

A painting of two young Black boys walking towards the viewer on a dirt path. They are both smiling and looking slightly to their right. They are wearing matching school uniforms: dark blue V-neck sweaters over light-colored collared shirts, and dark shorts. The boy on the left has a brown strap over his shoulder. They are wearing dark socks and black shoes. The background is a warm, golden sunset or sunrise scene with a cross visible in the distance and some buildings on the right. The overall mood is hopeful and joyful.

two boys, a bike, and an apology

IS SORRY ENOUGH?



OR TAMBO

School of Leadership

AS PART OF THE SCHOOL'S
READ TO LEAD INITIATIVE

Please enjoy this story.

While you are reading think about:

- **how else could Kefentse have handled this situation?**
- **how would you have handled the situation?**
- **what do you think Thabo should have said in response?**
- **what would you have said in response?**
- **have you ever been in such a situation?**
- **what can we learn from this story?**

Once you have read the story, please continue to read the message from President Ramaphosa.

Once you have read this, please think about how you can relate the story of the two friends, to the President's message.



In Mamelodi, where mornings begin with the hum of taxis and the smell of vetkoek drifting from roadside stalls, Thabo and Kefentse walked side by side to school every day. Their friendship was the kind that felt permanent—shared lunches, scraped knees from soccer in dusty fields, and laughter that echoed long after the sun dipped behind the rows of houses.

They had little, but they had each other. And for a long time, that was enough.



Then one morning, everything changed.

Thabo came around the corner pushing a gleaming bicycle, its chrome catching the early sunlight like it was made of stars. The tires were thick, the bell crisp, and the frame spotless. Kefentse stopped in his tracks.

“My birthday,” Thabo said, barely able to contain himself. “My uncle helped my parents get it. I’ve been saving too.”

Kefentse forced a smile, but something inside him shifted—quiet at first, like a crack forming beneath the surface.



From that day on, the rhythm of their mornings broke. Thabo rode ahead, sometimes circling back, sometimes not. Kefentse walked alone more often, kicking stones, watching the bike disappear down the road. What had once been shared now felt divided.

Jealousy doesn't arrive loudly. It settles in slowly, convincing you that something unfair has happened.



One afternoon, when Thabo left his bicycle near the school gate, Kefentse lingered. He looked around. No one was watching.

He took it.

At first, he told himself it was temporary. Just for a ride. Just to feel what it was like. But one ride became another, and soon the bike was no longer Thabo's in his mind—it was his.



Thabo searched. He asked. He waited. But the bike was gone.

And with it, something else disappeared too.

He never told his parents. The words felt too heavy, too tangled with shame and fear. Instead, he walked to school again, this time alone. Kefentse avoided him. And just like that, the friendship that once felt unbreakable quietly dissolved.



Years passed.

Mamelodi changed, as places do. New shops, new roads, new faces. But some things linger—memories that refuse to fade.

One afternoon, outside a small café near the taxi rank, their paths crossed again.

They recognized each other instantly.

Kefentse hesitated, then stepped forward, extending his hand. “I would really like to reconcile with you,” he said. “I am very sorry for what I did and how much I upset you. Can you accept my apology? Can we become friends once again?”

Thabo looked at him for a long moment. The years had softened something in him, or perhaps simply worn him down.

“I forgive you,” he said.

Relief flooded Kefentse’s face. “Thank you so much. You have helped alleviate my pain. I can finally rest peacefully.”

And just like that, he turned and hurried off, disappearing into the movement of the street.



The words echoed in his mind.
I can finally rest peacefully.

A strange weight settled in his chest. Forgiveness had come easily—almost too easily. But something felt unfinished, like a story missing its final page.

The bicycle.

He could still picture it—the shine, the pride, the feeling of finally having something that was his. That loss had shaped him in ways Kefentse would never fully understand. It wasn't just about the bike. It was about trust, about silence, about carrying something alone for years.

Was an apology enough?

Should Kefentse have offered to make things right? To return what he took—or at least acknowledge its value beyond words?

Thabo exhaled slowly, watching the crowd move around him. Forgiveness, he realized, had given Kefentse peace.

But closure... that was something else entirely.

