

## **Address to the Annual Opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders**

1 April 2003

Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders, Inkosi Mzimela and Deputy  
Chairperson, Kgosi Suping,  
Your Majesties and Royal Highnesses,  
Traditional leaders,  
Honourable Deputy Minister Ntombazana Botha,  
Leaders of our public service,  
Distinguished Guest  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to have this opportunity to speak at this year's Opening Session of the National House of Traditional Leaders. I thank you for the opportunity you have given us to carry out this function.

Many of us who are gathered here this morning are engaged in on-going discussions about issues that are central to the institution of traditional leadership.

In particular, this relates to the processes that derive from the publication of the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance. Our government hopes that these processes will help our country finally to determine the role and place of our traditional systems of government in our evolving democracy. This determination will also have to be consistent with our Constitution.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the role you have and are playing to facilitate consultation workshops in various provinces, in the villages and communities, so that all our people have a real possibility to make the necessary inputs on this important matter.

I also thank you for the submissions you have made in this regard, which will enable us to reach correct and durable conclusions that will take us beyond the previous controversies which we all know.

In this regard, I would like to assure you that the government is very keen that we resolve all matters pertaining to the role and place of the institution of traditional government as quickly as possible. We owe this outcome to ourselves as a country, as we progress towards the conclusion of the tenth year of our liberation.

Obviously, we cannot celebrate our Tenth Anniversary of Liberation in a situation in which we have not met our constitutional obligation to resolve all matters that attach to the issue of the institution of the traditional system of government.

In addition, the government is intensely interested that we achieve this result without confrontation, with everybody concerned proceeding from the fundamental understanding that we have a common responsibility to ensure the successful reconstruction and development of our common homeland. We rely on this National House to play its part in guaranteeing this outcome. The government will do everything it can to meet its own obligations.

In addition, we must, of course also mention the Communal Land Rights Bill which is still being processed. Once more, I would like to thank you and all our traditional leaders for your participation in its discussion. Currently, the Bill is being redrafted to take into account the various observations that have been made, including your own.

When the Bill is tabled in Parliament, there will be a further opportunity to make such additional comments as you may wish. Yet again, I must emphasise that the government seeks a finalisation of this matter through a process of discussion and without unnecessary confrontation.

As you are aware, the White Paper process will culminate in national framework legislation that will deal with the issues that attach to the institution of traditional leadership. This will be followed by complimentary legislation at Provincial level, to take into account the institutional variations in different parts of the country.

Because the work that the two departments of Provincial and Local Government and Agriculture and Land Affairs are doing is related, we have ensured that the respective Task Teams are now able to co-ordinate and align their work.

I am sure that as we engage in the public hearings on the Draft White Paper, we all do so in a manner that will further entrench our hard-won democracy, as well as strengthen and consolidate our cultures and traditions.

In addition, I am confident that we engage in these processes so as to give more meaning to our fundamental rights as articulated in our constitution, and that the important institution of traditional leadership gains the necessary institutional capacity to contribute to the realisation of the goals spelt out in that constitution.

We must use our leadership to help evolve a process whereby this important institution compliments and strengthens the work done by all spheres of government.

I am certain that we all agree that we have a common duty to pull our people out of the morass of poverty and disease, that our primary desire is to defeat underdevelopment and ensure that together we move faster towards the achievement of the goal of a better life for all.

I also know that you are aware that in the iimbizo that government convenes, the people of this country continue to give practical suggestions about the way in which we must accelerate the pace of change and the manner in which we can practically involve the citizens of this country in the transformation process.

We have worked with many traditional leaders as we engage our people in these important forums. Although these engagements are not necessarily constitutional prescriptions, they are a clear example of how all of us can utilise the lessons of our traditions of democracy, participation, consultation and other important elements of our history as well as the values that constitute the concept of Ubuntu, to give this democracy a uniquely African character.

Clearly, we are faced with this challenge of ensuring that our traditions -whether on governance, morality, sacrifice for the good of society, solidarity with the weak and the vulnerable - permeate the entire fabric of political, economic and social processes.

Again, we have to do all these things because we want simultaneously to retain our traditions and cultures as well as ensure that the living conditions of our people improve drastically and that all these people, who played a central role in our liberation, continue to be at the centre of defending, consolidating and deepening our democracy.

