



**Remarks by H. E. Sibongiseni Dlamini-Mntambo at the 3rd annual Institute of African Studies
Conference & Festschrift in honour of Professor Linda Freeman
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***Solidarity and Shifting Patterns of Hegemony in Southern Africa: Historical and
Contemporary Perspectives***

Head of the Institute of African Studies, Professor Pius Adensamni,

President of Carleton University, Alastair Summerlee,

Our special guest, Professor Linda Freeman

Heads of Missions

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

The past two days have been a humbling experience for me and my colleagues from the South African High Commission in Canada. We have listened in awe and it is unbelievable to see and hear for ourselves the critical and extensive role Canada played in the attainment of our democracy. It is even more so to be in the midst of the people who were literally at the coalface either running the institutions Canada set up to fight apartheid or working within those institutions, providing intelligence, financial and moral support to the oppressed.

To hear and talk to individuals who took risks on our behalf, informing the international community, providing legal aid and ensuring that the crimes and atrocities by the apartheid regime were exposed

is surreal. I shudder to think that if it was not for your interventions where would I be? Where would South Africa be today?

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human rights being the rights and liberties that are guaranteed to everyone everywhere irrespective of your race, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

Despite the adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human rights in 1948, South Africa continued with abuses of human rights by further introducing apartheid laws which were meant to segregate races and entrench white minority rule. For decades, Black South African's human rights were violated. The apartheid system introduced pass laws for blacks to restrain their movements; introduced an inferior education system so that a black person was not exposed to any learning which would take him/her out of slavery; segregated facilities were introduced and Black could not vote in their country.

This was a brutal evil system that I and my colleagues here went through, whereby the oppressed South Africans suffering under crimes against humanity were: executed, incarcerated, tortured, dragged behind trucks, fed into crocodile-infested rivers, burned alive, exiled, and subjected to all manner of debauched sub-human treatment

It is partly through your individual interventions and your organisations that the end to the violations of our rights and the dismantling of the apartheid system became possible. Your efforts confirmed your conviction that human rights are rights belonging to all people and that, we the previously marginalised are also entitled to the same rights.

Professor Linda Freeman, today you are honoured by the university of Carleton for the role you played during our struggle for justice. Through your teachings and writings you have ensured that our story is told and is not forgotten. Through your writing you actually remind us that there should never be a repeat of such atrocities as nothing positive come out of it.

Where are we today, 24 years later?

We were listening very carefully and if I can sum up, we have heard your concerns about

- the direction our country seems to be taking. You have raised concerns about;
- what is perceived as human rights violations and intolerance against foreign nationals;
- the reported alleged corruption by the government and in particular the leadership of the ruling party
- the land issue, expropriation without compensation
- the perception of a shadow state or what is widely referred to as the “state capture”
- A stagnant economy
- Political environment which appears to be unstable
- The plight of the poor, poverty and the unemployment rate

In responding to these concerns I will not go through them one by one, given my limited time. But first I think it is important to remind Canadians that the apartheid system was deeply entrenched such that the challenges we face as a country today have their roots in this system.

The obdurate nature of racism and privilege still thwarts real transformation in South Africa. You will understand that democracy only addressed one layer of the apartheid system, that of colonialism. We are yet to address racial oppression in the form of classification and hierarchy which still exists (Whites, Indians, coloureds and blacks – in that order). We have not touched that topic.

The poor and black of South Africa largely live and function outside of the formal economy. They have virtually no access to the market place. Despite only making up 9.5% of the economically active population today – white South Africans still occupy 69% of top management positions and 58% of senior management positions. To repeat: 9.9% occupies 69% of top management and 58% of senior management. Looking at the gender disparities is also sobering: Males occupy 78% of top management, and 67% of senior management.

The land issue is another very sensitive area which needs to be addressed urgently. You will remember that the land act of 1913 stripped the indigenous populations of the right to own land and

effectively handed 90% of South Africa's land to 20% of the population. The indigenous people were shoved to the 10% of land which was neither arable nor had any known mineral deposits. This has been and remains a sore issue for black South Africans. Government has tried to address it by introducing e.g. willing buyer, willing seller; restitution; redistribution but there has been resistance which has not yielded the results we hoped for. It is for this reason that Government is now looking at expropriation without compensation.

Yes South Africa has nearly been brought to its knees because of corruption. The concern I have is that when the West talks corruption, it sees corruption as "black Africans". Corruption in South Africa has been in both the public and private sector. Both national and international companies have been alleged to have influenced certain individuals to take decisions which were not for the benefit of the country. We have learned of allegations by some international companies like KPMG, Mckinsey, SAP and some construction companies which have colluded in bidding for the building of stadium, PR companies, etc. Our newly elected president has indicated that we will go after both the corrupt and the corrupter. So corruption does not have colour or region, but it is spread all over.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our democracy is maturing. We have just witnessed a peaceful – although admittedly *remarkable* - transition from our fourth President, Jacob Zuma, to our fifth, President Cyril Ramaphosa. Our civil society is robust. The recent developments in our country are an indication that the country's citizen is not going to allow the hope and dreams to fade.

Again, it was interesting to read, Globe and Mail's Geoffrey York's article describing our courts as being <and I quote>

"fiercely independent, filled with some of the country's brightest minds." <end quote>

These ladies and gentlemen are signs that our democracy and political landscape are stable. Having said that, the High Commission will communicate these concerns to help South Africa shape a better future for its people. We have a lot to work on and we need Canada to help us build our economy. We dare not let your contributions to our struggle be in vain.

I thank you for these constructive engagements and hope to receive a report on the outcomes of the conference. We are made better “human beings” by your caring. Thank you again Professor Adensamni and Professor Linda Freeman.

Ladies and gentlemen thank you all.