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Dear Mr Lewenstein

BBC Focus on Africa: January-March 2008 issue, Volume 19 Number 1:  
'Has Thabo Mbeki Damaged the ANC?'

In his article under the title 'No' to the above question headlining your feature on pages 34-5 of the current issue of *BBC Focus on Africa*, Ronald Suresh Roberts makes several demonstrably false statements concerning South African President Thabo Mbeki's views on AIDS.

Roberts, an Oxford and Harvard educated lawyer from Trinidad sojourning in our country, is the author of *Fit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki* (Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2007), in which he claimed to explicate Mbeki's political and ideological thinking. It seems that for this reason *Focus* approached him to write in Mbeki's defence, on the basis that he's able to give your readers a reliable account of the President's views on some of the major policy issues of his time.

Commentators unanimously agree that the most prominent and perplexing of these issues, the one for which Mbeki will be remembered above all, has been his approach to AIDS, and recognizing this Roberts devoted two central chapters to the subject in his book. But instead of expounding Mbeki's thinking on AIDS, as everyone hoped he would, Roberts commenced with the remarkable assertion that such an exposition wasn't necessary; it had all been a big mistake; everyone but him had simply misunderstood the President, because actually, 'Thabo Mbeki is not now, nor has he ever been an AIDS dissident.'

In *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2007) published five months later, Mark Gevisser reported how Mbeki himself had acted immediately to repudiate this false claim at the heart of Roberts's book, by (a) telephoning him late one Saturday night in June, the month in which Roberts's *Fit to Govern* was published, and asking him whether he's read *Castro Hlongwane, Caravans, Cats, Geese, Foot & Mouth and Statistics: HIV/AIDS and the Struggle for the Humanisation of the African* – his radical scientific and ideological analysis and debunk of the American HIV-AIDS construct, distributed for discussion at an African National Congress National Executive Committee meeting in March 2002, (b) confirming in reply to Gevisser's pointed enquiry that *Castro Hlongwane* reflects his thinking on AIDS, and (c) having his presidential driver deliver an updated and amplified version of *Castro Hlongwane* the next day, to enable Gevisser to set the record straight in his forthcoming biography. Gevisser duly recorded accordingly: 'Mbeki had never previously contacted me unsolicited, and my reading of this unusual interaction was that he wished the record to reflect that – despite his near-silence since it was initially distributed – he still held to the views expressed in "Castro Hlongwane"'.

To read *Castro Hlongwane* is to see that indeed Mbeki is a radical dissident on AIDS, alive to the harmful toxicity of AIDS drugs; the non-specificity of all the blood tests used for 'HIV' diagnosis, prognosis, and epidemiological reporting; the crucial 'HIV' isolation (missing virus) problem; and the racist, colonial pith of AIDS ideology, all which he addresses in detail in uncompromisingly forthright terms.

Three days after Gevisser's biography came out, I published a critical analysis of Roberts's book, entitled *Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*, in which I took his claims to pieces, exposing line by line his extensive historical invention and falsification, his systematic abuse of his sources, and his massive plagiarism of my own work. After investigating my charges, STE Publishers cancelled the second impression of Roberts's best-selling book then about to go to print; and *Fit to Govern's* editor Dr James Saunders pronounced the book 'the most serious case of plagiarism and literary fraud in South African literary history'. My revelations were widely reported in the weekend papers.

It's against this background that we examine Roberts's claims in *Focus*.

'Mbeki's approach to policy making in the area of HIV/Aids has shown firmness during a public relations disaster,' Roberts writes in a jarring sentence that doesn't ring true. The reason it doesn't ring true is because Roberts doesn't really think it's true, at least the first half of it. By construing Western outrage over Mbeki's impertinently inquisitive essay into the fundamentals of AIDS science in 1999 and 2000 as a 'public relations disaster',

Roberts suggests that he considers someone in government to have been at fault. Indeed he does. The person Roberts blames for the 'public relations disaster' is Mbeki himself.

Criticizing him for researching the medical literature on AZT and the scientific integrity of Robert Gallo's HIV theory of AIDS, and for his public statements and initiatives after doing so, Roberts wrote in the *Sunday Independent* on 8 October 2000: '[Mbeki's] continuing personal musings [have provided] a year-long Christmas present to [the government's] detractors, both here and abroad. Much of this has been, frankly, Mbeki's fault.' Which is to say: if only you'd please shut up now. It turns out that Roberts's new opinion that Mbeki 'has shown firmness' (he doesn't say how) during the 'public relations disaster' Roberts says he caused, is a bought one:

Not having the brains to make sense of the critical scientific and medical literature that Mbeki was onto and circulating among top ANC leaders and local scientists in 2000, and believing like Roberts, Gevisser and nearly all whites, coloureds and Indians in this country that Africans really are riddled with a brand-new sexually transmitted virus that they originally got from having sex with monkeys, which always kills them unless they take the pharmaceutical industry's patented ARV drugs every day until they die on them, which drugs the pharmaceutical industry is fortunately selling, Minister in the Presidency Essop Pahad decided, on a frolic of his own, to fix this 'public relations disaster' by hiring Roberts for a fee of about R2.5 million all in, paid by a bank, other corporations and rich individuals hoping to win political favour, to spray over the record of what Andrew Feinstein in the same issue of *Focus* calls 'Mbeki's inexplicable Aids denialism', and to contend that Mbeki had just been 'misunderstood'.

