

Address by Honourable Mr Jacob Zuma on the occasion of his inauguration as fourth democratically elected President of South Africa, Union Buildings

9 May 2009

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government and Leaders and Members of delegations, Chairpersons of the African Union and the African Commission, Esteemed Members of the Order of Mapungubwe, our icon the Hon Nelson Mandela, and the Hon Thabo Mbeki, Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners Speaker of the National Assembly, Max Sisulu, Chief Justice, Pius Langa Members of the Diplomatic corps, Mama Albertina Sisulu and all veterans of our struggle, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On this day, a decade and a half ago, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was formally elected as the first President of a democratic South Africa.

At that moment a new nation was born, a nation founded on the fundamental principles of human dignity and equal rights for all.

A nation founded on the promise that 'never, never and never again' would this land experience the oppression of one by another.

Today, a decade and a half later, we gather here to reaffirm the promise of that great day.

We gather here determined to renew that most solemn undertaking, to build a society in which all people are freed from the shackles of discrimination, exploitation, want and disease.

We gather here determined that the struggles and sacrifices of our people over many decades shall not be in vain.

Instead, they shall inspire us to complete the task for which so much blood was shed, and so much hardship endured. This is a moment of renewal.

When Madiba took the oath of office on the 10th of May 1994, it was one of the greatest historic moments of our country, Africa and the African diaspora.

Madiba healed our wounds and established the rainbow nation very firmly.

He set us on the path of nation building and prosperity and made us a respected member of the world community of nations. He taught us that all South Africans have equal claim to this country, and that there can be no lasting peace unless all of us, black and white, learned to live together in harmony and peace.

He made reconciliation the central theme of his term of office.

We will not deviate from that nation-building task. Thank you Madiba, for showing us the way.

I would also like to acknowledge the former second Deputy President of the democratic republic, the Hon FW de Klerk, who worked with Madiba in the resolution of the apartheid conflict, and participated in shaping a new South Africa.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

In June 1999, former President Mbeki came to this very podium to take the oath of office, as the second President of the Republic. He took the country forward as a true statesman.

He made a remarkable contribution towards strengthening our democracy, and laid a firm foundation for economic growth and development.

He made our country an integral part of the continent and worked tirelessly for an African rebirth. Through his leadership, South Africa's stature grew in the continent and globally.

In his last address to the nation as Head of State in September last year, he demonstrated his patriotism, and put the interests of the country above his personal interests.

Thank you Zizi for demonstrating a character that the ANC had always embodied since 1912.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentleman, the nation is equally indebted to my friend, comrade and brother, President Kgalema Motlanthe.

He came into office during a period of great anxiety, and brought about calm, stability and certainty. He has led us in a very capable manner and the transition has become remarkably smooth and well managed.

On behalf of the nation, let me express our sincerest gratitude to President Motlanthe for patriotic service to the nation. Motlanthe!

Bakone! Mmadiboka, seboka, dikgomo lebatho!

Today, as I take this solemn Oath of Office as the Fourth President of the Republic of South Africa, I do so deeply conscious of the responsibilities that you, the people of our country are entrusting in me.

I commit myself to the service of our nation with dedication, commitment, discipline, integrity, hard work and passion.

There is a lot to be done. More than 11.6 million South Africans voted for the ANC, based on the programme put before them.

We are now called upon to implement our Manifesto. The dreams and hopes of all the people of our country must be fulfilled. There is no place for complacency, no place for cynicism, no place for excuses.

Everything we do must contribute in a direct and meaningful way to the improvement of the lives of our people.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies,

We make a commitment here and now, before the eyes of the world, that:

For as long as there are South Africans who die from preventable disease;

For as long as there are workers who struggle to feed their families;

For as long as there are communities without clean water, decent shelter or proper sanitation;

For as long as there are rural dwellers unable to make a decent living from the land on which they live;

For as long as there are women who are subjected to discrimination, exploitation or abuse;

For as long as there are children who do not have the means nor the opportunity to receive a decent education;

For as long as there are people who are unable to find work,

we shall not rest, and we dare not falter.

As we apply ourselves to these and other tasks, we must acknowledge that we find ourselves in difficult economic times.

Jobs are being lost in every economy across the world. We will not be spared the negative impact, and are beginning to feel the pinch.

However, the foundations of our economy are strong and we will need to continue to build on them.

This will require more hard work than ever before.

To achieve all our goals, we must hold ourselves to the highest standards of service, probity and integrity. Together we must build a society that prizes excellence and rewards effort, which shuns laziness and incompetence.

We must build a society that draws on the capabilities, energy and promise of all its people.

Fellow South Africans, this is indeed a moment of renewal.

It is an opportunity to rediscover, that which binds us together as a nation.

The unity of our nation should be a priority for all sectors of our society.

We are a people of vastly different experiences, of divergent interests, with widely different views.

Yet we share a common desire for a better life, and to live in peace and harmony.

We share a common conviction that never shall we return to a time of division and strife.

From this common purpose we must forge a partnership for reconstruction, development and progress.

In this partnership there is a place for all South Africans, black and white.

It is a partnership founded on principles of mutual respect and the unfettered expression of different views. We do not seek conformity.

We seek a vibrant, dynamic partnership that is enriched by democratic debate that values diverse views and accommodates dissent.

Therefore, we need to make real the fundamental right of all South Africans to freely express themselves, to protest, to organise, and to practice their faith.

We must defend the freedom of the media, as we seek to promote within it a greater diversity of voices and perspectives.

We must deepen the practice of participatory democracy in all spheres of public life.

We must strengthen the democratic institutions of state, and continually enhance their capacity to serve the people.

We must safeguard the independence and integrity of those institutions tasked with the defence of democracy, and that must act as a check on the abuse of power.

Compatriots, today, we enter a new era in the history of our nation, imbued with a resolve to do everything within our means to build a better life for all our people.

Today, we renew our struggle to forge a nation that is at peace with itself and the world.

As we rejoice in being surrounded by our friends from all over the world, we reiterate our gratitude for the sterling contribution of the international community to our struggle for freedom.

We single out the African continent, for refusing to rest until the southern tip of Africa was free.

We recommit ourselves to continue to be an active member of the international community.

We will continue to use multilateral and bilateral forums and relations to take forward the goals of eradicating global poverty, strengthening peace and security and to promote democracy.

We will promote international friendship and cooperation through amongst others the 2010 FIFA World Cup. South Africa will deliver a world class event that will forever change the perceptions of the international community, and also ensure a lasting legacy for the people of Africa.

Fellow South Africans, let us move forward decisively, together.

Let us build a nation that remains forever mindful of its history, of those who have sacrificed so much, and the many who put down their lives so we can be here today.

A nation filled with the laughter and joy of children.

A nation filled with a hope born of the knowledge that if we work together, we will achieve our dreams.

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, thank you for gracing this occasion today.

I thank you.

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