At the heart of all these is our abiding faith in our democratic processes. In these processes, as has been the case since we won our freedom, we engage and take into consideration the views of all sectors of our society.

We arrive at our final determination on the basis of what our people say: we listen to the poor and marginalized, the disadvantaged in the rural and urban areas, the women, the unemployed, the workers, youth, the traditional leaders, the intelligentsia and all other social forces in our country.

Chairperson;

We are aware that there are many challenges facing this House, the government and the people of our country. One of these is the question of disputes among some of our traditional leadership on the issues of succession and legitimate heirs to some of the positions. There are also a number of land claims by communities, as well as traditional leaders on behalf of their people.

We must continue urgently to resolve these and many other problems facing us so that we have the possibility to unite our people and concentrate on the challenges of development. Once we have finished the current process of the White Paper and passed the necessary legislation, we would be in a better position to move faster on these matters.

Chairperson;

We need to move with an increased sense of urgency on the many challenges facing our nation. At the same time, we must be informed by our own history and the evolution of society that has impacted, in various ways and for better or for worse, on all facets of our lives.

Many of us in this room will remember that, not so long ago, every year the white rulers of this country commemorated April 6th as Van Riebeeck Day because this was the day when Jan Van Riebeeck, on behalf of the government of Holland, planted the Dutch flag in the Cape and began a brutal colonial process that lasted more than three centuries.

We are all familiar with the negative consequences of the hundreds years of colonial rule over our people. This included the genocide against the Khoi and the San people, the mass killings of many indigenous people and massive land grabbing, that spared little space from this city of Cape Town to Mussina in the Limpopo Province.

It also included the dethronement of heroic traditional leaders who stood up to the settlers and the assassinations, incarcerations and general harassment of many amongst our people who refused to submit to colonial rule. It meant the suppression and destruction of African political, economic and social institutions and their replacements with colonial ones.

As we know, those who were willing to collaborate with the colonialists replaced many of these true leaders of the people.

For more than three hundred years we have been subjected to the wholesale de-culturation by our conquerors that sought to redefine our country and people according to their own religions, cultures and philosophies.

We engaged in the long struggle to defeat these colonialists and take our destiny in our own hands. Emerging from this long and brutal nightmare our society marches forward, carrying within its bosom the important features of our cultures and traditions that have defied the deadliest weapons that sought to exterminate them forever. This society also possesses the progressive elements of social evolution, which include democracy, accountability, non-racialism, non-sexism and human and peoples rights.

Being one of the countries whose liberation came when most of the world was already free, we have the advantage of also learning from other countries to produce solutions that further advance our society.

Today, as we meet at the opening of the House of Traditional Leaders, we are still faced with the challenge of undoing the great damage done to us by colonialism and apartheid, whose legacy will be with us for a long time to come. We are also challenged to ensure that we retain our cultures and traditions and make this part of all of our processes.

At the same time, we must ensure that the progress that humanity has made in the fields of politics, economy, education and culture, benefits to the fullest, all the people of South Africa and indeed of the entire continent of Africa.

I have no doubt that as we perform our tasks in this House of Traditional Leaders, we will continue to be conscious of this rich history of the people of South Africa, of Africa and the World. We will continue to be informed by the immense social progress made by humanity. And we will add our energies to all these advances and take our country, our people and the rest of society further into a better, developed and prosperous future.

This we can and must do, in collaboration and partnership with government, the traditional leaders, civil society, business and all social formations that define the mosaic that constitutes our vibrant society.

Once more I would like to thank all our Kings, Queens, Amakhosi and other Traditional Leaders who continue to work with government as well as our communities to accelerate the process of change. We value your assistance, your guidance and your willingness to work with your people, conscious that all the programmes of government, should in reality, belong to the ordinary people in our communities.

The government is determined that every effort is made to ensure that these programmes achieve their objectives. We are therefore attending closely to the issue of the effective implementation of these programmes. In this regard, we have to pay particular attention to what happens at the local level.

We count on our traditional leaders to play an important role in this regard, to help our country and people to accelerate the process of pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

I am confident that together we will succeed to accelerate the pace of our advance towards the prosperous South Africa, which we owe to all our people. This National House of Traditional Leaders has an important role to play in this regard.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you.