

## **Sir Quett Ketumile Joni Masire (23 July 1925 – 22 June 2017)**

Leadership in Africa exhibits lots of disfiguring examples as compared to positive role models. However, there exist positive examples of African leaders who stand out because of their clear-minded strength of character, their adherence to democracy and their respect for the rule of law. Our dearly departed founding father, His Excellency Sir Ketumile Quett Joni Masire is a true quintessence of such a truly commendable African leader.

Sir, a title equally befitting his status, was the second President of the Republic of Botswana. He ascended to the Presidency of the Republic in 1980 and endured his peaceful and increasingly prosperous presidency up to 1998 when he stepped down. He was a leading figure in the independence movement and then the new government, and played a crucial role in facilitating and protecting Botswana's steady financial growth and development. The ethos of good governance requires an environment conducive to peace, security and development, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights and Botswana under the stewardship of His Excellency had to address the challenge of advancing each in a balanced way. This has been helped by the independence and integrity of its institutions which bodes well for further progress towards spreading wealth and opportunity across all sectors of Botswana society.

In so doing, His Excellency ensured that there was a functioning rule of law; education, health, and a framework conducive to economic growth. He further ensured that the infant nation had an effective artery of commerce and enshrined personal and human freedoms. The country saw a cautious but steady growth in the civil society movements, health services, life expectancy, schooling standards, currency appreciation and infrastructural development. Aware of this, Sir provided the citizens of Botswana with a sense of belonging to a national enterprise of which everyone could be proud of. He focused on knitting and not unravel his nation and ensured the improvement of the real lives of the ruled rather than the fortunes of the few. Notable strides were made in maintaining high economic growth, sound fiscal policies, and regular elections, which fed this image as a true embodiment of a progressive technocrat leader.

During his tenure in office, His Excellency did not only contribute to the socioeconomic development of Botswana through the promotion of good governance, but also to regional development. He chaired the South African Development Community (SADC) and held the distinction of Co-Chairperson Emeritus of the Global Coalition for Africa. Since his retirement, he has devoted his life to peace and justice and led the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) investigation into the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and was a facilitator of the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Throughout this appointment, Sir implored the indigenous institutions for, and approaches to, dispute resolution and the reconciliation of the parties. His Excellency subscribed to the school of thought that believed that the role of values played a significant role in democracy and good governance, for he believed that the democracy and good governance, we enjoyed in Botswana has to a great extent been grounded in our own social norms, rather than foreign ideology. This is synonymous to Botswana whereupon our indigenous laws operate side by side with the general law. This easily found applicability in missions such as Rwanda which has a system more similar to our *kgotla* known as the *gacaca*.

As Head of State, Botswana's democracy grew stronger, gained stability and deeply rooted itself in the rule of law. He adhered to the principles that, firstly, the government and its officials and agents as well as individuals and private entities are accountable under the law. Secondly, that the laws are clear, publicized, stable, and just; are applied evenly; and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property and certain core human rights. Thirdly, the process by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, fair, and efficient. Lastly, that justice is delivered timely by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals who are of a sufficient number, have adequate resources, and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.

Nevertheless, His Excellency presidency was not always adorned by simplicity. There were instances where his leadership qualities shone brightly in times of despair. A few particular instances come to mind like when the Botswana Democratic Party's political power was threatened in the late 1990's, he ensured that their response was to change their policies to make themselves more popular instead of reacting in dishonourable ways like how most of his peers in Africa did at the time. His Excellency chose to take the democratic path. This explains why he managed to sustain a political equilibrium of a nature that no other African country has ever done. Furthermore, during his tenure, the Republic faced one of its worst drought. The Government of Botswana sought to counter this scourge and at least partially succeeded. The Government relief efforts provided food and other forms of aid to those in need as a matter of right and not as a consequence of political supplication. The most hard hit managed to cope with the effects of the drought and Botswana was celebrated as an African success in the way it coped and handled the famine.

Recently in July 2016, His Excellency gave a sterling lecture at the Botswana International University of Science and Technology. During this lecture, he detailed the philosophy that guided the grandeur leader that he was as follows;

*"I must confess, however, that when I saw that I was asked to speak to about - "the journey of Botswana, where we come from; where we are, who we are, and where are we heading" - I wondered where does one begin? It struck me as a topic that could fill several books! Given our country's relative success over the past five decades in combining adherence to democracy and the rule of law with economic growth accompanied by notable advances in human development, I have often been asked what accounts for our country's relative success. What has set us apart from others? One could here speak of good governance in the context of leadership, policies and institutions, the African image, the history of political parties or the history of our economic development. But I suppose that is reserved for our discussion time. But on further reflection, I thought I might rather try to dig a bit deeper by focusing on some of the longstanding, shared qualities that have defined who we are as a nation. Certainly one of our strengths as a nation has been our ability of the last five decades to uphold our unity in diversity through our practices of consultation and consensus building buttressed by tolerance and mutual respect. Other social values that have propelled our progress would include our prudence and, at least in the past, collective commitment to self-reliance. As a nation, we can take collective pride in the fact that we have made remarkable progress since independence, though many challenges admittedly remain"*

As an alumnus of the University of Port Elizabeth, I am proud to detail the above few highlights on our Honorary Doctorate of Law recipient for the year 2001 - *(among other honorary accolades he amassed during his lifetime).*

His Excellency lived his life of true honour to the fullest and was a true quintessence of a truly commendable African leader.

*Domine requiescant in pace.*