

Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, at the Celebration of Nelson Mandela's 90th Birthday

Qunu, Eastern Cape, 19 July 2008

Director of Ceremonies,
Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel,
Makaziwe and the rest of the Mandela family,
The Mtirara and Matanzima leaders and families,
Dr Kenneth Kaunda, diplomats and other international guests,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Our veterans, and glad to see Mama Albertina Sisulu amongst us
Presidents of the ANC and the UDM and leaders of other political parties,
Acting Premier and leaders of the government of the Eastern Cape,
Your Majesties, Royal Highnesses and traditional leaders,
Our religious leaders,
AbaThembu,
Fellow South Africans:

We have gathered here today, at Qunu, in the Transkei, to celebrate the 90th birthday of an iconic son of the people of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, whom we have also surrendered to the nations as a citizen of the world.

On behalf of our nation and Government, I am pleased and indeed privileged to say to you, Madiba -

- many thanks for everything you have done for all our people, black and white;
- a happy 90th birthday and may you have many more;

The high awards bestowed on you, Madiba, perhaps tell everything that needs to be told about the inestimable esteem in which we and the nations of the world hold you.

On this important occasion of the celebration of your four-score years and ten, surely then, together, we must say:

- all hail, Sithwalandwe, Nelson Mandela;
- glory to the Honoured Member of the Order of Mapungubwe, Nelson Mandela;
- long live the Nobel Peace Laureate, Nelson Mandela!

In his book, "The Peasants' Revolt", Govan Mbeki wrote that "The Cape "native administration" has ... in many ways ... anticipated future national policy on the control of the African people. The power of the chiefs, especially among the amaXhosa, had to be crushed. It was partly to achieve this and partly to facilitate the integration of Africans into the mining and industrial economy that led Cecil John Rhodes to introduce the Glen Grey Act and the Bunga, the mixed Transkeian council of elected and nominated members.

"The council system was claimed to be the form of local government best suited to the tribal areas. It was not intended at that time to be an alternative or substitute for representation in Parliament. Only under the Nationalist regime was the existence of a separate Transkeian local government system to be made a pretext for denying Africans representation in Parliament ...

"Under the Glen Grey Act, the Bunga (the word means "Council") system of African representation outside a " common society" was established in the Transkei proper. It developed gradually until the 26

magisterial districts of the Transkei became the basic units of the larger Bunga, which became known as the United Transkeian Territories General Council (U.T.T.G.C.) ... Tata you remember that.

"The 1946, post-war, (UTTGC) session passed the resolution - "This Council requests the Government to extend a direct individual franchise to all Africans in the Union with the same qualifications as in the Cape."

" "We are told better times are coming. We want to know what our share in these better times will be," said a Councillor at this session. Trusteeship was debated. Is it easy for a guardian to release his authority and hand it over to his ward, Councillors asked.

"Cllr. F. T. Qamata said: "We are a people that was created by God and we should therefore find ourselves one day entering into the control of this country and enjoying the rights that are enjoyed by others today. We are entitled to these rights." "

We have gathered here, today, at Qunu, in the Transkei, because many decades ago there were some who were older than he was who inspired a young man, Nelson Mandela, to understand, perhaps dimly, the message that -

""We are a people that was created by God and we should therefore find ourselves one day entering into the control of this country and enjoying the rights that are enjoyed by others today."

We have gathered here today, at Qunu, in the Transkei, to celebrate the 90th birthday of an iconic son of the people of South Africa, whom we have also surrendered to the nations as a citizen of the world. We are therefore not meeting here, at Qunu, phesheya kweNciba, by accident.

We have convened here in celebration because the 90-year-old birthday child, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, emerged from this Transkei, and who, defying the circumstances into which he was born, developed into the great liberator that he is, because -

- he refused to accept his status of the colonised, which the likes of Cecil John Rhodes intended;
- he refused to accept that bodies such as the UTTGC could ever satisfy the hunger of his people for freedom;
- a member of the royalty of abaThembu, he refused to endorse or participate in the Bantustan system and its fraudulent Republic of Transkei; and,
- like Councillor F.T. Qamata, he upheld the view: "We are a people that was created by God and we should therefore find ourselves one day entering into the control of this country and enjoying the rights that are enjoyed by others today."

