

Closing address by the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to the fifth CISSA Conference

Cape Town, 24 May 2008

Minister for Intelligence Services, Ronnie Kasrils,
Chairperson of the Fifth CISSA Conference,
Distinguished Directors–General,
Panel of Experts,
Executive Secretary of CISSA,
International Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to say a few words at this significant event in our country. We are indeed grateful that South Africa was chosen as the host for this year's CISSA Conference.

I am informed that the Conference has been a resounding success. The call of duty necessitated that I undertake an urgent official trip abroad and as a result I could not join you at the beginning of this important conference.

In his opening address to this Fifth ordinary Session of CISSA Conference, our Minister for Intelligence Services, Ronnie Kasrils, referred to our shared legacy as bequeathed to us by the African liberation giants of the 20th Century.

That shared legacy, enshrined as it were, in the dictum "Unity is Strength", has continued to inspire the current generations of African leaders in their quest for peace, stability and sustainable development.

This quest for African unity as reflected in the theme of the Conference, "Towards Enhanced Stability, Peace and Security in Africa", has, I believe, been the central message communicated in this Conference.

Chairperson,

At the dawn of the 21st Century, we strove to consolidate our post-independence gains by re-positioning ourselves to confront the challenges of the new century with renewed vigour.

Among some of the steps we took was to transform the Organisation of African Unity into the African Union, in 2002. In pursuit of the noble goal of our Renaissance, we also created institutions and mechanisms like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the implementation of African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM); and the creation of institutional capacity to deal with challenges in the areas of peace, security and stability.

Among the array of organisational capacities and structures in the area of peace and security that have been established, one can also mention the following:

- The Peace and Security Council, with its nascent early warning capacity;
- The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT);
- Regional Economic Communities (REC) to implement the Plan of Action relating to the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)

The inception of CISSA in 2004, perhaps more than any other initiative we have undertaken under the auspices of the AU, sought to provide our continental body with an instrument that could provide African leadership with "the coordination of strategies to facilitate interaction on intelligence and security, and capacity to deal with issues related to peacekeeping, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction "

Indeed, CISSA has positioned itself as an important element in this quest to create a stable and safe environment for Africa, which is conducive to sustainable socio-economic development.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of the new security environment, as well as new security threats, presented Africa with new challenges. Issues of development and governance are now central questions that should occupy our mind.

Given the complex international environment, African states have to confront threats that are both indirect and direct in nature. The fight against international terrorism, the scourge of international crime syndicates, drug trafficking or piracy is no less important than the defence of national borders, the creation of a stable and safe environment for sustainable socio-economic development and the resolution of intra-state tensions and conflicts.

Indeed, your meeting here is testimony to the fact that unity is central if we are to effectively deal with all these challenges. In this regard, it is important that you, as the intelligence and security practitioners, should always be vigilant and alert at all times.

Neither should you seek to ingratiate yourselves to the Executive and the policy-makers by telling us what you think we would like to hear. The role of intelligence is to provide accurate and honest assessment of situations without fear or favour.

In this regard, CISSA is expected to play a pivotal role so that at the end of the day this Pan-African security and intelligence organisation of ours positions itself as, in the words of Minister Ronnie Kasrils, "... the security advisor and provider of information of choice to the AU and its evolving peace and security architecture".

It is indeed good that we have made commendable advances in establishing CISSA as a security and intelligence information provider of choice to the AU. Yet, it would be folly of us to ignore some of the challenges that this organisation still faces.

Among others, these would include:

- Strengthening the capacity of Research and Analysis Department at the Secretariat;
- Improving the functional effectiveness of the Secretariat;
- Improvement of the quality of the product;
- Strengthening the CISSA structures at national, regional and continental levels;
- Enhancement of access to leading organs of AU including the offices of the Chairperson as well as the Commissioner of Peace and Security.

Your deliberations during this particular Conference and key decisions contained in conference resolutions point to a commitment and desire to articulate an African defence and security paradigm.

