

2003 New Year Message

30 December 2002

Fellow South Africans:
Friends and guests visiting from other lands:

The year 2002 is rapidly reaching a close.

The last month of this year will be remembered in the Southern hemisphere for the total solar eclipse in some parts that for six seemingly long minutes blocked out the sun from view.

I am told by those who were present in the Limpopo Province that when this occurred, it felt as if a strange silence and coldness fell over the land. In ancient times, this wondrous event was considered something to be feared.

The earliest people in Southern Africa created stories about the sun and the moon and prayed to the stars.

Now in modern times, in the year 2002, we know better and marvel at the miracle of nature. We understand that the darkness is only momentary and that the sun will return to bathe the earth with light. The symbol of the rising sun is also present in our National Coat of Arms. Such is our optimism in nature and also in ourselves as a new South African nation.

Another year recedes into the past and we look forward with joy to the new light of the New Year. We look forward with confidence to 2003 because the foundations have already been laid in 2002 that will ensure a brighter future.

The year 2002 became known as the Year of the Volunteer. Volunteers in a number of sectors in unprecedented numbers participated in the Letsema Campaign and communities across South Africa engaged in voluntary work aimed at building a better life for all South Africans. We must thank all of those who came forward to lend a hand in this national effort. Volunteerism has fixed itself in the minds of our people as a way of collectively contributing to the growth of our country; and the challenge in the coming year will be to make Letsema a permanent feature of our society.

This second year in our African Century has also seen the launch of the African Union that took place in Durban in July. Through this landmark event, we can say that Africa has taken a giant step forward into the future, and that our task must be to achieve unity, development and co-operation among the peoples of Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has also made progress in opening new space for the economic advancement of the continent. We are grateful for the sacrifices made by many people to build the new foundations for African unity and social progress, even as we are conscious of the hard work that lies ahead in the consolidation of these processes.

The year 2002 has also witnessed the success of collective efforts to bring peace to the war-torn regions of our continent. The people of the Great Lakes Region, of the Congo, of Burundi, will soon be able to experience peace and stability and bring prosperity into their lives. We must continue our work in assisting them to reach this goal so that they are united, as we are, in our own diversity.

Our thoughts are also with those among us who still suffer from poverty and deprivation, for those of our people who are jobless, those who are ill and those who have been the victims of violence, especially women and children. We shall not relent in the struggle to build a people-centred society, where everyone shall care for the other, where there is mutual respect, gender equality and where the dignity of women

and children is paramount. We shall defend our democratic order from rogues and continue to advance the interests of ordinary people trying to do good things with their lives.

As South Africans, in 2002 we were the proud hosts of the World Summit for Sustainable Development. We welcomed the world to our country as a people conscious of the social catastrophe caused by centuries of abuse, believing that as we strive to end poverty and underdevelopment in our own country, we should also speak out against environmental degradation in the world and do all we can to ensure that a healthy and sustainable global partnership between people and the planet prevails. We believe that the Johannesburg Summit has achieved much and that the gains must be consolidated in the year to come.

At the World Food Summit meeting earlier in the year in Rome, we committed ourselves to eradicate poverty, to achieve food security and promote sustainable development. In a region threatened with famine, we will continue to focus on putting in place the necessary policies and programmes so that we reach the goal of sustainable food security.

This year ends on a positive note for the South African economy that has grown beyond expectations. One of our biggest challenges will be to ensure higher rates of economic growth and development and that greater confidence, stability and certainty are maintained and further strengthened.

Government has worked hard this year to improve efficiency and co-ordination so as to improve the quality of service delivery and enhance our ability to push back the frontiers of poverty and expand access to a better life. Work has continued in the integrated rural development and urban renewal programmes to create the conditions in which communities can flourish and take control of their lives.

As part of the Imbizo Programme, I visited the Free State and Gauteng and interacted with many people to listen to their concerns and advice about ways of accelerating the transformation in our country. The Imbizo programme will continue in to the New Year together with the strengthening of the social partnerships that are central to the attainment of collective prosperity.

This year also saw the launch of Freedom Park, a place where we shall commemorate key events in South African pre-history and history, and pay tribute to our heroes and heroines and all the sectors of our society who made great sacrifices so that we could achieve political emancipation.

For the first time, in 2002 we presented our new national orders, the Order of Mapungubwe, the Order of the Baobab and the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo, to men and women who have rendered distinguished service to our people. May the people of South Africa be inspired by their example and be more determined to build a united nation with a common vision, aspirations and goals.

We must thank all South Africans for what they have done over the last year to make us proud to be South African as we work to build a better life for all.

For those who have to travel long distances to be with their loved ones at this time of the year, I ask you to be careful and to drive safely as you cross the length and breadth of our country.

In 2003 the sun will continue to shine on the South African people as we build this non-racial, non-sexist and democratic country, instilling in all a shared sense of nationhood and human solidarity.

Let us do everything in our powers to ensure that we make real advances for the sake of the African woman and for the future of the African child.

I wish all of you a happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year.