And as he turned to walk away, Thabo understood that while the past could be forgiven, it didn't always settle itself so neatly.

Sure he forgave Kefentse; but the matter of the bike was still not resolved. Was Kefentse going to return the bike? Was Kefentse going to compensate him for the bike? Or was Kefentse satisfied with an apology?



— FROM THE DESK OF —
THE PRESIDENT

Reparations must help to address Africa's colonial legacy

Dear Fellow South African,

Every May, we observe Africa Month to commemorate the founding of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. Celebrating and affirming our identity as Africans is as integral to our national character as the ideals that anchor our democracy.

We are one people. Despite Africa's many languages and cultures, we take pride in a common identity, in our shared values and in a belonging that transcends geographical boundaries.

Even as we celebrate our continent's vibrancy and dynamism, we are mindful of the legacy of Africa's colonial past and how it continues to shape our continent's fortunes. While most African countries achieved independence many decades ago, the effects of the colonial era are still evident in much of the inequality, economic exclusion, political instability and conflicts that persist in parts of Africa.

The most extreme form of dehumanisation was the transcontinental slave trade perpetrated by European empires and slave-trading networks across the Sahara and North Africa. For more than a hundred years, millions of African men, women and children were hunted down, captured and traded as if they were not people, but possessions.

The reality is that much of the wealth of former colonial powers today is the result of the deprivation of Africa's people. Not only were millions of Africans enslaved, but colonial powers grew wealthy from the vast tracts of African land they forcibly occupied and the valuable resources they extracted.

Across Africa, our people were taken, both dead and alive, as human specimens to be displayed and studied in faraway capitals. African historical artefacts were looted and taken to European museums.

The colonial powers have largely avoided a deeper reckoning with the consequences of these acts. Some have apologised for specific atrocities, but in the main they have fallen short of full unqualified apologies for colonialism.

Reparations for Africa, which was the site of some of the worst forms of brutality in human history, has been a contested issue for decades.

Opponents of reparations argue that modern states differ from those of the colonial period. It has been argued that too much time has passed, that those directly harmed are no longer alive and that it would be unjust to hold to account individuals or governments for actions committed decades or centuries ago.

This would be to wilfully ignore the intergenerational trauma wrought by slavery that continues to hold back the development of entire societies in Africa. As the Guyanese political activist and academic Walter Rodney writes in his seminal 1972 work ‘How Europe underdeveloped Africa’, “when one tries to measure the effect of European slave trading on the African continent, it is essential to realise that one is measuring the effect of social violence rather than trade in any normal sense of the word.”

This issue has now been given renewed momentum. In March this year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring the trafficking of enslaved Africans and the racialised enslavement of Africans as the gravest crime against humanity.

The resolution is anchored in acknowledgement of harm, reparatory justice and restitution. It calls for looted cultural property to be returned and for compensation and other forms of reparation to be considered.

The former colonial powers derived financial benefit from the display of our looted historical and cultural artefacts in their museums and institutions. Enslaved labour from Africa built farms, industries and infrastructure to enrich colonial powers, as the countries from which the slaves were taken remain underdeveloped even today.

The colonial enterprise was not merely about the deprivation of human rights. It was motivated by profit. As Walter Rodney writes, “it was economics that determined that Europe should invest in Africa and control the continent’s raw materials and labour”.

Whatever form reparations ultimately take, they should be aligned with our continent’s developmental objectives and assist African countries to tackle debt challenges, poverty alleviation, inequality and unemployment.

Just as the exploitation of Africa and the enslavement of millions of her people made the former colonial powers wealthy, redress must take the form of sustained, direct, material investment in Africa’s development.

This should include increased foreign direct investment and market access for the African countries affected by slavery. It should include skills and technology transfer. And it should include the return of historical artefacts to their countries of origin.

South Africa supports a unified, collaborative approach to the issue of reparations for Africa. This must include concrete measures to redress the lingering effects of the slave trade and colonialism that are forward looking.

Just as truth and reconciliation has been an integral part of our own journey towards nationhood, so too must the former colonial powers confront the historical injustice of colonialism with honesty and integrity. Beyond that, they must make a clear commitment to tangible measures of redress that support Africa’s growth and development.

With best regards,



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