

# PART FOUR 1985 – 1993







# Oliver Tambo

## NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE

“Our people are suffering under the iron heel of military dictatorship. They are facing the full might of the apartheid state because they dared to stand up to fight for our liberation ... The time has come to join in one determined offensive to make all of our country ungovernable ...”

Oliver Tambo, Radio Freedom, 22 July 1985

In the latter half of the 1980s, Oliver Tambo made repeated calls for the “four pillars” of struggle – international pressure, armed struggle, the underground, and mass resistance – to be intensified.

As he made these calls, he was aware that the world was changing rapidly and a new arena of struggle was opening. The possibility of a negotiated settlement with the apartheid regime was on the horizon. Preparing the way for negotiations would require all the skill and wisdom of the great leader and statesman Oliver Tambo had become.

“Tambo’s position had been, you can’t not want to talk to people – it’s incorrect ... And you can’t say I want to talk only to those people who are already converted.” Thabo Mbeki, president of South Africa, 1999 - 2008

## Getting Down To Business



Gavin Ford/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images



Hugh Murray



Sallyvn/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

As a result of increased resistance inside the country, President P.W. Botha declared a State of Emergency on 20 July 1985 in 36 magisterial districts, giving more powers to the police, the military and the president. Within a month, more than 2 000 people were detained under the Internal Security Act.

On 15 August 1985, the world held its breath in anticipation of President P.W. Botha’s Rubicon Speech. But the apartheid president got cold feet and the speech was a huge disappointment to the people of South Africa and the world at large.

A few weeks later, Chase Manhattan Bank in America announced that it would stop rolling over its loan to South Africa. Other banks followed. The Rand dropped and business people began to worry.

Then, on 13 September 1985, at the invitation of President Kenneth Kaunda, Oliver Tambo and his senior comrades, including Thabo Mbeki, Chris Hani, Mac Maharaj and Z Pallo Jordan, held path-breaking talks with a delegation of South African businessmen in Zambia.

The delegation of businessmen included Tony Bloom, chief executive of Premier Milling (below, to the left of Tambo), Gavin Relly, chief executive of Anglo American and Zach de Beer, a director at Anglo American and later leader of the Opposition in Parliament (below, both to the right of Kenneth Kaunda). Senior journalists like Tertius Myburgh, editor of the Sunday Times (below extreme left), also attended this meeting.

Discussions focused on the difficult questions of armed struggle and what type of future the ANC envisaged for South Africa.

In November 1985, Tony Heard, editor of the Cape Times published a long interview with Tambo. Being his first opportunity to address his white compatriots directly, Tambo assured them of their undoubted place in the country and of their identity as Africans.

He explained the history and context of the armed struggle and the call for economic sanctions. And, importantly, he spoke of the possibility of negotiations if the government created the right climate:

“Lift the State of Emergency; pull the troops from the townships, and the police. And release the political prisoners.” Oliver Tambo



At this first meeting with businessmen in Zambia, Tambo said that he was often asked whether the fight was for a future capitalist or communist South Africa. The fight, he said, was simply to be free. But he did say that freedom had an economic dimension.

“The ‘haves’ cannot continue to exist at the expense of the ‘have-nots’ – freedom has to reflect a difference in the conditions of life.” Oliver Tambo

*Oliver Tambo*



“We share a common belief that serious discussions with the ANC must form part of the search for the resolution of conflict and the transition to a just and peaceful future ... We hope what began in Dakar can continue inside and outside of South Africa ...” Joint Statement, Dakar 1987

## Finding Common Ground



Courtesy of IDASA Resource Centre



Courtesy of IDASA Resource Centre



Courtesy of Professor Willie Esterhuyse

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in October 1985, an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) was appointed to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement in South Africa.

“No serious person we met was interested in a fight to the finish; all favoured negotiations and peaceful solutions.” Commonwealth Eminent Persons’ Group on southern Africa

Progress was made with the ANC finally agreeing to conditions for negotiations. But on the day the EPG were to report back to the South African government – in May 1986 – they woke up to hear that the South African army had struck at ANC targets in Lusaka, Harare and Gaborone.

