

Opening speech of the 17th General Assembly of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa

Johannesburg, November 19, 1998

Mr Aziz Mohammed Derouaz, President - in - office, of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa
Ministers responsible for Sport in the Continent
Confederation Representatives
Ladies and Gentleman

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our shores on the occasion of your 17th General Assembly.

We are especially pleased to be afforded this and other opportunities to host important continental gatherings. Thank you for making us welcome in the African Sports Movement.

I understand that the main reason for this General Assembly is to evaluate preparations made to date on our way to hosting the 17th All Africa Games, next September.

I would like to assure the Assembly that preparations are not only on track but are also ahead of previous arrangements with just a year to go.

It is common knowledge that we were reluctant to host the games so early in the life of our new democracy. Please rest assured that such reluctance was not motivated by a desire not to give effect to our membership of the Africa Sports Movement, but by a feeling that when we do host, we want to do an excellent job of celebrating our integration into mainstream continental affairs.

We are, however, not complaining and we will pull out all stops in ensuring you a memorable time in our country both organisationally and in the context of encouraging a spirit of friendship among the youth and peoples of our continent.

A lot has been said in the media about perceived financial problems that are threatening these Games. I wish to state categorically that these problems exist in the minds of people with quite active imaginations. Not only has Cabinet given public support for the Games, but the corporate sector is also determined to change the notion that these games are designed to emulate 'Hurricane Mitch' in the misery and devastation they cause to the host country after they have been held.

We also do not wish to see the games as a travelling show in that the day after the closing ceremony, there is no evidence that they had been held.

I would therefore like to reiterate our reassurance to sponsors to see any pessimism about the games as representing minority opinion in the country.

We see the hosting of such events as an important building block in our reconstruction and development programme by leaving a legacy in the form of infrastructure that will have a life that continues long after the games have been held.

These games need to be modest in scale and, in short, need to be brought down to a level where they can be within the reach, in terms of affordability, of the majority of the countries in the continent rather than being the prerogative of only a handful of affluent countries.

This General Assembly has an important task in dismantling popular stereotypes that tend to expect less than excellence from Africans, particularly in the economical and organisational spheres.

In motivating for Cabinet support for the games, Minister Steve Tshwete unequivocally declared his ambition to achieve, through them, the necessary credentials to establish South Africa not only as single sports hosts, but a country whose future bids for the Olympic and Commonwealth Games and the Soccer World Cup, should be taken seriously.

May I, in conclusion, Mr. President, apologise for President Mandela's inability to be here and extend his good wishes to the delegates.

It is, finally, my singular honour and privilege, Mr. President, to declare this 17th General Assembly open.

I thank you