

## **Radio and television address to the nation by Thabo Mbeki, on the occasion of Africa Day**

25 May 2008

Fellow South Africans:

Today, the 25th of May, all of us, Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora join together to celebrate Africa Day. We therefore take this opportunity to convey the best wishes of our Government and the people of South Africa to all Africans everywhere.

We also join other Africans to renew our pledge to work together for the rebirth and renewal of the African continent and the advancement of Africans wherever they may be.

We also recommit ourselves to work with other Africans in our region and the rest of our Continent to promote the achievement of the goal of African unity. That unity also means that in our own country, South Africa, we must continue to live together with our brothers and sisters from other African countries as good neighbours.

On this day, wherever we may be, we should be proud of our identity as Africans and do nothing that brings shame and humiliation on ourselves both as a country and as Africans.

Sadly, here in South Africa, we mark Africa day with our heads bowed. The shameful actions of a few have blemished the name of South Africa through criminal acts against our African brothers and sisters from other parts of the continent, as well as other foreign residents especially from Asia.

Our television sets, newspapers and other media have brought us shocking images of violence against people from other countries who live in our country, including cold-blooded acts of murder, brutal assault, looting and destruction of their property.

Never since the birth of our democracy, have we witnessed such callousness. As part of the reflection that Africa Day requires of all of us, we must acknowledge the events of the past two weeks as an absolute disgrace.

The violence and criminality we have seen perpetrated by a few South Africans is opposed to everything that our freedom from apartheid represents.

The violence and criminality we have seen by a few South Africans stands against everything we have sought to do to build a humane and caring society built on the values of Ubuntu.

The actions of these few individuals do not reflect the values of our people who for decades have lived together with their fellow African brothers and sisters – whom they accept, without question, truly as their own!

As South Africans there are some things we must never forget.

We must never forget that our struggle for liberation has always been both national and Pan-African. For this reason, when the ANC was established 96 years ago it included peoples from the rest of our region, stretching as far North as present-day Zambia.

We must never forget that our economy was built by the combined labour of Africans drawn from all countries of our region, many of whom died in our mines together with their fellow South African workers.

Neither should we forget that many people from other African countries helped to build our liberation movement, while many in our region died because of apartheid aggression as they supported us in the struggle to defeat apartheid.

We must also sustain the understanding that our own progress and prosperity is dependent on the progress and prosperity of our neighbours and other African countries.

This means that we must remain firm in our commitment to work hard to achieve the goal of the renewal of our continent, understanding that again in this instance, an injury to one is an injury to all.

Though it will not and must never be allowed to succeed, the violence and criminality we have seen by some South Africans seeks to soil the good name of the best of our leaders, such as John Dube, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Clements Kadalie who was himself of Malawian origin, Chief Albert Luthuli who spent the first years of his life in Zimbabwe, Lilian Ngoyi, Thomas Nkobi who was himself of Zimbabwean origin, Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and others such as Joe Slovo and Ruth First, themselves children of migrants.

These leaders, together with the overwhelming majority of our people, have always understood that they are South Africans and Africans: they are both local and continental.

None of these leaders, nor the majority of our people, would ever countenance such savagery as we have seen in the last two weeks.

For this reason, many of our communities have rallied together to defeat the senseless agitation of the few seeking to mount attacks on people from other parts of the continent.

I refer here to communities such as Diepsloot in Johannesburg, Hammanskraal outside Tshwane, Mkhambathini in KwaZulu-Natal, communities in the Western Cape, many others throughout the country and various religious communities.

Many of our people, black and white, have come out to condemn this barbarity, offering food, shelter and clothing to those affected. We commend and thank all these patriots and appeal to them to continue their good work, to reject and isolate the criminals in our midst and extend a hand of friendship to our foreign guests who are nothing more than our fellow-human beings.

Our National Disaster Management Centre has been working with all the relevant government departments, business, religious and humanitarian organisations, as well as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees urgently to respond to the humanitarian requirements of those who have been displaced.

Fellow South Africans,

While government seeks, always, to address people's concerns, nobody will be allowed to pervert those concerns by targeting vulnerable people from other countries.

Whatever concerns exist, including those about housing, jobs and so on, these can and must be addressed in a manner that is consistent with the dignified, humane and caring characteristics that define the majority of our people – not through criminal means. They must be addressed through the structures of our democratic system.

Humanity, democracy and protection of the law are indivisible. What begins as attacks on people from other countries also involves, as we have seen, the killing, rape and looting of property belonging to fellow South African citizens.

Everything possible will be done to bring the perpetrators to justice. Last week, we approved the deployment of units of the South African National Defence Force immediately after we received this request from the Ministry of Safety and Security and the South African Police Service.

We have issued the necessary instructions to these forces and other law-enforcement bodies to do everything necessary to stop and apprehend the killers and looters, and ensure that everybody in our country lives in conditions of safety and security.

Working together with the South African National Defence Force, the Police have already apprehended more than 250 alleged perpetrators. The police will continue to do their job and will root out of our communities the criminal elements who deserve to be nowhere else but in jail!

Nobody should be left in doubt about the seriousness with which the entire government views this matter. No one should doubt the capacity of the State to deal firmly and decisively with criminal elements, however daring they may be. All our communities should remain ever vigilant, making it forever impossible for anyone to manipulate their concerns and aspirations for criminal purposes.

We also urge all our people to convey any information they may have about the planned activities of the criminal elements to the Police Service to empower them to act on time to protect everybody in our country. Fellow South Africans,

Civic education is a vital part of what we need to do to deal with the events of the last two weeks. We must all assist one another to understand the phenomenon of migration, its global nature, its causes and how others elsewhere in the world manage it, avoiding its mismanagement.

I also call upon community, political, religious, civil society, media and other leaders of our people to act together against the manipulation of our people by criminal elements. This is the time for unity – it is a time to speak with one voice against something which if it takes root, will take us back to a past of violent conflict which no one among us can afford.

Government has set up an Inter-Departmental Task Team to investigate all possible causes of the attacks on foreign nationals and to make recommendations about action that needs to be taken to prevent the recurrence of the violence we have experienced and may continue to experience.

In this regard I must restate that our Government is firmly of the view that it would be wrong to isolate and segregate our foreign guests in special camps. Instead, we must build on the tradition of many decades of integrating our foreign guests within our communities.

This also means that all of us, Government, popular organisations and communities will have to create the conditions conducive to good neighbourly relations between ourselves as South Africans and our foreign guests.

I would like to reiterate that while government will do everything in its power to address our people's concerns, we will never accept violence and the destruction and looting the property of any person regardless of their country of origin, as legitimate ways of addressing those concerns.

The organs of state have been fully mobilised to ensure law and order and protect everybody in our country.

We are working on an urgent basis with all other South Africans of good will to attend to the needs of those who have been displaced.

All other measures will be taken to avoid the recurrence of the criminal violence which has besmirched the good image of South Africa.

On this day, Africa Day, let us pause to reflect on what it means to be a human being, a South African and an African. Thus we shall be able to answer the question whether we are on the right path towards the dawn of a new day for Africa and her people.

Africa Day invokes the legacy of freedom, a legacy that must be protected, cherished and passed on to future generations.

We have a responsibility to defend human freedom and human life. We dare not shirk our responsibility.

I wish everyone a happy and peaceful Africa Day.