In January, the month in which Roberts's article in *Focus* appeared, I revealed in a new chapter of the expanded edition of *Lying and Thieving* that Pahad had controlled the content of Roberts's book. But more significant than Pahad's censorship – again, widely reported in the newspapers – I presented evidence that Pahad had directed Roberts's false account of Mbeki's thinking on AIDS.

Despite Mbeki's immediate move to disclaim it, Roberts persists in selling his bogus narrative concerning Mbeki and AIDS in your magazine, contending that Mbeki has succeeded in 'moving the global agenda towards a better balance between the roll-out of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs and the emphasis upon poverty and underdevelopment as the root causes of the horrendous spread of the disease', as if Mbeki has striven for a 'better balance between the roll-out of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs and the emphasis upon poverty and underdevelopment', and still thinks of AIDS as a 'horrendous ...

disease' that has 'spread' among Africans. Roberts's claim here is a hydra-headed lie:

Firstly, Mbeki has rejected ARVs unequivocally:

- in the National Council of Provinces on 28 October 1999: 'There ... exists a large volume of scientific literature alleging that, among other things, the toxicity of this drug [AZT] is such that it is in fact a danger to health. These are matters of great concern to the government as it would be irresponsible for us not to heed the dire warnings which medical researchers have been making.'
- in his letter to the Leader of the Opposition Tony Leon on 1 July 2000: 'AZT is immuno-suppressive. Contrary to the claims you make in promotion of AZT, all responsible medical authorities repeatedly issue serious warnings about the toxicity of antiretroviral drugs, which include AZT.'
- and extensively in *Castro Hlongwane*, including his most recent inclusion in August 2006: the Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Cohort Collaborative's landmark findings reported in *Lancet* 368:451-458, which found in a study of over 22,000 cases that ARV treatment results in (I quote also from the covering editorial) 'a discrepancy between the clear improvement we recorded for virological response and the apparently worsening rates of clinical progression' (the better ARV-treated patients' 'viral load' got, the sicker they got), 'no significant improvements in early immunological response as measured by CD4-lymphocyte count' (no meaningful rise in CD4 cells), 'no reduction in all-cause mortality' (ARVs do not extend or save lives, as medically claimed and popularly believed), 'and a significant increase in combined AIDS/AIDS-related death risk in more recent years' (ARVs accelerate the death rate of people treated with them, as compared with untreated people).

This is to say, Mbeki is on record repeatedly stating his absolute opposition to useless, deadly toxic ARVs for administration to Africans; and, unlike Roberts and nearly all whites, he has never wanted a 'roll-out' of these drugs in South Africa at all, never mind in a 'balance[d]' manner as Roberts falsely claims.

Secondly, as is clear from *Castro Hlongwane*, Mbeki has completely rejected the sex-virus theory of broken health among impoverished Africans – the drug industry's business model for the sale of these drugs – not least because, as he points out correctly (as odd as it sounds) the putative virus has never

been isolated by the standards of classical virology. By early 2000 Mbeki had snapped out of his sex-plague delusion, the sex-plague he'd warned the country about in a special midday address to the nation on TV on 9 October 1998 when he was still full of excitement about it, and had permanently quit talking, like Roberts and Pahad still do, about AIDS 'spread[ing]' 'horrendous[ly]' among Africans (but not whites, coloureds or Indians, not even poverty-stricken ones). In using this sort of thrilling language, Roberts imputes to Mbeki his own hysterical conventional white American thinking about sexually diseased Africans everywhere – the thinking Mbeki left behind in early 2000.

Thirdly, whereas Roberts believes, like many whites do nowadays, being the current fashion, that 'poverty and underdevelopment' contribute to the 'horrendous' sexual 'spread' of 'HIV', it's Mbeki's view that poverty alone resulting in malnutrition suffices to wreck the health of the African poor, irrespective of whether they keep their pants up or not. (In his book, Roberts actually says, as if Mbeki thinks this too, 'Poorer Africans, the majority of the population, had made fewer changes because few could expect to reach old age, whether or not they contracted HIV.' The way he thinks and writes, you'd swear Roberts was a white man.)

And fourthly, Roberts cluelessly speaks of AIDS as a 'disease', when it's elementary that it's a syndrome of a couple of dozen disparate, completely unrelated diseases, from invasive cervical cancer to TB. Mbeki makes this very point in his preface to *Castro Hlongwane*, but Roberts didn't get it, perhaps because a syndrome is less exciting to talk about than a 'horrendous ... disease', especially a sexually transmitted 'disease' that the natives are 'spread[ing]' all over the place with their septic sexual organs, since they've made 'fewer changes' to their behaviour in the sack. And this is why Roberts way prefers white ones.