For all of these reasons, the example he set for all our people, consistently to uphold the vision of freedom for all our people, we say - many thanks Madiba, and Happy Birthday!

Councillor Qamata visualised a South Africa in which all its citizens would enjoy equal rights - a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, and therefore a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

Given the virulence of racist oppression and exploitation in our country, and the length of time generations of our people had to endure this injustice, it would have been understandable for the oppressed to seek to revenge themselves on their oppressors.

But even, as the President of the ANC, Comrade Jacob Zuma said, as he and his comrades in the Rivonia Trial faced the threat of death by hanging, Nelson Mandela made the famous statement from the dock:

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

This noble vision, confirmed in these words by Nelson Mandela, gave birth to the transition from apartheid to democracy which many in the world saluted as a miracle. It informed the things we did -

- to avoid a racial war;
- to agree on a Constitution that prescribes that we should build a South Africa that belongs to all, black and white, and therefore a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa; and,
- to set upon a long road towards national reconciliation.

All these define the South Africa of today, serving as the fundamental basis we need to guarantee the success and development of the new Republic of South Africa.

For everything Nelson Mandela did in this regard -

- the vision he sustained when he spoke at the Rivonia Trial;
- the outcomes he sought during our process of negotiations from 1990 onwards; and,
- everything he did to build our new democracy, all focused on achieving the goal of creating a new South Africa that belongs to all, we say,

- many thanks Madiba, and Happy Birthday!

We may, today, cocooned by the assurances provided by the victory of the Democratic Revolution, speak of the victory of the values and vision for which Nelson Mandela stood,

- as though they could have been achieved easily;
- as though they did not demand enormous sacrifices;
- as though their realisation did not require sustained and selfless attachment to principle by those, like Nelson Mandela, whom we celebrate as our liberators.

Far to our North, in our capital City of Tshwane, we are building Freedom Park, our principal monument to celebrate our emancipation. In its promotion, the Freedom Park Trust constantly reminds all of us that - Freedom was not Free!

Nelson Mandela's life -

- his membership and activism of many decades in Africa's first liberation movement, the African National Congress;
- his refusal to betray his people, his movement and his principles in the face of state repression, including 27 years of imprisonment; and,
- his determination always to stand up even to the wrath of our people, to affirm everything that is just and humane, -

communicate precisely the message, and serve as a concrete proof of the reality that Freedom was not Free!

For all this -

- for your willingness to make the necessary sacrifices for our freedom;

- for what your life has taught us about the need for selfless dedication to the liberation and upliftment of the masses of our people; and,
- for what your life has reaffirmed, that Freedom is never Free,

Madiba we say - many thanks, and Happy Birthday!

We have gathered here today, at Qunu, in the Transkei, to celebrate the 90th birthday of an iconic son of the people of South Africa, whom we have also surrendered to the nations as a citizen of the world.

As we say Happy Birthday Madiba, and commit ourselves to give meaning to this message of friendship and goodwill and hope, we must also answer in a practical way, and through everything we do, the critically important question -

what will we do to build on the extraordinary legacy which you and others of your generation of liberators have bestowed to us and future generations, as our priceless gift that is a prayer to the future, and as the firm foundation on which we must build the new!

As we join you Madiba to celebrate your 90th birthday, we undertake that we will do everything we can to continue to serve the masses of the people for whom you sacrificed so much.

We commit ourselves always to strive to advance the goals to which you dedicated your life - the goals of a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.

We will continue to work hard to eradicate the poverty that continues to afflict millions of our people.

We will continue to work for the unity and the upliftment of the peoples of Africa, the renaissance of our Continent and the building of a better world.

A decade ago, we were privileged Madiba to congratulate you and your bride, Mama Graça Machel as you joined in matrimony. We thank both of you that today you have given us the possibility to be with you to say congratulations on the 10th anniversary of your marriage, we also thank you Mama Graça that we could borrow you from across the border and bring you here!

As others have said Madiba and Graça Machel, on behalf of our nation and our government, many happy returns on your 10th wedding anniversary, and to you, Madiba, Happy 90th Birthday: may you have many more. Ukhule ukhokhobe!

Ndiyabulela!