

3rd Alfred Nzo Memorial Lecture to the Indian Council of World Affairs

16 October 2003

"INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA: STRATEGIC PARTNERS FOR ALL SEASONS"

Patron of the Alfred Nzo Memorial Lecture and Chairperson, Shri I.K. Gujral,
Director of ICWA, Shri Butshikan Singh,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to address such a distinguished gathering in honour of one of the heroes of our struggle for freedom, Comrade Alfred Nzo. To many of our compatriots at home and friends across the world, Alfred Nzo was a father, a friend, a comrade, a mentor and a great African patriot.

He dedicated his entire life to the liberation of his country and to the creation of a new global order that would serve the interests of all humanity, especially the poor and the weak. It is therefore important that we address our challenges in the memory of this giant of the African liberation.

I stand here feeling that I have indeed come home again. This is particularly because Indian and South African freedom fighters have shared an enduring and special bond of kinship, friendship, solidarity and comradeship for more than a century.

We can therefore say, without any hesitation, that we are not fair-weather friends - we have been, we are and always will be strategic partners for all seasons.

Our bond is very special and strategic, because our verdant landscapes, our origin and our souls have been intertwined since the dawn of time. India and South Africa once shared the same continent until the process of continental drifting fragmented the super-continent, Gondwanaland, and the mighty Indian Ocean currents drifted this great land away from Africa to Asia.

Yet, time and time again, the seasons brought us together as strategic partners. The seasonal winds heralded the once-prosperous era of medieval globalism and bore precious cargo of gold, ivory, beads and spices across the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean.

In the last seventy years, archaeological excavations have unearthed a bountiful harvest of Indian-made goods which tells a forgotten-story of maritime trade which existed between Asia and Africa, between India and South Africa, when the Iron Age Indian ancestors engaged their African partners who lived in the royal palaces of Mapungubwe where gold was mined and smelted in the 10th century AD as well as the ancient forbearers in the Great Zimbabwe and other centres of African civilisations.

Our strategic partnership was consolidated, ironically when the scent of the Indian spices and the glitter of the African minerals tickled the insatiable avarice of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and others, and this greed ensured that they relentlessly pursued everything that belonged to us as if these equally belonged to them.

Because of this cupidity, and perhaps because the aroma of the spices was too strong and the sparkle of gold and diamond too dazzling, they began a brutal expedition that sought slaves on both sides of the Indian Ocean as if hunting fair game. In the process, they shot and captured humans without regard to the victims' claim to humanity and transported them to far-away and at times, strange places.

When the indentured labourers arrived in South Africa, our people, in the spirit of Ubuntu which does not only welcome strangers to our homes, but invites them so as to find reason to get merry, embraced these new arrivals as their own. These fellow human beings, who some centuries back came to our shores as friendly traders, were now forcefully engaged in labour for the benefit of another human who has turned into an oppressor.

Yet, the struggle of these new arrivals found resonance with that of the African people who for centuries have fought heroic battles in defence of their land, their sovereign right and their independence.

Accordingly, this ensured that John Dube, the first president of the African National Congress, was to be a comrade-in-arms with Mahatma Gandhi the father of Indian independence who also formed the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses in our country.

Therefore, our fulsome tributes cannot adequately express the special and strategic bond, which has been embodied in the name of this icon and symbol of freedom, humanity and independence -Mahatma Gandhi.

Today, coursing through the veins of many South African communities, among them Africans, Afrikaners, Malays and Coloureds, is Indian blood, including those of Indian-born slaves who were brought by the Dutch East India Company to the Cape since the mid-17th century and beyond. They came from places like Bengal, Cochin, Malabar and the Coast Coromandel and toiled in arduous conditions as Dutch slave labour.

It was those slaves, together with their African brothers and sisters, who tilled the farm soil, who fashioned out of mortar and bricks some of the finest "Cape Dutch" architecture of the Cape, and who left behind their spicy cuisine.

