, closing a difficult chapter in our country's response to the major challenge of the spread of HIV infection and the severe impact of AIDS on individuals, families and communities.

The interventions announced by President Zuma will go a long way in preventing further HIV infection amongst children through the strengthening and expansion of services to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. By providing antiretroviral treatment to all children born with the virus without first checking their CD4 count, government will be able prolong the lives of those children who have unfortunately been infected with HIV.

The decision to put HIV-positive pregnant mothers on antiretroviral treatment at 14 weeks will further improve the lives of pregnant women and mothers, enabling them to better care for their children. These interventions are a major boost to the efforts to strengthen families as basic units of our society. Prolonging the life of a mother and thereby providing her an opportunity to nurture her children which will go a long way in strengthening the social fibre of our nation which is built on family values.

Unfortunately, AIDS has already left us with a major challenge of finding the best measures to care for millions of children who have lost one or both parents due to HIV and AIDS epidemic. South African Institute for Race Relations estimates that by 2015, about 5,7 million or 32 percent of all children in South Africa would have lost one or both parents due to HIV and AIDS. Currently, children orphaned by AIDS are estimated at more than 1,5 million.

The AIDS epidemic continues to shorten the lives of parents. The Actuarial Society of South Africa estimates that life expectancy in South Africa is 13 years lower than what it would have been without HIV and AIDS. The UNDP World Population Prospects for 2006 puts female life expectancy at 56 while women in Senegal are expected to live up to 64 and 72 in Algeria.

Government is easing the difficulties faced by orphaned and vulnerable children through various means. The child support foster care grants and Care Dependency Grants ensure that basic subsistence needs for children are met. Free health care for children under five years and the indigent ensure that minimum health care needs are met. With 60% of schools declared no-fee schools, there is a better chance for vulnerable children to access basic education.

Services accessed by adults such as housing subsidy, free water and electricity will also indirectly benefit children. Municipal workers have to make sure that Child-headed Households access this facility. The Department of Social Development provides support to thousands of orphans and to households where older children have to care for younger siblings after the death of one or both parents.

However, in addition to the monetary relief, there is a need for additional support to cover for the loss of the primary caregiver(s). We need to further increase the training, recruitment and retention of social workers who are responsible for identifying vulnerable children and facilitating the provision of the necessary support.

These social workers also facilitate the processes of adoption of children which we have to encourage if we want children to grow up in a standard family setting. These social workers are also responsible for monitoring integration into adoptive families and addressing problems that may arise.

As one of the efforts to assist orphans, the Department of Social Development signed an agreement with the German Development Bank which allocated R76-million to improve the living conditions of child- and youth-headed households in South Africa.

This project will equip orphaned children with life skills and ensure access to improved services offered by refurbished and adequately equipped community care centres. The programme is implemented over a period of three years in the Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

While we are strengthening our response to the various challenges posed by the impact of HIV and AIDS in our society, we need to put more efforts into prevention measures to reduce the number of new infections.

The South African National HIV Survey conducted by HSRC and other research partners released earlier this year, indicates that HIV prevalence has stabilised, albeit at high level of 11%. This stabilization is largely confirmed by the 2008 National Antenatal Survey of HIV and Syphilis released by the Department of Health this year.

Of major concern though, is the fact that HIV prevalence remains disproportionately high amongst females compared to men. According to HSRC, HIV prevalence amongst females is more than twice as high as that of males in the age group 20-29. The imbalances between men and women are also highlighted in the disturbing findings with regard to young women who have sexual relationships with older men. We therefore need to find the more effective intervention targeted at protecting women from the risk of HIV infection.

All the efforts and processes that the Government can never work without participation and support from our communities. The ANC needs revolutionary Cadres with revolutionary morality to implement these programmes we need a special cadre that is committed to making a better life for all, a cadre that is committed to changing the lives of the people. Our communities must take care of vulnerable groups and protect them from sharks who want to treat them as objects and make them perpetually live in poverty.

The announcement made by the President has created an environment for building a caring society and for us to reap the fruits of ubuntu we all need to get down and work. We all don't have a place to hide now because the playing field has been levelled.

Most encouraging is the finding that HIV prevalence amongst children between the ages of 2-14 has decreased from 5,6% in 2002 to 2,5% in 2008. This clearly indicates the need to scale up the preventions of mother to child transmission of HIV programme. The dream of an HIV-free generation is indeed becoming a possibility.

Prevalence of HIV has also decreased amongst young people aged 15-24 years from 10,3% in 2005 to 8,6% in 2008. What was even more encouraging in the HSRC study was the conclusion that the incidence (number of new infections) substantially decreased in the age group 15-19.

These findings are supported by a marked increase in condom use, with both males and females reporting similar levels of use of this preventative tool. We should put more effort to encourage safe sexual behaviour by making both male and female condoms of good quality even more accessible to vulnerable and remote sections of our population.

Quite critically, all the partners, both from within government and other social partners, have demonstrated a new-found and collective will to address the challenge of HIV and AIDS. All of us need to build on this momentum to deal with this challenge. We cannot afford to bicker or posture over semantics. We must all support the government and, in particular, the Department of Health which leads this fight at departmental level.

With the leadership provided by the President, there is now a wide space for collaboration with local and international partners in strengthening our prevention, care and treatment programmes. There is encouragement from the highest office for each one of us to test for HIV. Knowing your HIV status will enable you to take correct decision about your life and access prevention, care and treatment services that government has made available.

The government of the ANC is serious about fighting HIV and AIDS. What are YOU doing?