In February 1986, the leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Dr Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, together with his colleague, Dr Alex Boraine, resigned.

In July of the following year, under the auspices of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA), Slabbert led a delegation of 60 influential South Africans (half of them Afrikaners) to meet the ANC in Dakar in Senegal. Tambo delegated Thabo Mbeki and other senior leaders to meet the delegation. The ANC delegation is pictured here in a relaxed moment during the meeting.

The historic meeting went a long way to breaking down long held stereotypes. They added their voices to the calls for the unconditional release of all political prisoners and the unbanning of all political organisations.

The Dakar initiative was followed by several similar meetings between the ANC and other delegations from South Africa. One of the most significant meetings was led by Professor Willie Esterhuyse of Stellenbosch University, who first met the ANC in Maputo in November 1987.

Esterhuyse eventually became an honest go-between, establishing links between the ANC and Niel Barnard, the head of the National Intelligence Service. On 31 May 1989, he provided Thabo Mbeki with a code name and telephone number, enabling the first direct contact between the liberation movement and the South African government.



The majority of those who attended the meeting in Dakar in 1987 are pictured here on a visit to Goree Island:

**Front row** (l to r): Randall van den Heever, Revel Fox, Penuel Maduna, Rocky Gagliano, Grethe Fox, Peter Gastrow, Harold Wolpe, Max du Preez

**Second row** (l to r): Franklin Sonn, Breyten Breytenbach, Barbara Masekela, Tony Trew, Jakes Gerwel, Mac Maharaj, Blackie Swart, Pierre Cronje, Ampie Coetzee, Adrian Enthoven, Aziz Pahad, Michael Savage, Hardy Botha, Zallo Jordan, Errol Moorcroft, Manie van Rensburg, Benoît Ngom, Lourens du Plessis, Christo Nel, Alex Boraine, Chris de Broglio

**Third row** (l to r): Alister Sparks, Selwyn Gross, Leon Louw, Beyers Naudé, Ilse Naudé, Thabo Mbeki, Kader Asmal, Essop Pahad, Wayne Mitchell, unidentified person, Jacques Kriel, Andrew Savage, Trudi de Ridder, André du Pisani, Gerhard Erasmus, Lawrence Schlemmer, Van Zyl Slabbert, Lindiwe Mabiza, André Odendaal, unidentified person, Ian Liebenberg, Yolande Breytenbach, Francis Melli, Theo Hanf

**Fourth row** (l to r): Theuns Eloff, two unidentified people, Chris Louw, Hermann Giliomee, unidentified person, Jaap du Randt, Johan van Zyl, Heribert Adam, unidentified person, Steve Tshwete, Tommy Bedford, Willem van Vuuren, Klaus von der Ropp

“When the moment for negotiations arrives, it must find us ready; and we should not start to fumble ...” Oliver Tambo

In the late 1980s the state used massive force to try to contain popular protest. In 1988, PW Botha banned the UDF and 16 other organisations, and introduced labour legislation to curb the rising power of the unions. The SA Defence Force occupied many urban townships on a continuous basis, and the security police harassed and arrested activists continuously.

But this did not blunt resistance. Instead protest grew and grew. In 1989, some 700 detainees went on hunger strike, forcing the state to release many. The Defiance Campaign of 1989 attracted massive numbers of people, many of whom waved ANC flags in open defiance of the state – as seen here at the funeral of David Webster, a UDF activist, assassinated in broad daylight outside his house in central Johannesburg on 1 May 1989. The townships were becoming increasingly ungovernable and the state was losing its grip. The regime had run out of options.



In the late 1980s, the world was changing fast – and nobody was more aware of the fact than Oliver Tambo.

