

Reply to the toast remarks of King Mswati III by Thabo Mbeki, at the state banquet in his honour

Mbabane, 23 April 2008

Your Majesty, King Mswati III
The Queen Mother Indlovukazi
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellency, the Prime Minister,
Your Excellencies, Cabinet Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguish Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your Majesty, King Mswati III, I would like to express our deepest appreciation for the welcome you and your Government have extended to us.

This occasion marks an important day, where the Government of South Africa and its people testify to the relations of good neighbourliness which exist between us and the Kingdom of Swaziland.

South Africa has had a long history of solid relations with Swaziland, one of whose highlights was the refuge we were given by the Kingdom during the days of apartheid.

Your Majesty, the support that your father, the Great King Sobhuza II, and the people of Swaziland gave to us is immeasurable, and contributed to the freedom of our people from the apartheid crime against humanity.

Indeed, during the anti-apartheid struggle we lost many of our comrades and friends in this country we came to regard as our home.

In this connection, Your Majesty, we appreciate the big-hearted gesture made by the Kingdom of Swaziland a couple of years ago when you granted permission to the Freedom Park Trust to "fetch the spirits" of the fallen heroes and heroines and take them back to South Africa, the final resting place where their other ancestors are buried.

I am confident that this common spirit of mutual support will never fade away; instead, it should be enhanced and strengthened through the consolidation of bilateral relations between our two nations

Your Majesty, the bilateral relations between South Africa and Swaziland are of utmost importance and we will continue to do whatever is necessary further to cement them.

In order to formalize the already cordial and practical relationship between our two countries, we signed the Joint Bilateral Commission for Cooperation (JBCC) with Swaziland on 20 December 2004.

In this regard, strategic areas for the co-operation have been identified and the South African Departments of Trade and Industry, Home Affairs, Education, Water Affairs and Forestry, Correctional Services, Health, Agriculture, the South African Revenue Service, Transport and Justice, continue to engage their counterparts here in the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Accordingly, we trust that these areas of co-operation will bring about sustainable social and economic development through the creation of employment and investment opportunities for both our countries.

Thankfully, the Kingdom of Swaziland offers a picture of "rolling hills and colourful craft". During the course of preparing for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup South Africa will make certain that the hospitality

industry and other tourism opportunities the country has to offer are displayed to the visitors so they can keep coming back for more of the breath-taking views of the emerald coloured mountains of Swaziland, even after the World Cup.

Clearly, this will assist in attracting investors to the South African region and result in economic expansion that can sustain us as brothers and sisters of the region and continent.

Since Swaziland attained its independence on 6 September 1968, it has to meet and face a number of political and economic challenges.

Political reform, as embodied in the adoption of the new constitution during June 2005 and subsequent developments are being followed with great interest, not only by South Africa but the region, the African continent and the international community.

As His Majesty knows, we and the rest of our region continue to be interested in these matters because of our shared interest in achieving the objectives contained in the SADC Charter. In this regard, we also wish you success for the 2008 general elections.

I am informed that we have more than 70 companies of all sizes and in all spheres of economic activity operating in Swaziland. We also have a duty to ensure the effective implementation of current and future NEPAD projects, as well as the SADC programmes, as these are the building blocks for the socio-economic progress of our region and the continent at large.

We should continue to work together to strengthen our people-to-people contacts, including through cultural, scientific and educational exchange programmes as well as encouraging two-way tourism.

Your Majesty, The Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative is a very important step in leveraging economic integration between our two countries and the region. Finally, I wish to reiterate that our bilateral relations rest on a firm and deepening base, representative of the warm feelings of friendship that our peoples share. Once more, Your Majesty, many thanks for the warm welcome you have extended to us.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please rise and join me in a toast to the good health of His Majesty, King Mswati III, and to the everlasting and enduring friendship between the wonderful people of the Republic of South Africa. To friendship!

Thank you