>> Bathabile Dlamini is an ANC NEC Member and Deputy Minister of Social Development

TRIBUTE TO SIS' MANTO

She posed difficult questions, challenged sloppy formulations and refused to accept “fact” simply because it was being billed as such by all and sundry



So now that Sis'Manto is gone, we will go to the normal template and find the standard words to describe how her departure was all too sudden and unexpected. Many who hated her guts ratcheted up all kinds of incidents to justify an antipathy that had turned pathological. Thus the real Sis'Manto disappeared under the pile of words, sounds and images that reduced complex phenomena into superficial and impressionistic representations.

All this will come to pass. And the living would have asserted their authority over the dead.

But tragic as her departure was, would Sis'Manto agree with us that it was all too sudden and unexpected? “We-Joel”, former Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang was fond of saying in jest as she struggled with her health after the liver-transplant, “lesi sibindi ngathi asingithandi” (Joel, it seems this liver does not like me). Then, she was struggling with walking; her eyes watering from time to time; and sometimes with a persistent cough that made it difficult for her to speak.

The competent team of doctors who managed the transplant and her tentative recovery can explain the physiology and biochemistry that conspired to rob Sis'Manto of her life.

What many of us will never fully appreciate is the courage with which she bore her condition and accepted that the complications may not be resolved. Even when her health was failing, she endeavoured to attend all meetings of Cabinet as well as the NEC and Gauteng Executive Committee of the ANC, and to all the tasks that the ANC had deployed her to like the Support for Caster Semanya Task Team.

During the recent election campaign, she would call late in the evenings about inspiring experiences she had gone through that day, interacting with the Afrikaner community in her area, with the youth, with people with disability and women from all walks of life. And more than in any other period, one came to understand what made Sis'Manto tick: intellectual debate and a search for the truth; and reassurance that her efforts were making a difference particularly on the quality of life of South Africans and people of the continent, to whom she selflessly dedicated her life. It is this, and this mainly, that finally consumed her life.

What many of us will never fully understand is the intelligent and inquiring mind that Sis'Manto possessed. Quite often, even those of us who knew her had to be woken from the slumber of assumptions that we had swallowed hook, line and sinker from media discourse: as she posed difficult questions, challenged sloppy formulations in drafts, and refused to accept "fact" simply because it was being billed as such by all and sundry.

This, some of us came to appreciate even more when she became Minister in The Presidency after the recall of President Thabo Mbeki in September 2008. What is the core responsibility of the GDCY (gender, disability, children and youth) function, she would ask to our irritation because we thought we knew it all. And it would be in her elaboration that we realised she was onto something significant: should they confine themselves merely to advocacy; shouldn't there be specific projects that they initiate and supervise; to what extent are they monitoring practical implementation by departments and the other spheres of government!

It became clearer in those brief seven months of her tenure in The Presidency that Sis'Manto was and will always be more than just about matters of health, let alone HIV and AIDS. She was a committed gender activist, within and outside of the ANC Women's League and she brought this quality into the Justice Ministry when she joined the Executive as Deputy Minister.

There is something in how Sis'Manto revelled in a good intellectual spat, and in how under difficult conditions she never lost sight of the big picture, which speaks of attributes of a generation that had indescribable courage to defy the odds.

She was a member of the Luthuli Detachment, those 'daredevils' who in the darkest days of repression took the courageous step to seek all-round skills in far-away lands, never losing confidence in the certainty of victory; and she was in Angola during the most dangerous period. Their discipline of focussing on essence always shines through – under current circumstances, exposing the gap they leave behind as one by one they bid us farewell.

It is this steadfastness to principle, sometimes to a fault, that pitted Sis'Manto against many, in the debates on HIV and AIDS - and she insisted on separating the two because she argued quite logically that infection was not the onset of the syndrome: people can and should lead normal healthy lives even if they have the virus. Precisely because it attacks the immune system and because there is no cure, the HI virus needed to be confronted first and foremost in prevention, secondly in strengthening the immune system through a healthy diet and lifestyle, and thirdly through a combination of these elements and treatment of secondary infections and anti-retroviral medication. This was and remains government policy.

Tomes have been written on these debates, the evolution of government policy and the consequences thereof. And more will still be penned.

In the process the truth will sometimes be turned on its head as oversimplification and sometimes downright distortion and populism take the place of rational reflection. And so we are persuaded to forget the titanic battles for the reduction of anti-retroviral drug prices, without which we would not have been able to afford the drugs and achieve any significant coverage. We are persuaded to ignore the real challenge of side-effects of anti-retroviral medication that patients have to be aware of and commit to bear.

We are called upon to ignore the fact that Sis'Manto's insistence on completing the Nevirapine trials on mother-to-child transmission has in fact now been borne out by science (with proof of resistance and the migration to combination therapy), the 2001 Constitutional Court decision notwithstanding. In the words of an ANC statement then, the formulation of which Sis'Manto insisted on:

“[W]e should fully understand the long-term effects of using the drug, both for the baby and the mother. Thus, those who have gone through the programme are continually monitored. At the end of [this] period..., the evidence will become clearer. This will then inform a decision on universal access”.

Did Sis’Manto at times overstate some approaches to the pandemic? Perhaps. My own sense is that this had to do with her penchant for a good intellectual spat as she sought, in her own logic, to balance out what was in turn an overstatement of other approaches.

In reality, the balance was there in formal policy such as the rolling comprehensive strategies - including the current one, which she led in crafting.

The vagaries of fate have dictated that Sis’Manto should depart on Reconciliation Day. Was this her last symbolic gesture that we should accept the synthesis of different ideas that has made our approach to the pandemic the richer and more effective? This we shall never know. But as with any genuine reconciliation, this can only be long-lasting if it is based on fact rather than fiction.

>> This is an edited extract of a tribute by Joel Netshitenzhe to the former Minister of Health and NEC Member, Cde Manto Shabalala-Msimang. Joel Netshitenzhe is a member of the ANC NEC and former Head of the Policy Unit in The Presidency