

# Steve Biko

## International Peace Award

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In a unique development, Umtapo has decided to present the Steve Biko International Peace Award 2005 posthumously to the late revolutionary Brazilian popular educator, Paulo Freire, whose ideas and pedagogy formed the basis of Umtapo's modus operandi since it was established.

**F**reire was the one who married politics and teaching, the one who dared us to teach students not only to read and write but to "read the word and the world." Skills alone are not enough, he taught us; the point of education must be to illuminate reality, to unmask how domination works. And he emphasized that teaching could be part of changing society. In the early 1960s, a man living in Recife, Brazil explained why he wanted to conquer his own illiteracy: "I want to learn to read and write so that I can stop being the shadow of other people." Paulo Freire dedicated his life to helping people emerge from the shadows to transform their own lives, and to challenge the oppression that thrives on and perpetuates ignorance.

Born in Recife in 1921, Freire earned a law degree but spent most of his life as an educator. His career

encompassed university extension projects in Brazil, the establishment of literacy programs in Chile, Nicaragua, and Guinea-Bissau, international consulting, and, toward the end of his life, three years as secretary for education for Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest school system. He authored two dozen books, including the highly influential "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," published in 1970.

Freire leaves a profound legacy. Steadfastly opposed to teaching as indoctrination, he insisted that learning is inescapably political and that educators should help students articulate their own vision of social justice. He argued for a pedagogy that draws on the lives of our students to engage them in asking critical questions about the larger society. "[B]y criticizing traditional schools," Freire said, "what we have to criticize is the capitalist system that shaped these schools."

### Quotes In Memory of Paulo Freire

#### A Bit of My Life with Paulo Freire

*Ana Maria Araujo Freire*

"I wish to speak as his widow, as a woman who has lost and cries for the man who loved and was loved by her so much. I wish, thus, to speak about the passion, about the complicity and the difficulties of a life so intensely shared..."

#### Remembering Paulo Freire

*Ann Berthoff*

"Paulo Freire was dangerous because he made change seem possible to the peasants. His revolutionary praxis depended on his passionate belief that the oppressed can move towards liberation, can begin to take power, NOT because they can recognize the letters of the alphabet and NOT because they can read but because they know THAT they are literate..."

#### Paulo Freire in Context

*Gary A. Olson*

"Literacy worker, Secretary of Education, coffee aficionado, Paulo did not simply pontificate in his scholarly works about 'democratic practices,' he practiced democratic politics in everyday life..."

#### Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Politics of Hope

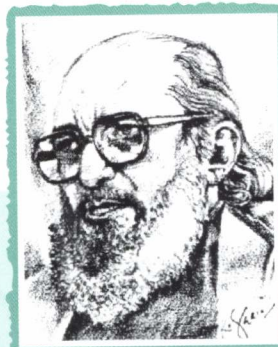
*Peter McLaren*

"Few figures as vivid as Che Guevara and Paulo Freire have crossed the stage of human history. It surely is tragic that their generation did not awaken at their call, but more tragic still is the possibility that future generations will choose not to heed their message or follow their bold example. We will never see the likes of them again."



Paulo Freire's family has received with great happiness the opportunity of this award. "We feel extremely touched to know that our father is remembered in Africa side by side with this great African leader, Steve Biko"

Lutgardes Costa Freire



The function will take place at the Tropicana Hotel in Durban on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2005. The National Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor, will be amongst the keynote speakers in what is being planned as a major event for South Africa, in particular for popular education activists.

Special guests will be Fatima and Madalena Freire.

# Black Brazilians learn from Biko

By Alejandra Martins, BBC

Steve Biko sought to set black South Africans free from oppression and he died for it. He probably never imagined that 30 years on, his message would be setting free the minds of young men and women thousands of kilometres away, in Brazil.

The Steve Biko Institute in Salvador, the capital of Bahia state, aims to help black Brazilians achieve what many never dared to dream of - to enter university. Brazil boasts some of the best universities in Latin America, but passing the country's tough university entrance exam, the vestibular, is not an option for most black Brazilians. They make up almost half the country's population - far more than that in Bahia state - and the majority live in poverty. "Here in Bahia, 70% of the population is of African descent, but more than 80% of those who graduate from university are white, so you can see clearly there is a situation of exclusion," explains Lázaro Passos, a young mechanical engineer who is the institute's project co-ordinator.

Mr Passos says the poor quality of state primary and secondary schools means black students end up with only a remote chance of passing the vestibular. Many white students, on the other hand, not only grow up in the private school system, but can also afford expensive one-year courses that prepare them for the exam.

Paradoxically, it is mostly these students who secure the coveted places in Brazil's federal universities, which are funded by the federal government and charge no fees. The Biko institute aims to redress the balance, offering cheap courses to prepare black students. "Biko is a reference for us because of

his activism as a student, and above all, because he saw education as a weapon against oppression", explains Mr Passos.

The institute's T-shirts bear Biko's words: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." The message has changed the lives of hundreds of students, like young mother Karina de Souza, who attended a course at the institute and is now a university student specialising in literature. "We grow up seeing only white people having success as professionals. We learn at history lessons in school that black people were brought as slaves, and all they left as a legacy is traditional foods, and dances like samba or capoeira," she says. "Here at the Biko institute we learn about many blacks who succeeded through education."

Salvador, the capital of Bahia, was at the heart of the slave trade. All the students at the Biko institute attend lessons in "citizenship and black consciousness", where they learn about great black Brazilian engineers such as Andre Rebouca or Teodoro Sampaio. "Black people need to learn about these figures and many others. It is part of the process of raising their self-esteem," says Mr Passos. "We realised if we don't work at this very deep level, students never aim to be doctors, or engineers, because they believe they can only apply for less prestigious courses."

Bahia was at the heart of the slave trade that shaped Brazilian history. It is estimated that four million slaves were sent across the Atlantic to shed their sweat and blood in the fields of Brazil, eight times the number of slaves shipped to the US. Their legacy is alive in every corner of Bahia.