In December 1988, the Soviet Union announced the withdrawal of half a million troops from Eastern Europe. Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviet Union now favoured a political rather than a military solution to the apartheid question. The financial and military support that the ANC had relied on from the USSR for so many years would be downscaled.

At almost the same moment, “a non-aggression” pact was signed in New York between South Africa and Angola, in which South Africa would cease to support UNITA and Cuba would withdraw from Angola. In terms of the deal, the ANC would have to move its camps out of Angola, and locate them in faraway Uganda. In exchange, South Africa had to accept Namibian independence.



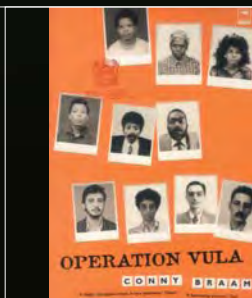


# O. R. Tambo

## The Harare Declaration



Ken Owen/Gallo Images



Joanna Media



Wits Historical Papers

As early as 1985, the ANC appointed a sub-committee to look into the question of negotiations. This was followed in 1986 by the formation of the ANC's Constitutional Guidelines Committee, whose work provided the basis for the new constitution of our country.

"In 1988, Tambo appointed a President's Team ... to develop the ANC's perspective on negotiations. He understood that arriving at a 'bottom line' position would involve wide-ranging consultations."

Z Pallo Jordan

This team developed a document on the ANC's position on negotiations, accommodating feedback from different stakeholders, including leaders of the Mass Democratic Movement inside the country, leaders of the Frontline States, the OAU and the UN. Tambo worked impossibly long hours, improving the document that would eventually become the Harare Declaration.

It was crucially important at the same time to keep up the struggle on all fronts. The four pillars of struggle needed to be maintained and intensified.

Tambo had devised the top secret 'Operation Vula' as early as 1987, which not even the ANC Security Department knew about. The objective was to integrate the ANC back into the country by moving senior political and military leaders to South Africa to escalate resistance. This secret leadership network improved channels of communication, enabling Tambo to communicate with Mandela and others about the Harare Declaration. Operation Vula continued into the early 1990s, and was seen by some as a back-up in case negotiations failed.

"Vula was the most sophisticated operation ever mounted by the ANC," Stephen Ellis, social scientist

"The Harare Declaration referred to a number of principles for a democratic society ... It contained the preconditions for negotiations: the cessation of hostilities, the release of political prisoners and a mechanism for drawing up the new constitution." Kadar Asmal, one of the key drafters of the South African Constitution

The Harare Declaration was finally adopted at an OAU Summit on 21 August 1989. But Oliver Tambo was not there. He had suffered a stroke and was seriously ill, unable to speak. Such was the price the great man had paid for the document that would finally set South Africa on the path to freedom.



# Oliver Tambo

## Home At Last



Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation



Maybuye Archives



Associated Press/Photo © Chris Farrell

After his stroke in Harare, Oliver Tambo was sent to a clinic in London, and from there, at the invitation of the Swedish government, was admitted to a clinic in Sweden. Typically, as sick as he was, he was distressed that at this crucial time he "was letting down the ANC".

Soon, Tambo was to receive a wonderful surprise – a visit from his old friends and comrades, several of whom had recently been released from Robben Island. Standing (from left) are Thabo Mbeki, Joe Nhlanhla, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Tambo, Andrew Mlangeni, Walter Sisulu, Wilton Mkwayi, Joe Slovo and Henry Makgothi. Seated are Alfred Nzo, Albertina Sisulu and Elias Motsoaledi. It was an emotional reunion, a time of celebration and rejoicing.

It was a special day indeed. Remarkably, on that very day – 2 February 1990 – President FW de Klerk announced that the ANC, the SACP and other parties were no longer banned, and that Nelson Mandela would soon be released!

On 11 February, after 27 long years, Nelson Mandela walked out of the prison gates. A few weeks later, on his first trip to Europe, he arrived in Stockholm to visit his great friend and comrade-in-arms. The two men embraced, and everybody, including the hospital staff, was moved to tears.

