

*Lebohang Masango
14 June 2022
Sanlam Leadership Conference
Poem: Over 1,4 Billion*

Over 1,4 Billion

By Lebohang Masango

Beneath this endless sky and land of lakes, lush forests and grassy plains,
Roaring waterfalls, rolling hills, desert dunes and dense cityscapes,
We, descendants of first nation, proud monarchs, nomads, hunter gatherers,
Become students, go-getters, global citizens & hustlers

We people of strength, song and sun,
Over 1,4 billion, we move
March to the beat of our own drum
Palms striking, fingers rumbling across stretched skin,
The quick quake of hands thunder a rhythm
We recognise as our own
Our hearts collectively beating
Towards opportunities untold
The rush of freedom propels us
To embrace this African present that is glorious and bold
With hope in our hearts and victory on our minds
We keep our eyes on the horizon

We are over 1,4 billion beings rising

To that steady, rousing rhythm in our chests
Train your ear to hear
What it takes to move the spirit and steel the spine
to begin again to do the hard work of living
In the distance,
The holy call of the adhan,
Whispered prayers
Altars set with candles, fresh fruit and honey
School bells and the chatter of children

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Walking bright-eyed into futures
Far better than what the villages that raised them
Could ever dream
Hear how
The chaos of hoots from hordes of matatus
tuk tuks, trotros, dala dalas, danfos
and booming calls of “4-4 mas’hlalisane!”
Let us know that there is no place like home
For over 1,4 billion breathing

In a land scarred by the straight lines of colonial scrambles,
Haphazard fragments of history, continuing wars and battles
We remain the most youthful continent
Rich in potential and possibility
Across time zones and border control,
We power rapidly growing economies

So, praise the blood that keeps rushing
Keeps urging us
Forward ever and backward never
Praise the hard work of our hands
Praise the sweaty brows, the rolled-up sleeves
Praise the building of bridges to tomorrow
The collaboration of community

There are over 1,4 billion building
Reaching,
Hoping
Believing
And betting on YOU

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The chosen people in this room
Gathered here to honour their hopes
To make their burdens light
To give their dreams wings
To propel their futures into flight