

Speech at the, Imam Abdullah Haron Education Trust - Johannesburg Launch, 29 October 2008

Thank you for giving me the honour of speaking at the Johannesburg Launch of the Imam Abdullah Haron Education Trust today.

Some in my generation were beginning to become politically aware in 1969 when the Imam was detained and later died in detention after 123 days in the hands of the Apartheid Security Police. I certainly recall the sadness and anger that his death in detention caused to many thousands of justice loving people who yearned and worked hard for a free and democratic South Africa – that we enjoy today.

I congratulate Mustaq Brey and all those associated with the Trust on your efforts to help South Africa remember the Imam, his passion for freedom and his determination to create a South Africa without poverty;

“Make sure when leaving the world not just that you were good, but leave a good world” - Bertolt Brecht

More importantly the Trust aims to “empower through education”.

Education is recognised as indispensable to giving each young person increased opportunity to succeed in life. Your focus on education at a time when the state is grappling with overcoming the devastating effects of apartheid on many generations of black South Africans is commendable.

But we are going to need more than education to combat the negatives of our current society and global norms and to have more young people who will emulate this genuine activism, magnanimity and non-racial solidarity of the Imam.

It is said that globalisation has turned the world into a village – the village is divided into haves and have-nots; into billions who live in poverty and a few who enjoy wealth. This is the village which is in profound economic turmoil today.

There are two challenges that our society and indeed the world faces – a more enlightened youth committed to social justice and a new societal culture that combats poverty.

Committed to community rather than myself; youth who will sacrifice their time and energy to help mobilise all of us into action on any number of fronts on which we can make a difference: creating a vibrant civil society, increasing radically our participation in societal affairs. Youth whose freshness and innocence will remind us what honesty, sincerity and solidarity means.

A youth that will help us fight the scourge of drugs, criminality, alcohol abuse and violence against women. A youth that will, distance themselves from the evil of racism and xenophobia. A youth that will, understand social justice and social solidarity and demand of us adults that we change our ways if we do want a world and a country that offers a better life to all its peoples.

The second challenge is the economic, political and social marginalisation and sheer poverty both in our country and the world. For thirty years the selfishness, greed and unregulated markets, weak status and rank marginalisation of the developing world promoted by the Thatcher/Reagan axis in the form of neo-liberalism dominated our world. Today, that same greed and unregulated markets have caused a massive crisis in the financial system of developed world.

The values which the Imam stood for – that of sharing, building community, selflessness, social justice – have a unique opportunity to come to the fore in the present times.

But there is also food for thought for all of us in respect of the economic and social culture we have in South Africa presently. Our society also nurtures (worships) individualism over community, greed over modesty, selfishness over philanthropy and a limited inclusivity over a true social solidarity. So part of our challenge is how we narrow the gap between haves and have-nots; how we tackle poverty and marginalisation; how we aggressively attack corruption and criminality.

The founders of the Trust and their efforts will remind us constantly of the legacy of the Imam and help to nudge our conscience, rekindle the spirit of solidarity and reinforce the vital role played by social activists. South Africa needs more of you!

Your example also reminds us of the importance of community – based organisations. South Africa has a rich history of such organisations. It is time to strengthen such organisations, create new ones and generate more social entrepreneurs'. In this way, we create new synergies between government, business, labour and community organisations.

We face formidable challenges. But we also have incredible opportunities to make our dream of a just and equitable society a reality. What we need are more engaged people, more selfless leaders, more passionate activists. Above all we need a common purpose and form a new unity in action to make our dreams a reality.

We need more people who will stand up for democracy, who will be part of engaged citizenry. We need more of us to promote and defend integrity and social justice. We need many more people who will actively combat greed, poverty, marginalisation and corruption.

You can be rightly proud of the Imam Abdullah Haron Educational Trust and your contribution to building a better South Africa, a South Africa in which we desperately need to build social solidarity.

I know you will join me in paying tribute to three great South African Patriots who passed on recently - Billy Nair, Mrs Duma Nokwe and Ezekiel Mphahlele.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing this occasion with you.

And remember, the tax system is very generous to those who are generous in their contributions to educational ventures such as the Trust!