This defence and security paradigm is rooted in African reality and informed by our shared histories, anti-colonial heritages, struggles against neo-colonialism and other tendencies and practices that have impeded African development.

The negative social effects of under-development in Africa will continue to undermine the capacity of our respective governments to guarantee peace for our people and security of our countries.

Thus, there can be no sustainable peace and security without complementary socio-economic development. The same is true in reverse. Successful post-conflict reconstruction, democratisation and economic growth are dependent on a stable and peaceful environment that we should provide.

As CISSA, it is your duty to embrace the peace agenda of the continent and support the initiatives of the African Union in conflict resolution and management.

By so doing, you will have set the stage for sustainable socio-economic development. Also, you will have given momentum to the articulation and actualisation of the African security paradigm.

This African security and defence paradigm should, among other issues, confront one of the most pressing challenges of today. The current negative international economic climate is rapidly accentuating the vulnerability of African people.

Food security is a real problem that all our governments have to deal with. Left unattended, this problem poses the risk of manifesting itself in violent mass protests as was witnessed not so long ago in a number of our countries. This calls for creative collaboration, partnerships and radical new ways of resolving our problems.

Issues of food security will obviously impact upon Africa's capacity to meet some of the Millennium Development Goals by 2014. Nonetheless, it is our firm view that the attainment of MDGs is not beyond our reach.

However, such daunting challenges as I have highlighted, will continue to test our imagination, stretch our resources and capacity, and slow down our movement towards the realisation of the MDGs.

Chairperson,

Your visit to South Africa coincides with a challenging moment to our leadership and governance as South Africans. In the past few days, we have witnessed shocking and unacceptable levels of intolerance by a small minority of South Africans against people from the rest of the continent.

The past few days have been characterised by criminal conduct resulting in senseless looting of businesses and killing of fellow Africans by elements in our midst whose agenda is at variance with the ethos of African solidarity and unity.

This is a situation that we find extremely embarrassing and indeed a serious setback to our gains and achievements towards African unity and integration. It is an unfortunate manifestation of the colonial and apartheid legacy of the estrangement of Africans from one another.

Continuing social inequalities in our society and the struggle for scarce resources also feed these stereotypes. Unfortunately, elements in our midst have taken advantage of the situation to pursue their criminal agendas.

Certainly, this kind of thinking and behaviour is against the spirit of building a united Africa and is not in keeping with the ethos of African solidarity which we are all fostering.

In the words of one of the most illustrious sons of Africa, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, honourable Kofi Annan, "no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another. What begins with the failure to uphold the dignity of one life too often ends with a calamity for entire nations".

On behalf of the government of South Africa and, indeed, in the name of all the people of South Africa, I would like to apologise for this criminal behaviour and reassure you that we shall not fail to uphold the dignity of one life, thus leading to calamity for entire nations.

I wish to reiterate our government's commitment to addressing this challenge with all resolve and might in pursuit of the creation of an atmosphere that is informed by the noble ideals of tolerance and pan-African solidarity as enshrined in the founding Charter of the AU.

I wish to reiterate, therefore, that the situation currently confronting us will not be allowed to continue unabated, as it seeks to undermine our partnership and common objectives.

Chairperson,

Tomorrow, Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora will be celebrating Africa Day. In doing so, we as Africans shall be re-dedicating ourselves to the struggle to eradicate injustice, poverty, and disease, so that we may escape the retribution of coming generations of Africans for not having done enough to rid our continent of the scourges of underdevelopment, divisions, and disunity.

In conclusion, it is vital that Africans should meet and dedicate their time to building synergies for continental peace and security, and to find common solutions to their problems.

In this regard, I wish you well as you go back to your respective countries and implement the conference resolutions.

I also want to commend the people of Cape Town for their generosity of spirit; for extending a warm South African welcome to all of you in furtherance of a successful Fifth Ordinary Conference of CISSA such as we have just had.

Fare you well! Bon voyage! Kwaherini! Hambani kahle! Tsela Tshweu!

Thank you.