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As a child of the constitutional democracy, I stand before you in the best of times and the worst of times. There is, as the Bible reminds us, a season for every thing, and a time to every purpose under heaven, a time "to break down and a time to build up".

I believe that now is not the time to burn homes, lives and possessions but to bring warmth and hope to homes and people who precariously live in them while they are in limbo.

I also believe that this is the time, not for throwing stones but of picking up stones. It is a time of renewal and rebuilding with these stones, a lasting monument that encapsulates the vision, the ethos and the spirit foundational to our constitutional democracy.

At the end of the rainbow there are incredible challenges and opportunities, especially in developing a sustainable democracy that will become a beacon of light and hope for the rest of the continent.

I believe that while we have the capacity, we lack the collective will, because of the lapse on the part of those who drafted the Bill of Rights, to prepare a manual about how to interpret the provisions thereof and to realise the blueprint presented in the Constitution.

The truth and reconciliation process that we had undergone a few years ago exposed an intensely deep conflict in which fundamental human rights was the major casualty. It paved the way, for every South African, by confronting their past, to put their shoulders to the wheel and to see the challenges not as problems but as opportunities.

As I see it, there are in South Africa two challenging ideas: namely the old and the new. The old ideas will evaporate like the dew under the burning morning sun because they are weak and morally challenged ideas such as racism, xenophobia and exploitation.

The new ideas are entrenched in the challenges we face today. Instead of asking what our country can do for us, we should rise up and as Khalil Gibran encourages us, we must ask what we can do for our country.

These new ideas are designed to transform and catapult the nation from the role of camp followers towards becoming leaders of the caravan. There is an awakening that defies slumber and will conquer the old because the sun is the leader and we, the children of the dawn, are its army.

The challenge and my expectations of our nascent democracy is how, unlike the ethos of the old that uses and continues to use society's dependencies for the necessities of life as a monopoly and for exorbitant profit, how we can become transformed into a sincere, hardworking and diligent nation whose reward is prosperity and freedom in the true sense for everyone.

Inherent in that challenge lies an enigma, namely why do we crawl like worms close to the ground when we can soar high above the firmament as eagles! That is a challenge we seriously have to address in the next decade! But we have to earnestly start now for after all a journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step, does it not?

The poet Masizi Kunene's refrain in the poem "The ancestors and the sacred mountain" is appropriate for the designs I have in mind.

He said: "It is us, the descendants of lions who must rule, for without us (surely) the earth itself would end."

These lines, vividly instruct us to become the path finders or the stairway to the future for surely it is our conduct that will determine the sustainable trajectory of our nation.

But first we have to confront the challenges. Xenophobia is at the apex of these challenges!

Njabulo Ndebele wrote about a terrible specter stalking our land: "It is a specter of violence, corruption and mismanagement of national affairs by government. This specter is the inarticulate premise that fans the flames of xenophobia supplying it with the vital oxygen with which to spread like an uncontrollable firestorm."

Every decent human being must, as the late Chief Justice Ismail Muhammad said in the famous Azapo case, feel grave discomfort in living with consequences that allow perpetrators of evil acts to walk the streets of this land with impunity.

We cannot be part of any dispensation in which society and authoritarianism conceal truth and human rights in little crevices of obscurity in our history.

Nor should we, as Mazisi Kunene exhorts us in the epic poem 'Emperor Shaka the Great' be party to those who spew words of hate, that poison the hearts and soul of the nation especially those,

as he puts it, who in truth “worship at the feet of the great and often abuse their authority with the violence of their words”.

And yes, while we as youth are challenged with a sacred duty we have to, as one writer wrote in a daily newspaper during the height of the xenophobic firestorm, “expose those who drive this murderous machine”.

Mere isolation of those who “fan the fires of xenophobic hatred and violence” is not an option, nor is it a solution. We must be principled and firm in our resolve if we are to raise and sustain the bar of morality and the attainment of social justice.

I believe that while we are conscious of the terrible past out of which we have emerged, and which exacted a high toll on the collective morality of its beneficiaries, we must regenerate this morality if we are to succeed in our challenging enterprise.

We must, introduce an interpersonal truth and reconciliation process and instill the enduring qualities of ubuntu for in it lies our collective humanity and morality. Whilst we discuss the horrible effects of apartheid every year on June 16, I find it odd how we increasingly turn our attention away from the maladies such as xenophobia that destroy the fabric of our society.

Xenophobia is an unjustifiable odium that shames us all. The MJ Naidoo Social Justice Foundation, is an appropriate vehicle to tackle the blight on the lives of those who sought sanctuary amongst us, for there can never be peace and prosperity without social justice for everyone.

We need the emergence of another Shaka who resolutely and with an iron fist eradicated all the known maladies that festered in the Zulu nation that he had founded. Xenophobia is alien to the African culture and I am an African!

In conclusion, we cannot walk across that “historic bridge” described in the epilogue to the interim constitution, if we remain mired in what ails our nation. We will if we are non-responsive to the challenges that confront us, hobble more that walk to the future with heavy and dragged steps delaying and impeding a rapid and enthusiastic transition to the new society and the end of the bridge.

Today, the 16th of June, 32 years after Mbuyisa Makhubo ran through the streets of Soweto with the dying 12 year old Hector Peterson in his arms, we salute those youth of courage and determination who will raise our nation like the fabled Phoenix that rose from its own ashes!