

# THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION



**REMARKS BY**

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FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU;  
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFEREMENT OF THE  
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DRUM MAJOR FOR JUSTICE AWARD  
AT THE U.S. EMBASSY, DAR ES SALAAM**

17 January 2005  
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Your Excellencies,  
Honourable Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am extremely honoured to be here today to receive this Award named in memory of the late MARTIN LUTHER KING, Jr. At the very outset I wish to express my profound appreciation to the Ambassador of the United States Mr. Michael L. RETZER and his Colleagues at the Embassy for making this possible.

Like other distinguished Tanzanians who have in the past been recipients of this Award, I feel highly privileged to be associated with the legacy of this great American and accept the Award with humility.

In common with many people throughout the world, I hold Dr. King as <sup>A</sup>figure of reverence. He stands as an Icon of <sup>L</sup>~~THE~~ civil rights struggle and liberation.

During his life, and since his tragically premature death at the hands of an assassin in April 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King has remained a symbol of justice, liberation and human rights across the globe – to his own immediate constituency of African-Americans, to Americans generally, to Africans in the African Continent, and to people across the world who believe in the principles for which he stood for. Martin Luther King stood for everyone who believed in freedom, justice and equality; and we are proud to honour him as one of our own. He famously said that a man who is not prepared to die for something, has nothing to live for. He risked and ultimately sacrificed his own life for the principles in which he believed.

One speech, known for two particularly resonant lines, marks the zenith of Martin Luther King's civil rights career. This is the "I have a dream" speech delivered in August 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. In that memorable address, Dr. King asserted the equality of all human beings and dreamt of a day when his children "will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but the content of their character." Those words acclaimed for their universal resonance inspired freedom fighters and civil rights activists across the world. They captured the imagination of human beings across the planet.

For decades, after the Declaration of Independence, the guiding principles of the American Revolution rang hollow for African Americans. Many among their fellow citizens did not want it to be a self-evident truth that 'all men are created free and equal.' Hence the history of African Americans in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century America was a history of insisting that their country live up to the ideals enshrined in its Constitutional promise. Their struggle was a struggle for justice and equality, to make America true to itself. The Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves was one great landmark in that struggle; and the civil rights Movement led by Dr. King was another.

African Americans' struggle for full citizenship at home in the United States is well known. But it was deeply and intrinsically connected to the struggle for universal human rights and liberation from colonial and racist rule across the rest of the world. Martin Luther King saw his Movement as one and the same with the anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He saw his mission as making America a true anti-colonial power in the world, liberating the oppressed people of the colonial world just as the oppressed people of the United States achieved full citizenship rights. He famously said, that an injustice anywhere in the world stands as a threat to justice everywhere.

King finished his 'I have a dream' speech with the words, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! He attributed those words to a



Negro Spiritual. But the memory of one of those in his audience, the American civil rights activist Bill Sutherland, was stirred by those words. He recalled a night six years earlier, when Martin Luther King, his wife Coretta, and Sutherland himself, had attended Ghana's independence ceremony, and witnessed how 'the British flag was lowered, and the flag of Ghana was raised. Nkrumah, dressed in traditional kente cloth, his fists waving in the air, tears streaming down his face, shouted over and over again, "Free at last! Free at last! Free at last!" Sutherland wonders if, perhaps 'those thunderous words in Washington DC had not come from King's memory of that historic evening in Ghana.'

The echoing words of Kwame Nkrumah and Martin Luther King remind us how much those two men, and the movements they led, had in common. Theirs was a common commitment to universal human rights, to the dignity and equality of all, and to a transcontinental coalition for human progress. At that time, Nkrumah's political philosophy of 'positive action' was non-violent, drawing strongly from the mass mobilization methods used by Mahatma Gandhi in India, and similar in spirit and tactic to the non-violent methods of Dr. King. Nkrumah's Pan African Conference on 'Positive Action', held in Ghana in the year of that country's independence, brought together activists from across the world.

Later on, of course, Nkrumah's method diverged sharply from that of King. The circumstances of decolonization in Africa were markedly different from the civil rights struggle in America, and indeed from the independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi in India. The violence unleashed by the colonial powers and their proxies made non-violent protest an impossibility. Belatedly and reluctantly, Nkrumah recognized that liberation in Africa demanded force of arms. This was a realization reached, with equal reluctance, by other pioneer African statesmen. President Kenneth Kaunda, for example, felt compelled to support the armed struggle when all peaceful avenues were blocked. The path of armed struggle was not one undertaken lightly.

