

## **Address by Thabo Mbeki, at the Freedom Day Celebrations**

Landsdown Stadium, Cape Town, 27 April 2008

Programme Director,  
Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr. Pallo Jordan,  
Premier of the Western Cape, Mr. Ebrahim Rasool,  
Deputy Mayor of Cape Town, Councillor Grant Haskin,  
Public representatives from all spheres of government,  
Traditional Leaders,  
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Distinguished guests,  
Fellow South Africans:

Molweni! Goeiedag! Dumelang!

I am honoured to join you today on this important occasion in which we commemorate the 14th anniversary of our freedom. We have assembled here in the beautiful province of the Western Cape and as South Africans throughout the country to celebrate an historic day during which we rededicate ourselves to the building of a united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society.

It is appropriate that the national celebration of our freedom, this year, which encourage public participation and national partnerships to speed up change, should be held in this Province which boasts a multicultural richness that comes from the meeting of Khoi, San, Xhosa, Malay, Dutch, French and English languages and cultures, all of which have made an indelible mark in the making of what is South African.

As we were preparing to celebrate this important day in our national calendar we lost, here in Cape Town, one of our outstanding freedom fighters, who dedicated his life to this freedom and democracy that we are celebrating today, Zoli Malindi.

Because of his lifelong dedication to the freedom of our people, as government, we were happy to honour him with the Order of Luthuli this week. Yesterday, we buried General Andrew Masondo, who knew no other life except the service and sacrifice for our freedom.

Both Zoli Malindi and Andrew Masondo were exemplary patriots, fearless fighters for our freedom and we take this opportunity, again, to pay tribute to them. It is because of these and other martyrs of our struggle that we meet today as free citizens of our country.

Fellow South Africans,

On this Freedom Day we are called upon to consolidate our hard-won freedom so that we realise our vision of attaining a better life for all. Accordingly, the Theme of these Freedom Day celebrations is: Business Unusual: All hands on deck to speed up change! This constitutes a call to the whole nation to unite in action to speed up the process of change in our country to realise our common dream to ensure that all South Africans enjoy a better life. We still have too many people who are poor. There are too many people without jobs. There are too many people without houses. There are still too many children who study in dilapidated schools.

There are other problems we must confront together as they impact negatively on the standard of living of the people. These include the national electricity emergency, the high food and fuel prices, and high interest rates.

Effectively to respond to all these challenges, we must act according to the call - Business Unusual: All hands on deck to speed up change!

The brutalities of the past – detentions without trial, disappearances of our people, deaths in detentions, hangings of those opposed to apartheid, imprisonment, exile, massacres, assassinations, forced removals, banishments, the Group Areas Act and many more laws that made the lives of black people unbearable – are testimonies that our freedom was never free.

Although today we walk tall because our collective efforts culminated in the 27th of April being our Freedom Day, we all still carry scars that remind us that our freedom that is at times taken for granted, was never free.

Because freedom was never free and truly to honour the memory of our heroes and heroines, we need all hands on deck to do more to make real the dream of equality, justice and a better life for all.

Because freedom was never free, we must work harder to defeat sexism, racism and xenophobia. We cannot allow racism and racist attitudes to prevail in our society, in our communities and in any of our various and diverse institutions.

In the recent past we have seen some acts of racism as well as racist commentary about black people. All these and others indicate that we still have pockets of backwardness in our country we must confront.

Indeed, we cannot claim to be truly free when insidious and blatant racism still exist in our society; we cannot claim to be truly free when racism still rears its ugly head in our institutions of higher learning, in the media, in the private sector, in the boardrooms and with the xenophobic occurrences that we observed in some communities in recent weeks.

The public debate and widespread condemnation by the majority of our people of the racist incidents indicates that South Africans will not tolerate people who want to drag us back into the savagery of racism and apartheid.

As South Africans, we should refuse to be part of the unnecessary attacks on innocent people, merely because they happen to be foreigners. We know very well that it is incorrect to argue, as some among us do, that crime is committed mainly by non-South Africans. Even if we suspect or have evidence that some people are engaged in crime, we should work with the police so that these criminals are arrested.

This applies equally to South Africans and non-South Africans because a criminal is a criminal, irrespective of nationality, and should be made to face the full force of the law. If indeed some foreigners are involved in crime, we cannot mete out collective punishment to all foreigners because of the criminal deeds of the bad few individuals. In this regard and at all times, no individual or a group of individuals should take the law into their own hands.

Just as the struggle against apartheid required the united effort and solidarity from our brothers and sisters in other African countries, so will the successful prosecution of the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment require all of us, as Africans, to unite our efforts and talents.

Related to this is the matter of violence against women and children. Everyday the media covers horrific stories of ill-treatment, abuse, rape and violence against women and children. Clearly, we cannot proudly proclaim that we are a free nation while women and children are, themselves, not free to enjoy our freedom.

