

Address at the annual opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders

Houses Of Parliament, Cape Town: 23 February 2007

Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders, Khosi F P Kutama,
Deputy Chairperson of the National House, Morena M F Mopeli,
Your Majesties and Royal Highnesses,
Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders,
Traditional leaders here present,
Leaders and Members of Parliament,
Minister of Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi, and other Ministers,
Deputy Minister, Nomatyala Hangana, and other Deputy Ministers,
Our religious leaders,
Senior Government Officials and other Leaders of our State Institutions,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very pleased to have this opportunity once again to address this important institution of our African leadership, our National House of Traditional Leaders. Thank you for inviting me once more to address you during your annual opening session.

I have been informed that the term of office of the current members of the National House ends on the 21st of May 2007.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the National House for the sterling service you have rendered to your communities, the entire institution of traditional leadership and the people of South Africa. I trust that the impending process of electing new members to the National House will proceed smoothly and will add further impetus to the work of this important national institution.

I am indeed very happy that we are meeting so early in the year, soon after the presentation of the State of the Nation Address and the National Budget, because this gives us the opportunity to share our thoughts about the work we need to do together to accelerate the development of our country and people. Clearly, this will enrich your work as you finalise your Programme of Action for the year 2007/2008.

Two weeks ago I spoke about the various challenges facing our country when I presented and then participated in the debate of the State of the Nation Address. The core message we sought to communicate as we did the mid-term review of this government as well as present the programme for the year and for the remainder of the term of government, was that the entirety of the South African society should work together in partnership to defend the advances that we have made, as well as intensify our work to confront the numerous challenges that still face our country and people.

Accordingly, we said that we should work in partnership to erase that which is ugly and repulsive in human society and together speak of the freedom and happiness that come with liberty.

Clearly, it is impossible to achieve all this without the full participation, as an integral and responsible component part of our system of governance, of an institution of traditional leadership that is strong, sufficiently resourced and has the necessary capacity to discharge its mandate; an institution that works for development in partnership with the rest of government, civil society and communities; an institution that relentlessly promotes the values of Ubuntu, and in every way helps to deepen our democracy and expand the access of our people to its benefits.

Fortunately, as we all know, the work of this institution seeks to achieve all these and other objectives. Indeed in our previous engagements with the National House of Traditional Leaders we have agreed on a number of issues pertaining to these challenges. These include:

- the preservation and promotion of our cultures and customs, which promote the values of Ubuntu;
- the regeneration of the moral fibre of our society;
- the protection and development of African indigenous languages;
- the role of traditional leaders in development and in promoting the health, safety and well-being of our communities, always working in partnership with other institutions of government and the rest of society;
- the transformation of the institution of traditional leadership to embrace our national democratic principles, with special emphasis on the role of women, the youth and people with disabilities;
- the strengthening and capacitating of the institution of traditional leadership, so as to make it an efficient and effective instrument of change;
- the implementation of the laws relating to the institution, working in this regard with all the different spheres of government; and,
- the role of our traditional leaders in the renaissance of the African continent.

I am confident that all of us will agree that these remain the challenges that are central to the work of this institution. We will remember that we reflected on some of these matters during the Conference of the National House of Traditional Leaders held in Tshwane in December last year.

Yet it is important that we continue the appraisal of the work we have to do around these issues, so as to make the necessary interventions on time, wherever and whenever we encounter problems.

As we meet here today, we are confronted by the disturbing spectre of moral decay in our society. This includes the prevalence of such abominable acts as the rape of women, including children and the elderly, ritual killings, stealing of pension money from the elderly, the disabled and children, and what Inkosi Buthelezi has correctly lamented as the lack of respect that has crept into our society.

I believe that these challenges are sufficiently acute to inspire and energise our traditional leaders vigorously to defend and promote the basic values of Ubuntu, and thus use our age-old value-system to defeat all that seeks to define and confirm the stereotyping of our people as barbaric and savage, which they are not.

This will not succeed merely through making appeals for the return to the values of Ubuntu, but by collaborating with other institutions in our society to integrate the Ubuntu value system into the ordinary daily activities of all our people, young and old, to ensure that it informs our way of life. In this way, this institution will play a central role, as it should, in the restoration of the moral fibre of our society and defining the character of the new South Africa.

