

Toast remarks in Honour of the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy

Tuynhuys, Cape Town, 28 February 2008

Your Excellency, President Nicolas Sarkozy and Madame Sarkozy,
Your Excellency, Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Your Excellencies, Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the government and the people of South Africa, I am truly delighted to welcome you, Your Excellency, Madame Sarkozy and your delegation to our country on this happy occasion and wish you a fruitful and enjoyable stay in our country.

Your Excellency, we are indeed very happy that you decided to visit us because your presence among us confirms the strong relations that both our countries have built since we attained our freedom in 1994. Our country truly values these relations, which have grown into an important strategic partnership between our countries, positively affecting our work at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

As you know, your Excellency, the leadership in both our countries has pursued this objective for many years, convinced that it could not but benefit both our peoples. In this regard we had to defeat the inertia and the historical distance we both inherited from our history.

I must confess that we, for our part, pursued the objective of sound relations between yourselves and ourselves because we understood the prominent place the French Republic occupies in world politics, in the world economy, in science and technology, in the evolution of global society, in the universe of ideas, in arts and culture, and, not least, in the development of our Continent.

Neither could we forget that the French people also joined us in the struggle against apartheid, thus taking their rightful place as one of the architects of our liberty. Because we too had to pay our own price to achieve our liberty, we could not but be moved by the music and the lyrics of La Marseillaise, which our compatriots have just sung with great feeling.

When we had to summon our own people to battle, in pursuit of liberté, égalité et fraternité, we could not but identify with the words:

Allons enfants de la Patrie
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.
Contre nous, de la tyrannie,
L'étandard sanglant est levé,
L'étandard sanglant est levé,
Entendez-vous, dans la compagnes.
Mugir ces farouches soldats ...

Aux armes citoyens!
Formez vos bataillons,
Marchons, marchons!
Qu'un sang impur,
Abreuve nos sillons.

Let us go, children of the fatherland
Our day of Glory has arrived.

Against us stands tyranny,
The bloody flag is raised,
The bloody flag is raised.
Do you hear in the countryside
The roar of these savage soldiers ...

To arms, citizens!
Form up your battalions
Let us march, Let us march!
That their impure blood
Should water our fields.

Mr President, meeting as we do in Cape Town, we cannot forget that the French Huguenots, fleeing from religious persecution in their own country, settled in this part of our country and made a major impact on what became the South Africa we know today. Indeed it is to them that we owe the excellent wines that are part of our banquet today.

This underlines the truth of what you said in our Parliament earlier today when you spoke about the positive impact which migrants can have in their new homes.

As you know, Your Excellency, our countries enjoy high level bilateral cooperation in many areas such as science and technology, safety and security, economic development, especially promotion of SMMEs, energy, arts and culture.

In this regard, we highly appreciate France's clear commitment to support our important programmes, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA) and the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA). This is done through a number of programmes that will clearly benefit our country, such as the training of South African engineering graduates in project management at post-graduate level by the French nuclear company, AREVA and the work done by the French-South African Technology Institute for Electronics as well as the collaboration between our countries on the training programme for senior South African civil servants.

Further, Your Excellency, I am confident that we will continue to strengthen our dialogue and partnership the better to address climate change and the environment as well as promote sustainable development.

Again, as you are aware, Your Excellency, in September 2006, South Africa and France signed a Partnership Framework Document outlining a R3,5 billion Development Assistance Programme between 2006 and 2010, to focus on areas such as infrastructure development, small business development and the development of clean energy technology.

In addition, the French Development Agency (AFD) works closely with our Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) in areas of vital importance, such as the development of municipal infrastructure, job creation through financing SMME's and the creation of human resource capacity for the successful implementation of NEPAD projects.

Our economic relations continue to grow, albeit with considerable room for improvement. Moreover, we are pleased that some 160 French companies are now represented in South Africa and would encourage particularly your small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs also to explore the myriad of opportunities in our country. I must also take this opportunity, Mr President, to thank you most sincerely for bringing with you the high-level business delegation we will meet tomorrow.

The agreements we signed today confirm our common determination further to deepen the already excellent and wide-ranging relations between France and South Africa.

I know this, as a matter of fact, Your Excellency, that our relations will continue to grow from strength to strength because we have a partnership which, first and foremost is embedded in common values – a shared desire for a global order that respects the diversity and equality of its inhabitants, a strong commitment to bring about global peace, democracy and justice and a firm belief that we have a collective duty to address the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment.

We also share a deep and principled commitment to multilateralism and the institutions of global governance, as embodied in the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, including their democratisation.

Mr President, all of us listened very attentively and with the greatest interest in the excellent address you delivered to our Parliament this afternoon. I am very glad that the address was broadcast live both to our people and the peoples of Africa because it was indeed very important that as many of us as Africans should hear what you had to say.

I can indeed assure you, Mr President, that we not only listened, but we also heard and understood very clearly what your passionate words mean in the context of the further evolution of our Continent.

What you said, Mr President, confirmed that we have been right in our conviction that we can count on you, the French Government and the French people to stay the course with our Continent as we continue our struggle to confront the challenges of peace and stability, democracy and human rights, poverty and underdevelopment, the affirmation of the dignity of the African people, and the renaissance of Africa.

As you spoke to our Parliament about an African reborn, Mr President, a vitally important event was taking place in Nairobi, Kenya, which strongly resonated with what you were saying. I must take this opportunity warmly to congratulate President Mwai Kibaki, the Hon Raila Odinga, the Hon Kofi Annan and his team of mediators for concluding an historic agreement that will bring peace to Kenya and restore this sister country to the path its people seek – the path of national unity and reconciliation, of democracy and respect for human rights, of development and shared prosperity.

It is at moments like these, Mr President, as when we listened to what you said, and when we see peace descend on an African country, that we hear with the greatest clarity the inspiring words that urge us never to despair – the words of the Marseillaise, *Marchons, marchons!*

Your Excellency, let me again thank you for visiting our shores. I thank you also that you gave us an opportunity to show you something of our country and to convey through you our respect and admiration for the French people.

If I may, I would also like to thank a beautiful lady, Mme Carla Sarkozy, for giving us the opportunity to meet her. And Carla, I am very glad to inform you do not have to wait for the President's next visit to South Africa to come back!

Ladies and Gentlemen, please rise and join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of His Excellency, President Nicolas Sarkozy and Madame Sarkozy and to the friendship between the peoples of France and South Africa. To peace, friendship and solidarity!

Merci!