When Alfred Nzo was sent by his organisation, the ANC, to represent the people of South Africa in this country, it was easy for him because India was like his second home. He did his work the way he did because he saw among the Indian people in this country the same neighbours, the same comrades and friends with whom he shared the cold cells of South African prisons as they toiled together for our freedom.

Of importance is the fact that since the independence of India, we as South Africans, have been blessed to have as our ally, this country that assumed the mantle of a champion of our liberation and democracy.

Through the struggles that we waged together, today South Africa has joined the community of free nations. Undoubtedly, this has been possible because of the efforts of the people of this great nation.

At the same time, there are bigger challenges that are facing the people of India, the people of South Africa and the rest of the world.

These are the twin challenges of global governance and of poverty and feed into each other.

As we know, since the end of the World War II, the international community has constructed an architecture of global governance based on the outcome and imperatives of that war, which included the necessity of ensuring that the threat posed by Nazism is forever obliterated from our common globe.

The global institutions that arose from the war correctly identified the threat to humanity as lack of freedom, denial of human rights and the perpetual grinding poverty and underdevelopment that affected the majority of human beings.

Accordingly, the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and other international multilateral structures were formed to respond to these identified challenges.

After more than five decades of their existence, it is clear that the institutions of global governance are, in reality, not truly democratic. On this issue there is broad consensus. There is also broad agreement that these institutions need to undergo urgent reforms so that they can be in a better position to serve the interests of all the citizens of the world - the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak.

Yet, the peoples of the world have not moved to effect the necessary changes. As the international community grapples with how to reform the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, the enduring and strategic relationship of India and South Africa should come to the fore. We need this strategic relation to combine with other efforts of the representatives of the developing countries to accelerate the process of change of these global structures of governance.

More than at any time, we need this strong relationship because of the global crisis as is reflected by the challenge posed first by the crisis in Iraq which has further shaken the very foundations of the United Nation philosophy and left the smaller and weaker nations more vulnerable. The second challenge is related to the recent failure of the WTO negotiations in Cancun.

The problems that we have cited and others reflect clear structural fractures that characterise the architecture of global governance. Clearly, they need the intervention of these strategic partners acting in concert with many other partners from different parts of the world.

In addition, India and South Africa together with many countries of the world have experienced numerous acts of terrorism. As we have said before, all of us have a duty and responsibility to act in defence of our countries and people against any and all acts of terrorism. On this matter, as in others, our partnership should respond as it has done over many decades, to collaborate and act together against those who wrongly believe that they can convey their message through bombs and guns.

The other part of the challenge facing us is poverty. This as we know, go hand in hand with underdevelopment and marginalisation of the poor and the weak by the rich and powerful.

Today, two-thirds of the 6,3 billion people in the world are living in poverty. The overwhelming majority of these people are in the developing countries.

This is the challenge to which we must respond systematically, mobilising all our people, all our resources and harnessing the talents and expertise that we possess.

In responding to the many challenges that we face, Nzo would have been happy if we build enduring partnerships between our governments, between governments and the private sector and civil society so that we can utilise the different strengths that we have.

In our joint response to our challenges he would have urged us to take a number of factors into consideration.

The global community has adopted a very comprehensive programme to attend to the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment, the Millennium Development Goals. As people who are directly affected by the failure or success of this important programme, we have a duty to ensure that it succeeds.

In particular, we must work together, as government, private sector and civil society to ensure that the developed countries meet their commitments to the developing countries in areas such as trade, debt relief and others.

We should give closer attention to relations between India and the African Union, and work on joint projects and programmes. This is not only necessary, but urgent, given the high levels of poverty in our regions.

We have to work together to strengthen regional development initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development and accelerate the process of the regeneration of our continent, which is facing the real danger of being marginalized from the global processes of development.

In this regard, we should continue to strengthen our people to people contacts and ensure, among other things, better collaboration between those of us who are working in the critical areas of knowledge production so that we promote and utilise the wealth of knowledge found in our respective indigenous systems.

