

## **Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the unveiling of statues of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, eThekweni, KwaZulu-Natal**

Tuesday, 3 March 2026

Programme Director, Mr Mbhele,  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers present,  
Members of the Executive Council,  
Mayor of eThekweni Municipality, His Worship Cyril Xaba,  
Speaker of eThekweni, Councillor Thabani Nyawose,  
Councillors of the eThekweni Municipality,  
Representatives of the Mandela family,  
Representatives of the Tambo family,  
Former Ministers Jeff Radebe and Mac Maharaj,  
Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature,  
Members of the Consular Corps,  
Amakhosi Asendlunkulu present,  
Leaders of business and labour,  
Veterans of our struggle,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Sanibonani.

It is an honour to address you today on the historic occasion of the unveiling of these statues of Presidents Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo.

The eThekweni Municipality has bestowed this honour on these two icons in recognition of their contribution towards our struggle for freedom, social justice and the empowerment of our people.

Monuments of this nature are important for preserving our history and heritage. They anchor the collective memory of a nation.

They are important as a public affirmation of the values which these leaders represented and the principles for which they fought.

It was the Roman Marcus Tullius Cicero philosopher who said: "The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living."

They stand as a reminder to future generations of the road our nation has travelled and the aspirations we have for our future.

Younger generations who did not live through the troubled times that our country went through – who did not experience apartheid or the liberation struggle – will learn through the monuments and statues of these iconic leaders.

Of course statues such as these provokes questions and initiates conversations about their value but more importantly about our past. The presence of Mandela and Tambo in bronze ensures that their stories and indeed the story of our country remains embedded in the landscape of daily life not confined to textbooks. At today's unveiling, we reflect on the preeminent contributions that Mandela and Tambo made to the birth of the democratic South Africa.

It is significant that these statues are unveiled in the year that we celebrate 30 years of the adoption of our democratic Constitution.

It was Oliver Tambo who initiated the drafting of the ANC's Constitutional Principles, which were developed while the liberation movements were still banned and while apartheid oppression was at its height.

The Constitutional Principles anticipated the essential features of the democracy that we live in today.

And 10 years after that, it was Nelson Mandela who signed our democratic Constitution into law.

It is one of the great coincidences of our history that the two partners of Mandela and Tambo Attorneys were each to play such pivotal parts in the development and adoption of our democratic Constitution.

The relationship between Mandela and Tambo was founded in a desire for justice.

Through their law firm, they fought for the rights of the poor and marginalised, the oppressed and dispossessed.

As young leaders, they were united in the defiance of unjust laws and in forging a vision of a South Africa which belongs to all who live in it and where the people shall govern.

As leaders of the ANC and founders of Umkhonto we Sizwe, they took up arms against an apartheid state that was intent only on violent repression.

Even as they were separated for close on three decades, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo remained resolutely committed to the same cause. They fought the same struggle for liberation, and they strived towards the same vision.

It is therefore fitting that they are memorialised in this way in the same city.

While these statues honour great leaders of our past, they retain great meaning in our present.

They remind us of what we value as a society.

They were leaders that celebrated the diversity of South Africa's people.

They dedicated their lives to the fight against racism, tribalism and sexism.

They sought to break down the divisions between African, coloured, Indian and white; between women and men; between the poor and the wealthy.

Today, we are called upon to embrace their vision and continue their struggle towards a South Africa that is a home to all its people.

Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo were men of peace.

They sought to resolve conflict through dialogue.

These men of peace would have been gravely concerned by the conflict underway in the Middle East.

They would have called for the United Nations Charter to be respected and upheld.

They would have joined us in calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the conflict to be resolved through meaningful and earnest negotiations.

Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo were leaders of integrity and honesty.

They sought no rewards for themselves. Only freedom for their people.

For this, they endured great hardships and made great sacrifices.

These are leaders that we need today. Leaders that will serve. Leaders that are selfless. Leaders that are honest and ethical.

As we build great statues of these leaders, we must understand that the most powerful and enduring monument to their leadership is in following their example.

We must seek to be leaders like them, to be activists like them, to be citizen like them.

We must realise that greatness is to be found not just in the celebrated victories of history, but in the many acts of committed service to the cause of human development.

These statues call on us not to be mere admirers. Not to be mere praise singers.

But to be active citizens in building a better nation, a better continent and a better world.

The National Development Plan reminds us that:

"Leadership does not refer to one person, or even a tight collective of people. It applies in every aspect of life."

As we look at these statues, we are compelled to be active citizens and trustworthy, dedicated leaders.

We unveil these statues knowing that people from across our country and across the world will come to see them.

eThekweni is one of the premier tourist destinations in our country and we can anticipate that these statues will contribute to exceptional growth in tourism.

They will contribute to a revival of the fortunes of the city as it works to tackle some of the challenges of recent years.

We know that the city's beaches have just had a bumper season.

It is said that more than 6.8 million people visited the beaches and the promenade over the festive season and that more than 1.2 million bathers were recorded at the municipality's swimming pools.

This is a sign both of what the city has to offer and the hard work that has been done by all stakeholders to ensure that eThekweni is a place that people want to visit.

I am therefore pleased to announce that eThekweni will be the venue for the 46th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community – SADC – to be held in August 2026.

This is a worthy recognition of the progress that has been made together with all social partners in restoring confidence in the city and encouragement to complete the work.

We look forward, as the chair of SADC, to invite leaders from across the region to gather here in eThekweni – where the African Union was launched – to deliberate on issues that are critical to the growth and development of Southern Africa.

This would be a fitting tribute to the legacy of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo.

To everyone who has been involved in this project, I want to say thank you for your dedication to see these statues taking their rightful place here.

The challenge is to market these statues not only as tourist attractions but as part of the story of our struggle for freedom.

It was in this city that Nelson Mandela spent his last night before his arrest at Howick on the 5th of August 1962, having visited to brief Chief Albert Luthuli on his clandestine travels to different African countries.

It was in this city that Madiba made his iconic call for the people of this province to end the violence that had cost so many lives.

It was here, within weeks of his release from prison in 1990, that Madiba said:

“My message to those of you involved in this battle of brother against brother is this: take your guns, your knives, and your pangas, and throw them into the sea... End this war now!”

And it was in this city in July 1991 that Oliver Tambo handed over the Presidency over the ANC to Nelson Mandela at the organisation’s 48th National Conference.

In erecting these statues, we are indeed affirming the importance of preserving our heritage for the benefit of future generations.

Having Mandela’s and Tambo’s statues in the same city honours their distinct but interlocking contributions and roles in the liberation struggle and strengthens our collective public memory.

These statues are more just art.

These statues are promises – promises made by a free people to themselves that they will not forget what it cost to be free.

The erection of the statues is an act of national gratitude of saying to those who gave everything and to the Mandela and Tambo families, that we do remember the sacrifices that they made by both these leaders and their families.

It is also a reminder to those who have yet to inherit this democracy, that freedom was not free, and that those who fought for freedom deserve to be seen.

We therefore deserve to see Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo across various landscapes of our beautiful country lest we forget.

In stone and bronze, we continue to write our history, not the history of those who held power unjustly but the history of those who refused to let injustice have the final word.

But we are also telling the world we will continue to honour the heroes and heroines of our struggle.

As we face the challenges of today and tomorrow, we are standing on the shoulders of these brave men and women.

Their lives will continue to inspire and encourage us as we strive together for a better world.

It is said that a nation that forgets its past has no future. We choose to have a future by remembering our past.

Ngiyabonga.

I thank you.