

“The greatest threat to future stability in our country VS The greatest strength of Abahlali baseMjondolo movement, South Africa”

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Many things have been said. Many things have been seen. Many policies have been passed. Many people have voted. But what has been done has not been done for the poor. It has been done for the rich. The poor are outside. We have no country. This is not the democracy that the poor fought for. We must ask, are we citizens of this country? If we are not then who are we and where are we?

AFRAID

I am afraid. Every day is an emergency in the *jondolos*. I am afraid that the AIDS epidemic and poverty are the greatest threat to future stability in our country. Our people are dying. Our people are struggling just to survive. Our desperation and anger can go in many directions. I am afraid that it won't always go the people who are getting richer while we suffer.

I remain afraid when I see how much is said at the high level of government. I am afraid when government and the NGOs and academics speak about the poor all the time but so few want to speak to the poor. I am afraid when it becomes clear that our job is just to vote and then watch the rich speak about us as we get poorer.

We have seen that when the wild forests and plantations of the rich are on fire there are often large helicopters with hundreds of tons of water to extinguish the fires. But when our shacks are on fire the helicopters and ambulances are nowhere to be found. Mhlengi Khumalo, a one year old boy died in a fire in Kennedy Road. When this happened there was neither briyani nor Durban Electricity on the scene. Helicopters only come for us when we want to march. The state comes for us when we try to say what we think. We must understand this lesson very well. We are on our own. We have no choice but to fight. It is not about us but our children, our nation and our country S.A.

I become ever more afraid when I see that so much money is being spent at the high level e.g. at conference centres, hotels, uShaka, stadiums, etc and that so little is being spent at the grass root level where most of our people live and suffer. Communities have had enough death. Families are not only facing this high rate of mortality but must also face the funeral expenses which also threaten our safety. It is clear that Aids breeds poverty and poverty breeds Aids. Both must be fought if we are not to be afraid in the future. It is warned that this is not about making small changes to policies. This is a class struggle. This is a struggle between the Haves and Don't Haves. Our society can only be saved if the Don't Haves win this struggle. If we loose this struggle everyone will have to live afraid for ever. Everything will be broken everywhere.

BRAVE

However I am brave now. More and more thousands of us are becoming brave. We are brave enough to fight this struggle now. We are brave because for the first time in history of this country, South Africa, the poorest of the poor are saying that it is time for us to begin to say "This is who we are. This is where we are. This is how we live. This is what we feel. This is what we think. This is how we want things to be done so that we can live without fear.'

AB AHLALI BASEMJONDOLO MOVEMENT (SA) is the hope of the hopeless, the home of the homeless, the voice of the poor of the poorest. It is the ground for He/She who knows not that She /He knows not that He/She knows not but knows that the poor suffer, knows that this country is rich and knows exactly what made and makes this country rich. Our movement seeks to bring the government to the ground, to bring the institutions of government & the private sector to the ground. We fight to bring policies that affect our people under the control of our people. We are realistic. We start where we are but we fight to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. We fight to make those who are blind to poverty to be able to see the poverty that we see. We work to show those who are blind to the power of the poor to see the strength of the strong poor. The threat of fires, storms, illnesses, police brutality and government repression make it clear that if we do not stand up now and act together, then, I am afraid, the poor citizens would once be remembered to have not survived to be part of the beauty of this nature.

STRENGTH

The Shack Dwellers (Abahlali baseMjondolo) have acknowledged that, the majority of this country & this continent and this world are the poor who are often undermined. This has made it possible for us to mobilise the broader communities who feel neglected by the State. It is the very same poverty and neglect by the State that throws us together in our settlements and from that togetherness we become strong. Our masses, our unity and diversity is our strength, our pain, our voice. We have become the strong poor. The politics of the strong poor is an anti party politics. Our politics is not to put someone in an office. Our politics is to put our people above that office. And when we have finished with one office we move on to the next office. Our politics is also not a politics of a few people who have learnt some fancy political words and who expect everyone to follow them because they know these words. Our politics is a traditional home politics which is understood very well by all the old mamas and *gogos* because it affects their lives and gives them a home. In this home everybody is important, everybody can speak and we look after each other and think about situation and plan our fight together. We believe that housing policy does not only require housing specialists, rich consultants and government. We believe that housing policy requires, most importantly, the people who need the houses. But we also know, as poor communities and as Shack dwellers that the broader poor have no choice but to play a role in shaping and re-shaping this country in to an anti-capitalist system. This is the task that the betrayal of our struggle and the struggles of our ancestors has given to us. We are on our own. We have to fight this fight. Although we will fight for land and housing in the city we know that this is not only a fight for land and housing in the city. Giving reasonable budgets to democratic development in district municipalities and advancing rural areas will mean that people will no longer have no choice but to leave their homes and build shacks everywhere. If the shack dwellers do not belong to this country then they must be sent back to where they belong. If they do belong here, then they are entitled to all the benefits of the soil of South Africa.

DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE

The alternative, the direction of our struggle, will come out of the thinking that we do in our communities. We are doing this thinking all the time in our communities. Tonight we can use this opportunity to do it here. Let us start with some questions. I will ask these questions now and then we can turn this lecture into a meeting. The world is full of lectures. Lectures usually come to us as one more way of making us sit quietly while rich people think for us. In our struggle we need meetings where everyone can speak and think together.

Have the poor Durban shack dwellers succeeded in their struggle for land and housing in the city? What has been won? What must still be won? What have we learned from our struggle?

Have the Western Cape QQ Section and Anti-Eviction Campaign succeeded in their struggle for housing? What can be learnt from their struggle?

Have the South Durban Communities succeeded in their fight against the threats from the Engin refinery and the generally poisonous environment? What can be learnt from this struggle?

Have the flat residents such as Bayview, Albert Park, Sydenham Heights, New Lands and Phoenix been attended to? What must still be done? What can we learn from this struggle?

Have Bachu, Baig, Xulu, Shezi and Dimba been removed from the offices of the community? Why are these people imposed on us? What should we do about it?

Have the deaths of Monica Ngcobo , Tebogo Mkhonza, Komi Zulu and Mhlengi Khumalo brought about any changes in our communities? What have we learnt from these deaths? Why are our people being killed by the police, by fire, by councillors? Why does no one high up seem to care?

What stops the poor from becoming the political majority of this country in which they are the majority of citizens? What stops us from deciding the policies that affect our lives? What stops from being in control of our future?

What strategy will force the blind government to see and get the deaf government to hear? What strategy will force those who are rich to share, those who do not give account to account?

How can we unite our struggling communities and movements to make them stronger?

I am optimistic that the “will” of the poor will soon be done simple because the poor are the majority of this country and the majority is beginning to speak for itself. We have the courage to do what must be done. But this optimism can only be kept for as long as democracy prevails so democracy must be protected and deepened. This is why we took Sutcliffe to court when he tried to ban us from marching. Comrades, let us now think about these questions together.