And our own first President and Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who like both Nkrumah and Kaunda had led our country peacefully to independence, saw that it was his personal duty, and his nation's obligation, to make every sacrifice necessary to liberate the African Continent as far south as Durban and Cape Town. Dar Es Salaam was of course the headquarters of the OAU's Africa Liberation Committee.

I was for many years privileged to be a part of the work of the Africa Liberation Committee, both as a Tanzanian and as a Pan-African. I like to think that in our work in the Committee, we lived out a commitment to address injustices across borders, on the basis of a universal commitment to human rights.

Thirty-seven years on from Ghana's midnight hour, the widowed Mrs. Coretta King attended the very last independence celebration in Africa, on 2 May 1994, where President Mandela addressed South Africans, Africans and all those who had struggled in sympathy with his cause. In his autobiography, President Mandela wrote, 'Mrs. Coretta Scott King... was on the podium that night, and I looked over to her as I made reference to her husband's immortal words. "This is one of the most important moments in the life of our country. I stand here before you filled with deep pride and joy – pride in the ordinary, humble people of this country. You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim this country as your own, and now the joy that we can loudly proclaim from the rooftops – Free at last! Free at last!

President Mandela had long been an exemplar and an icon of the armed liberation struggle in Africa. He had visited Tanzania and trained in Ethiopia and Algeria, and imprisoned for his activities in the violent destabilization of South Africa's Apartheid regime. On release from prison in Robben Island, he famously refused to disavow the armed struggle. But when the peaceful transformation of his country into a non-racial Republic committed to equal rights for all became a certainty, Mandela embraced reconciliation and constitutionalism with all the fervour of his spiritual comrades in the American civil rights movement.



With Mandela's Presidency, Africa's era of armed struggle for liberation from colonialism and apartheid came to an end. True, violence did not stop – most cruelly symbolized by the Rwandan genocide which was being unleashed even as South Africans voted and Mandela was inaugurated. The violence in the Darfur region of Sudan over the last few years is another terrible example of man's inhumanity to man on our Continent. But the day had passed when <sup>an</sup> enlightened political philosopher could advocate revolutionary violence to emancipate a people from colonial rule.

Our struggle for rights entered a new phase in the 1990s, symbolized by President Mandela. This new phase was one much more familiar to those who had struggled alongside Dr. Martin Luther King. This was a struggle, not to overthrow and transform an imperial or racist order, but to make a constitutional order live up to its principles. Just as Martin Luther King made America true to its own constitution, our struggle today is an effort to make Africa true to its own principles.

Foremost among such efforts by Africans is the Constitutive Act of the African Union. The founding Summit of the African Union was held in Durban in July 2002, at which President Thabo Mbeki became the first President of the African Union. Among the principles adopted was a commitment to constitutional rule and a refusal to recognize *coup d'état* as a legitimate means of changing a government. Never before in African history have military coups been so universally condemned and so rapidly and consistently challenged.

A second principle adopted by the African Union was that no nation's internal affairs are purely internal. If Africans anywhere on the Continent are suffering or having their rights violated, this should be the concern of all, and the African Union has not only a right, but also a duty, to intervene in a brotherly country to solve the problem. The presence of African Union troops in Darfur, Sudan, to

monitor the ceasefire there, and the role of the African Union in mediating an end to that conflict, are fine exemplars of this principle put into practice.

As Nkrumah and Dr. King predicted, and Mandela stated so clearly, we are free at last. We are still suffering, still exploited and oppressed, and still fighting one another. But we have collectively adopted the principles that allow for constitutional government, the rule of law, human rights, democracy and equality for all. And we have the freedom to use the political tools at our disposal either to make these principles into a reality, or to continue to destroy ourselves.

We are free but our dream is still a dream. Martin Luther King's dream has yet to be fully realized in the United States. Still less have our dreams of prosperity, equality, justice and peace been realized in the African Continent. Our dream is still a struggle. We have committed our lives to realizing the dream, shared by the great leaders of liberation in our time: Martin Luther King Jr., Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Nelson Mandela and many others. *A luta continua.*