Further, we need to have concrete programmes around such areas as exchange programmes in Mathematics, Science and Technology. We would like to collaborate with and learn from the great experience of our strategic partners here in India to advance our own expertise in these important fields.

It is also important that we further consolidate our business engagements, improving the levels of investments in each other's economies so that our people can accelerate the process of taking their destinies in their own hands.

In June 2003, India, Brazil and South Africa established a Tri-lateral Dialogue Forum that would enable the three countries collectively to address issues of global concern. These issues include those in the area of socio-economic development, technology and those pertaining to global governance. This partnership is not merely between the three governments. It is a partnership that should be taken up by our people from whatever station in life.

If we do these things and others, we would be living true to the correct assertion that our partnership is not only special but has and will continue to endure through all seasons.

Indeed, we have a duty to ourselves and to the next generations to combine our strengths, so that through our actions we would ensure that we shall no longer be defined as the wretched of the earth.

Our two countries are free. Yet none among us would contest the fact that to be truly free we have to attain the necessary levels of development.

In this regard, one of India's most distinguished sons, Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics, has argued that we should see "development as enhancement of human freedom." He further urges us that different kinds of freedoms must influence the agenda of the 21st century, and says:

"Freedom is not only the primary end of development, it is also its principal means. Freedoms are of different kinds - social opportunities (which include health care), market and economic opportunities, and political freedom in the form of participation in society and decision-making. In different ways, freedoms affect our lives, from different ends. But as it happens, they are highly complementary."

(Extracted from WHO website, To Our Health newsletter 1999, pp. 3-4)

I am confident that we agree with Professor Sen when he says that development is an enhancement of freedom. Because of this true assertion, we have to do the things that we have listed as well as many others that assist in ensuring that we improve and enhance our freedom through development of all our people.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development that we have already referred to has a number of Action Plans, including concrete projects that are at an implementation stage in areas such as agriculture, water, health, energy and technology.

Undoubtedly, these programmes will be incomplete without the active participation of the people of India. I therefore urge that we all find ways and means of engaging this process to our mutual benefit.

We are indeed very happy that the government of India has already pointed the way by joining hands with our continent as exemplified by the India-Africa Fund. We are very keen that India continues her involvement, particularly in assisting us with the establishment of viable entities in the areas of software development, biotechnology and human resource development.

We need this partnership to be characterised by concrete actions from both sides of the Indian Ocean. Only in this way can we define our development path that is driven by our own conditions and needs.

I have no doubt that together we will achieve the world that Rabindranath Tagore explains in his Anthology:

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action -
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."
(P356, *Rabindranath Tagore - An Anthology*, Published by Picador 1997.)

I am confident that all of us are working for this world where the mind is fearless and our heads would be held high because all of us are no longer visited by the brutalities of conflicts and indignities of poverty. We will achieve the world that has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls that divide the rich from the poor, separating the powerful from the weak - walls that creates two worlds of the hungry and the overfed.

Friends,

Our different corners of the earth orbit the sun and the moon at different times and in different seasons. Our Spring is your Autumn. Yet, we face the same immense challenges, which make our special and indeed strategic partnership more significant. The work that we do would help to define us as truly partners for all seasons.

Next year, we will be celebrating our Tenth Anniversary of Freedom and Democracy. We invite you to share with us in our celebration in the same way as you acted with us against the apartheid system. Most of you would be celebrating the auspicious Festival of Lights, Diwali, and so will many of our compatriots in South Africa I wish you a very happy Diwali .. M. May the lamps shine brightly and sparkle across both sides of the Indian Ocean and indeed radiate across the globe as we all pray for the triumph of good over evil, of prosperity over poverty, of peace over conflict.

Similarly, to the millions who would be observing the fast for the month of Ramadan we wish you well over this period. Together we will continue to sacrifice for our common good and rely on our self-discipline to attain our goal of a world that has defeated poverty, deprivation and war.

I thank you.