Further, the democratic government has sought to preserve many of the key African pre-colonial constructs of governance, believing that the ancient African philosophy and practice of governance was indeed visionary and efficacious in that it was responsive to the key yearnings of the people.

In this regard, we have reinvigorated some of these pre-colonial concepts and practices, such as Batho-Pele, Letsema, Izimbizo, Makgotla, Masakhane, among others, by incorporating them into our work, with the aim to enhance the quality of our democracy by ensuring a seamless relationship between the government and the people and the conscious involvement of the people in their development.

Clearly, the preservation and promotion of the African values of Ubuntu is linked to the challenge of defending and developing indigenous languages which should be central to the programme of this institution. Indeed, on these matters, we need to cultivate a very close partnership between our traditional leaders and the relevant national and provincial government departments and other state and social institutions.

Chairperson:

In the 2006 December Conference of the National House and in previous encounters we addressed the role of this institution in development and service delivery.

We will remember that in that conference, I spoke about the Government's proposed Programme of Support for the Institution of Traditional Leadership. Our officials have embarked on a consultative process with various stakeholders, including the institution of traditional leadership, with a view to ensuring that everybody endorses and actively supports the proposed programme. We are on course to finalise the details of the programme before the end of March, that is, next month.

Among other things, we said in the conference that the national support programme for 2007 will include:

- allocation of the necessary resources, both human and material;
- skills development;
- the involvement of the institution of traditional leadership in our development processes; and
- the formation of partnerships between municipalities and traditional councils in order to speed up service delivery and development in areas that fall within the jurisdiction of our institutions of traditional leadership.

All this relates to the challenge to ensure that all other structures of government work closely with this institution. In this regard, I would like to urge this House to inform the Presidency, through the Director General in the Presidency, about any problems our traditional leaders may encounter as they try to work with any sphere and department of government, as well as any organ or enterprise of the state.

I am saying, therefore, that government is really committed to increase our efforts, in partnership with the institution of traditional leaders, to advance our society and develop our rural communities.

It was in this spirit that the government through the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance and in the Traditional Leadership and Governance Act of 2003, provided that Government departments may delegate functions to traditional councils to be performed by the traditional councils, providing the necessary resources in this regard.

As you know, among other things, the Local Economic Development Strategy unveiled by the Minister for Provincial and Local Government last year, also highlights the role that this institution should play in matters of local economic development. I am convinced that our traditional leaders should take full advantage of this, so as to play their part in the common struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

In this context, I would like to remind this respected House of what I said in the State of the Nation Address, namely that this year, we will "start implementing the Communal Land Rights Act in order to improve the economic utilisation of communal land, while at the same time expanding assistance such as irrigation, seeds and implements to small and co-operative farmers."

In this regard, we are determined to work very closely, in a spirit of partnership, with our traditional leaders, and will, together with the other spheres of government, seek to act together with the National and other Houses of Traditional Leaders.

Among other interventions, the National and other Houses of Traditional Leaders will also have to pay attention to, and participate in the Neighbourhood Development Partnership process, with the assistance of the DPLG and related government structures.

In this regard, for instance, the 2007 Budget Review says: "The neighbourhood development partnership grant has also highlighted local investment opportunities in smaller township areas such as Mphophomeni in Umngeni, Nkowankowa in Tzaneen, and Ndwedwe", all of which would have a beneficial impact on the surrounding rural areas.

The Minister of Public Works has also assured me of the determination of her Ministry and Department fully to incorporate the communal areas among the development areas that will be attended to through the Expanded Public Work Programme. In this regard, she will work together with the DPLG and all other relevant government Ministries and Departments.

In addition, your interaction with our Deputy President last year laid a firm foundation for better and focused participation in the effort to address the issues important to the development of our country. The Presidency will sustain this interaction and cooperation.

In this context, I must also say that I am especially pleased that the National House also had the opportunity to interact with our National Cabinet, which our Ministers and Deputy Ministers greatly appreciated. I trust that you will agree that we should entrench this interaction in our national political calendar.

Similarly, we should institutionalise the practice in terms of which, at least once a year, the relevant national Ministers and Deputy Ministers should appear before the National House.

I believe that we must also act together to provide permanent premises for the National House of Traditional Leaders, within the zone in Cape Town that houses our National Parliament.