To correct this, men have an important role to play in advancing affirmative social values and mending the social fabric that is clearly been torn apart by the behaviour of those who, in reality, are behaving like animals. Men have an important message to give to their compatriots that: "Real men do not abuse".

Again, there are reports that our schools are facing a worrying phenomenon of abuse, assaults and of violence and crime in general. These reports indicate that our schools are also exposed to violent crime both in the classrooms as well as in the school yards.

Accordingly, our call for all hands on deck also means that we should mount sustained campaigns to make our schools safe. This is the collective responsibility of all of us – government, the police, parents, teachers, learners and communities – to combine efforts to ensure that our children learn in safe surroundings and good conditions.

Further, we need to speed-up the process that was announced by the Minister of Education at the beginning of this year for all of us to engage a process around the completion of the Schools Pledge. Indeed, as part of our efforts to mend the fractures created by the legacy of our divisive past, we need to embark on programmes such as this which would undoubtedly help further to build a united nation and accelerate the process of the evolution of a common South African identity.

This process should be seen in a larger context of the challenge around moral regeneration. In this regard, all religious institutions, business bodies, political parties, trade unions, community organisations, youth and women structures should unite so that together we can help bring into being the kind of South African citizen who will embody everything that is morally good.

Indeed, to bring about this new South African who does not do crime, who is not racist, who is not sexist, who is not xenophobic and who works hard to make our country succeed, will mean all of us engaging in business unusual and putting all hands on deck.

In this regard, among other things, as we continue in our work to transform the lives of all our people, we need to pay particular attention to the youth.

This is because there are increasing challenges facing young people today such as substance abuse, unemployment, crime and the absence of adequate good role models in many of our communities. Indeed, many of our young people have to face difficult challenges, at times without parental and adult guidance.

All of us, as society, need to inculcate among the youth the ethos and ethics that help build great and successful nations; we need to help bring about a spirit of resilience in the face of what would seem formidable odds; we need to bring up young people who know that to sustain the progress of the last fourteen years we need skills and better education.

Much has been achieved in the past fourteen years in speeding up change. Even though progress may be uneven in the different facets of our lives, there is no doubt that freedom has given us the possibility to move our country away from the terrible legacy of apartheid, opening new opportunities in the quest for a better life for all South Africans.

The important progress we have made in the reconstruction and development of our country and our communities since 1994 is an achievement that belongs to all the people of South Africa. The steady progress in improving the quality of the lives of the majority of the poorest of our people must encourage us to move with greater speed to bring a better life to all our people. As we meet to celebrate our freedom we again say: much, much more should still be done, over a period of time, finally to defeat poverty and underdevelopment.

As in the past, we will prevail over all the challenges we face in this regard when all hands are on deck, and we continue to implement the policies that we have adopted which in general, up to now, have minimised the negative impact of the global financial turbulence.

Further, since government made the call in the State of the Nation Address for all of us to work together to save electricity and help stabilise the national electricity grid, much has been done both by business and individual households. We therefore take this opportunity to thank the nation for their positive response and ask that we continue to work together to conserve electricity.

Again, at the beginning of the year, we identified 24 Apex Priorities to be implemented by all three spheres of government in a speedy, efficient and effective manner so as to accelerate the process of change. The 24 Apex of priorities include critical matters in the lives of our people, such as:

enhancing the impact of our programmes in the areas of education and training; accelerating economic growth and development; speeding up the process of building the infrastructure we need to achieve our economic and social goals; improving the effectiveness of our interventions directed at the Second Economy and poverty eradication; and, revamping the criminal justice system to intensify our offensive against crime.

Further, as part of our programme of action we have formed partnerships with the private sector, labour and community organisations which will help to ensure that our National War Room against Poverty succeeds in its important tasks.

We believe that by coming together and working in partnerships as government, business, labour, civil society and communities we will succeed. As we celebrate our freedom, let us strengthen these partnerships that have helped us to improve the quality of life of many of our people in the last fourteen years.

Indeed, while our country has experienced unprecedented levels of economic growth, such growth has not sufficiently enabled us to build an adequate skills base of engineers, financial managers, artisans and others. Indeed, a major constraint to creating shared economic prosperity is the lack of skills which match the needs of our economy.

To respond to this challenge, government, business and labour, introduced the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), headed by the Deputy President of the Republic, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

As was announced during last week, significant progress is being made in this priority area of addressing the skills shortage.

This is part of the work we have to do, as South Africans, in a spirit of business unusual so that together we can confront the multiple challenges that face us.

In the face of all the challenges we face we repeat what we said at the beginning of the year that: "it is not often that a nation is called upon to strain every sinew of its collective body to attain a dream. And such is the injunction that history has imposed on us today".

I wish all South Africans a happy and peaceful Freedom Day.

Thank you.