"It was an emotional moment. Oliver could walk but talked with great difficulty: 'Is it true? Are you out of prison?' They mostly embraced each other and stood hand in hand – like two happy children seeing each other after such a long time." Billy Modise, ANC veteran

Finally, on 14 December 1990, after stopping off at Lusaka to thank his loyal friend, Kenneth Kaunda, Tambo arrived home. He was embraced by his people at a welcome-home rally at the Orlando Stadium in Soweto, where 70 000 people had gathered to greet their beloved leader.

A few days later, Tambo addressed the ANC's first Consultative Conference in South Africa since 1959:

"I have devotedly watched over the organisation all these years. I now hand it over to you: bigger, stronger – intact. Guard our precious movement!" Oliver Tambo

Tambo arrived in Johannesburg, accompanied by his whole family, to be greeted by thousands at the airport. After 30 years 'in the wilderness', weary, worn, but unbowed, Oliver Tambo was miraculously back home.

He stood above the crowd and smiled, lifting his left arm with his right hand to wave. He was too exhausted to speak.





“Waiting for the moment when Comrade Mandela would come out of jail to deliver him the banner of the leadership of the ANC ... for that you have to be a superior kind of man ...” Angelo Dalmeo, Cuban Ambassador

## Farewell, Tata!



Courtesy of Elin Carlsson

At the ANC Conference in July 1991, Oliver Tambo graciously passed the reins to Nelson Mandela, who was elected president of the ANC. As far as Tambo was concerned, he had been the care-taker president all these years. The organisation bestowed on Tambo an honorary title, the newly created post of national chairperson.

In the months that followed, Tambo gloried in being home. His health and his speech improved. As national chairperson, he had an office next to his old comrades, Walter Sisulu and ANC President Nelson Mandela.

He visited Wattville where he and Adelaide had first lived, and the Oliver Tambo informal settlement nearby, and enjoyed dropping in unexpectedly on schools. He was fêted in Mbizana by *imbongi* praise poets and the sweet voices of children's choirs.



Paul Watson/Reuters

On 10 April 1993, South Africa was stunned to learn of the assassination of Chris Hani. As the secretary general of the SACP, Hani had enthralled the public with his controversial and articulate opinions. A few weeks before his death, Hani had softened his stance and spoken out clearly for reconciliation.

“That I loved Chris is indisputable; that he loved me, his people – all of his people – is equally not disputed. Now he is gone. Where do we go from here? I don't know; I simply do not know.” Oliver Tambo

After Hani's death, Tambo's health deteriorated rapidly, and in the early hours of 23 April 1993, after suffering a fatal heart attack, the great man passed on. Dali Tambo, his only son (pictured below) believes that the bullet that killed Chris Hani was also the bullet that finally killed his father.



Walter Dreyer

At Tambo's funeral in Wattville, a heart-broken Nelson Mandela, paid homage to his fallen brother and comrade:

“A mind whose thoughts have opened the doors to our liberty has ceased to function. A heart whose dreams gave hope to the despised has forever ceased to function. The gentle voice, whose measured words of reason shook the thrones of tyrants, has been silenced.”

Nelson Mandela, Funeral Oration, 2 May 1993

Like Moses, Oliver Tambo led his people to the Promised Land and bade them farewell from the mountain top. Exactly one year and four days later – on 27 April 1994 – a nation was born, when the first democratic elections in South African history were held.



© Elin Carlsson



# OR Tambo

## Remembering Oliver Tambo



Peter de Ruys



Courtesy of Tselane Tambo



The City of Ekurhuleni

“Oliver Tambo was South Africa’s gateway to the world. And now we have the gateway of the world into South Africa named after him.”

Lindiwe Mabuzo

Naming South Africa’s world class airport after one of the country’s most respected founding fathers is a fitting tribute. It will make sure that Tambo’s name will never be forgotten.