Chairperson:

I would like to reiterate what we have often said that the relevance and influence of this institution lies in its ability to adapt to the democratic prescriptions as contained in our Constitution, while using the power of our value system as expressed in the Ubuntu value system to deepen our democracy and enrich the humanism of our contemporary and evolving society.

Central to this is the transformation of the institution of traditional leadership itself, so that, among other things, the special respect accorded to women in many of our traditional societies is used to empower them, as well as the youth and people with disabilities.

Among other things, the transformation of the institution of traditional leadership, as well as our painful history under colonial and apartheid domination, which corrupted this institution, will also come into sharp focus later this year when the Nhlapo Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims releases its first major report. I hope and trust that this will not generate negative responses, which in the past have in reality brought the institution of traditional leadership into disrepute and made many among our people question the relevance of the institution.

This is important because we must constantly remind ourselves, as traditional leaders, that we have the responsibility to sustain a great tradition from previous generations of African leaders who upheld the humanism of the African people. Thus we should not deviate from, distort or misrepresent for personal benefit the legacy they handed down to us.

I am saying this because in reality, this institution has come down to us from the generations of African patriots represented by such leaders as Moshoeshe, Sekhukhuni, Hintsa, Shaka, Dingane, Sobhuza, Cetshwayo, Mantantise, Faku, Morolong, Galeshewe, Montshioa, Ngqika, Soshangane, Lobengula, Ramabulana, and many others of our great kings and queens.

These glorious African monarchs embodied the core values and principles of justice, unity, peace, freedom. Many of them fought gallantly to protect and defend the sovereignty of their states. It was not the titles and authority they inherited or acquired by other means that made them great and respected.

They secured the respect and allegiance of the people because of what they did, in the interest of the people, fully understanding that they only serve as leaders because the people agree that they should serve as leaders.

Inkosi yinkosi ngabantu. Ungek' utheth' amampunge, uthi abantu ngabantu ngenkosi yabo. Ndingatsho ndithi nob' umntwan' engazi oziphatha nje ngendlavini nemdlobongela, ekwaz' ukuzothul' ebantwini, enyanisile, esithi ulitakane lakwaNdlunkulu yoKumkani, angathembi ukuba isizwe siz' omhlonipha, sivume ukuba aphaathe. Nam, ndi ndim, ndingema ngenyawo, nokuba kunzima, nam ndithi – lo, nokuba kuthwani, asimfuni!

In brief, I am saying that all of us, including you as our traditional leaders, need to conduct ourselves in a manner that earns us the right to lead. The challenge today is to continue to bolster, entrench and preserve our proud historical heritage of outstanding leadership, fruitfully to bring it to bear on modern African institutions of governance so that, like the Africans of yesterday, we continue to benefit from this virtuous leadership.

Our country and people have great need for a cadre of leadership that is truly committed to serve the people, a leadership that resists and defeats all temptations to abuse state and other power to benefit itself at the expense of the people.

I am certain that all of us know of many specific instances when people placed in positions of leadership at whatever level, both public and non-governmental, have engaged in corrupt practices for personal benefit, to the detriment of the people.

If I may, I would like to challenge the National House of Traditional Leaders to lead a national campaign to address the important question – **WHAT DOES THE NATION EXPECT OF ITS LEADERS!**

I am certain that our Minister for Public Service and Administration and her Department, would be more than willing to support and collaborate with the National House of Traditional Leaders to ensure the success of this campaign, as part of the national offensive against the cancer of corruption, for the promotion of respect for the objectives of the Batho Pele programme.

In this regard, I must say that I am aware that some of the Provincial Houses have been addressing matters relating to the conduct and discipline of their members. This is important because for traditional leaders to be able to take the lead in addressing the national challenge of moral regeneration, they need to lead by example. However, to avoid any misunderstanding, I must emphasise that this challenge is not unique to our traditional leaders, but affects all sectors of our society.

Chairperson, I have truly enjoyed and appreciated all my interactions and exchanges with the members of the National House since its current term commenced in 2002. I look forward to maintaining this healthy relationship in the challenging years ahead of us.

I wish you success in your work, join the Chairperson in opening your annual session, and wish you have a happy and successful 2007.

Thank you.