Roberts's claim that 'Mbeki was ridiculed for saying [the activists have been only too successful in focussing attention on treatment instead of prevention] six years ago' is pure invention. In point of fact, rather than Roberts's fiction, Mbeki was never 'ridiculed for saying' this, because in 2002, 'six years ago', Mbeki never said anything of the sort (nor earlier or later). In fact, in 2000, two years before this, Mbeki had thrown the condom dispensers out his official residence – the ones he'd had installed as an example to emphasize the importance of 'prevention' while he was still a fired-up believer in the HIV theory of AIDS, like Roberts still is – because from the beginning of that year he no longer believed that the 30-odd diseases and other health conditions that doctors in the US Centers for Disease Control call 'AIDS' if you also light up a non-specific 'HIV antibody' test had anything to

do with a sexually transmitted virus originating in monkeys as these very intelligent white men in white coats with American accents claimed.

Notwithstanding Gevisser's revelations in his biography released in November that Mbeki is an AIDS dissident on his own showing, Roberts persists in spinning the President to your readers as having been merely 'misunderstood' by journalists – claiming that Mbeki's thinking on AIDS 'remains misunderstood' due to 'bad journalism' and 'appalling metropolitan reporting' and to 'the ANC's aversion to spin-doctoring', of exactly the lying sort that he tried and failed at in his book.

Concluding his bit on AIDS in his article, Roberts abuses your magazine's hospitality by hijacking the space afforded him for defending Mbeki to defend himself instead, by dint of some disingenuous special pleading for his own professional neck.

As mentioned earlier, Mbeki moved directly to refute Roberts's false claim in his book, made on Pahad's instructions, for a huge fee, that 'Thabo Mbeki is not now, nor has he ever been, an AIDS dissident'; and Gevisser rebutted this lie in his biography by sardonically echoing it corrected: 'There is no question as to the message Thabo Mbeki was delivering to me along with this document: he was now, as he had been since 1999, an AIDS dissident.'

On 6 November the *Guardian* cited Gevisser's report of Mbeki's approach to him concerning *Castro Hlongwane* in support of its headline, 'Mbeki admits he is still an Aids dissident six years on'. Roberts remarks in *Focus* that 'the piece conspicuously failed to live up to this' title, suggesting that the *Guardian* had misreported the real position and had no factual basis for the statement, and that Gevisser's understanding of 'the message Thabo Mbeki was delivering to me along with this document: he was now, as he had been since 1999, an AIDS dissident' was wrong too. Which is Roberts's sleazy way of insinuating that he was right: Mbeki is still with the believers, like him. But after reading *Castro Hlongwane* only a terribly dishonest or extremely stupid person would claim that Mbeki still believes, as Roberts (and Gevisser) still believes, in the HIV theory of AIDS and its treatment with ARVs. And since Roberts has come through two ruling class academies, albeit with lower class passes, he may be stupid, but he can't be extremely so. This then commends the former option – unless of course Roberts was just too bone idle to read *Castro Hlongwane*, less interested in Mbeki's understanding of AIDS than his own opinions that he got from the newspapers and TV, perhaps because he's so incredibly conceited that he can't even conceive that Mbeki's thinking on this subject has travelled way ahead of his, and that he no longer thinks the same as him.

In sum, instead of reporting and commenting truthfully in your magazine, Roberts puts his personal interests ahead of truth (I mean the objective facts)

as he tries retrieving himself from the trash heap Mbeki has thrown him and his book onto. In doing so, he dishonestly misdirects your readers into thinking that Mbeki still goes for the American HIV-AIDS construct, when *Castro Hlongwane* makes plain that he's rejected every aspect of it as racist junk-science.

Mbeki's contact with Gevisser in June last year speaks to the importance he places on not having the record of his dissent on AIDS misrepresented – what Gevisser fairly describes as 'his cause'. And obviously *Focus* has its own reputation for accurate reporting to protect from being sullied by a political mercenary who'll tell any lie for anyone with a chequebook.

So I was wondering how you propose fixing this.

Yours sincerely

ANTHONY BRINK

CAPE TOWN

*Lying and Thieving: The fraudulent scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts* is available as a free download at [www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com)

Cc: President Thabo Mbeki, all national and major regional South African newspaper editors, South African National Editors Forum, the *Guardian*, *New African*, Khanyisiwe Mkhonza, Christine Qunta, Thami Mazwai, Shadrack Gutto, Bertrand Aristide, Dumisa Ntsebeza, Branko Brkic, Phillip De Wet, Kevin Bloom, Mark Gevisser, Rian Malan, Martin Welz, Nic Dawes, Don Makatile, Megan Power, Andrew Donaldson, Jeremy Gordin, Ray Hartley, Drew Forrest, Anton Harber, Fred Khumalo, Sue Segar, Richard Calland, Patrick Bond, Max du Preez, Justice Malala, Xolela Mangcu, Brian Ashley, Ben McLennan, Guy Berger, Robert Brand, Lizette Rabe, James Sanders, other interested parties including Mr and Mrs Roberts in Port of Spain, and online at [www.lyingandthieving.com](http://www.lyingandthieving.com)