But there is a possible problem too: when young people, and future generations hear the name OR Tambo, the first thing to come to mind will be OR Tambo International Airport. There is a danger that, while we will always know the name OR Tambo, we may forget about the man himself and the important legacy he left behind.

Fortunately, there are people and organisations at work, making sure that the legacy of OR Tambo lives on and that his qualities – of selflessness, discipline, modesty and integrity – continue to be remembered and celebrated.

“The values of unity, selflessness, sacrifice, collective leadership, humility, honesty, discipline, hard work, internal debates, constructive criticism, self-criticism and mutual respect, encapsulate what President Tambo stood for.” President Jacob Zuma, Tambo Annual Memorial Lecture, 2011

The government of South Africa has committed itself to preserving the legacy of Oliver Tambo. The Department of Arts and Culture has begun work on the OR Tambo Legacy Project, as part of its broader national heritage work.

The project includes developing a heritage precinct at Nkantolo, Tambo’s birthplace and family home. Here Tambo’s last remaining sibling, Auntie Gertie (second from left), is pictured with her niece, Tselane, and other residents of Nkantolo.

The Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation was launched at OR Tambo International Airport in 2011. The Foundation works in the areas of socio-economic upliftment, education, women’s empowerment and the promotion of arts, culture and heritage.

“The Foundation aims to promote the Tambo’s legacy of dedicated struggle for the emancipation of the downtrodden people of South Africa.” Mavuso Msimang, CEO of the Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

In partnership with the City of Ekurhuleni, the Foundation hosted a wreath-laying ceremony on 27 October 2012. This marked the occasion on which the graves of Oliver and Adelaide Tambo were declared a national heritage site. Here Oliver Tambo Jr, son of Dali and Rachel Tambo, lays a wreath on the graves of his grandparents.



Visitors enjoy an event at the OR Tambo Narrative and Environmental Centre in Benoni. The centre is built adjacent to a wetland system which has been rehabilitated by the Ekurhuleni Metro. Since it is located near the burial place of Oliver and Adelaide Tambo, it aims to educate people about Oliver Tambo’s enormous contribution to the liberation struggle in South Africa, and to conscientise people about environmental issues. The centre houses a museum, an outdoor amphitheatre and five multi-purpose arts and crafts workshops.

“It's exciting. I think it's taken a very long time to preserve OR's legacy.”  
Gertrude Tambo, sister of Oliver Tambo



Courtesy of IDC Architects

The OR Tambo Legacy Project includes developing a heritage precinct at Nkantolo, at the site of Tambo's birth and family home pictured here. This site is unique as the rural home of an individual who made an indelible contribution to the socio-political development of South Africa.

Since Tambo's death in 1993, his family homestead has attracted thousands of local and foreign visitors. "Even though tourists have come here, many haven't visited this place because there was nothing here," said Mzoxolo Dube, a school teacher.

The plans include upgrading Tambo's homestead and building a museum where material depicting Tambo's life will be displayed. In order to make the site more accessible, roads leading from Mbizana to Nkantolo will be upgraded and projects to provide water and electricity expedited. Excited villagers are hopeful that the project will create jobs ranging from tour guiding to maintenance.

A museum celebrating the lives of Oliver and Adelaide Tambo will be established on this site, with its sweeping view of the Engele mountains. It will include a space dedicated to the unsung heroes of the struggle.

Courtesy of IDC Architects





Gisèle Wulfsahn

"I often think about OR and I have great joy in my heart about him. I hope that in whatever work we do, we will respect his integrity, dignity, sacrifices and love for South Africa. Now and again, I have a sense that our leader, our friend, our chief, Comrade OR is still present – stern, listening intently, pondering, smiling his most beautiful smile." **Mongane Wally Serote**



Mayibuye Archives

"OR didn't see himself as a big leader because he had been in exile and had led the ANC from outside. No, he always saw himself as a follower, even a follower of his own people. Anyone who worked with him will always remember working with a man who never considered you to be beneath him." **Ruth Mompati**



Gisèle Wulfsahn

"I recall times when some of our colleagues got into domestic conflict with their partners, resulting in tensions that would affect our work as a collective. At our request, Oliver would readily intervene and calm down all tempers ... For him the question of women's emancipation was central to the total liberation of the country." **Gertrude Shope**



Gallo Images

"Oliver Tambo commanded reverence and awe – not because he demanded respect or instilled fear. He simply towered above the rest: as an organiser, an accomplished intellectual, a master strategist and tactician, a source of inspiration, a force of example and a paragon of transformative virtue and revolutionary ethics." **Joel Netshitenzhe**



Source unknown

"Oliver's many talents excluded the rhetoric and histrionic side common among politicians. He seldom made an exaggerated pronouncement for the headlines. He had a firm will, an inner compass that told him where to go and made him consider the best route, not always the straight one, and he was helped by his humility and good humour." **Per Wästberg**



Louise Gubb

"Surely our own consciousness and consciences as revolutionary democrats must tell us that we would honour Oliver Tambo best, not by finding flattering and casual words to speak well of him, but by responding correctly to a time that is out of joint, by confronting the beast that is slouching out of Bethlehem to be born ... " **Thabo Mbeki**



Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

"Oliver Tambo believed that liberty was an act of liberation for the oppressor and the oppressed – a condition for the peaceful co-existence of peoples and individuals. He believed that we should lose the sin, not the sinner – that we should detest the offence yet love the offender." **Dali Tambo**



David Goldblatt/Africa Media Online

"I came to learn that one of his defining characteristics was to sift facts from assumptions, personal views and opinions. He would consider everything said and then make his own assessment before taking a decision." **Frene Ginwala**



Jonathan Katzenellenbogen/Africa Media Online

"He ensured in his life time that he reproduced himself manifold in his students, comrades and his lieutenants. By example he instilled the culture and values of the community taking precedence over individualism. The organisation, the ANC, was greater than one individual." **Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma**



Stephane De Sakutin/AFP/Getty Images

"Oliver Tambo left South Africa a fugitive. While in exile he held together the liberation movement as a united force; no other movement in exile managed to remain as united as the ANC. This must surely be the best part of his legacy." **George Bizos**



Gallo Images

"Oliver Tambo pursued the goal of liberation and creating a democratic South Africa with an unrelenting energy, a quiet tenacity and stubborn perseverance. By the end of his life, the object of his dreams was within sight. And his contribution to its attainment was second to none." **Z Pallo Jordan**



Deborah Feingold/Greatstock/Corbis

"The Tambo's paid a heavy price through the involvement of their father and husband in the liberation struggle. We owe them, we owe him, an immense debt of gratitude. I hope we will never forget that – and that we might do something to repay them for their share in bringing about the freedom we now enjoy." **Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu**

# Tributes And Reflections

In his full and busy life, Oliver Reginald Tambo, as a comrade, leader and friend, as a mentor and a father figure to an entire generation, touched the hearts of all who crossed his path. With his sharp intellect, principled integrity and humble humanity, he won the respect and admiration of all who knew and loved him – and referred to him affectionately simply as OR.

“When the Boers mowed down 27 of our people in Lesotho in 1982, I called OR and I said ‘I understand that you want to go to Lesotho?’ And he said ‘Yes I am going to Lesotho.’ So I said, ‘Please Papa, don’t go. The Boers will shoot down your plane as it crosses South Africa.’ ”

“He replied, ‘Listen, I was talking to Samora Machel just a few minutes ago and he was saying the same thing. But you know, those people are in Lesotho because of me. And now, when the Boers have attacked them and mowed them down, I must now sit back and say I can’t go to Lesotho and bury them because there is a likelihood that I might be shot down. That’s cowardice of the first order. I am going to Lesotho. I am going to be with the relatives of those people who were killed in Lesotho. That is the only decent thing to do.’ ” Adelaide Tambo



© R. Tambo



# CREDITS

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## APARTHEID MUSEUM

