

Press comments made by President Thabo Mbeki and President of The Democratic Republic of Congo Joseph Kabila

Tuynhuys, Cape Town 14 June 2007

President Thabo Mbeki

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

President Kabila, let me say a warm welcome to you and your delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

As you know, President Kabila is paying a State Visit to South Africa. He will this afternoon address a joint sitting of parliament and we will meet a big group of business people tomorrow morning.

Today we have had a discussion with the President and his delegation to look at what do we do next. As you know, the President and ourselves have been working together for some years now on various matters - firstly the negotiations that led to the establishment of the transitional government and then preparations for the elections and so on.

These discussions with the President has given us an opportunity to congratulate the President and his government on the progress that has thus far been made with elections being held last year, the subsequent drafting and adoption of the constitution and so on.

The President and his delegation have briefed us on the areas of priority his government has identified: infrastructure, water, health, housing, energy, agriculture and such areas which we need to focus on to address developmental challenges.

We have a binational commission between the DRC and South Africa that will meeting in August in the DRC to look at what we do with regard to these identified priority areas.

There is also other areas of work that was underway from before the holding of elections in the area of capacity building of government institutions between the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Public Service and Administration, Defence, Police, security sector reform. So co-operation is already underway in these various areas that will be escalated. I am referring to the matter of capacity building.

You must be aware that the President and his colleagues inherited a country that was in crisis for many decades. So the matter of building up the mechanism of the State machinery becomes very important. This is one of the areas of co-operation.

Let me conclude by saying, a very warm welcome. This is a very comprehensive programme of co-operation. Now that you have a stable democracy and processes, we have to ascertain what next needs to be done to address these developmental challenges. We are trying to do this both as

government and as I have already indicated, we will meet with a large group of business people tomorrow morning to inspire them to be part of this rebuilding of the DRC.

President Kabila

Thank you Mr President to you and your government for the warm welcome we have received since we arrived in Cape Town yesterday afternoon.

This is not my first visit to South Africa nor is the first visit for many members of my delegation. I was here for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue that was held in South Africa over a period of months. It is through this that we achieved what we set out to achieve 5-6 years ago - reunification, organisation of elections and the setting up of democratic institutions which are now in place.

The only difference between the other visits and this one, apart from the fact that it is a State Visit, is that you have a democratically elected President, institutions that are in place and off course, we could not have achieved all this without sustained support from yourself, the government and people of South Africa in various sectors, mostly the Defence sector and off course in as far as the organisation of elections was concerned. Thanks a lot for this.

With elections come expectations and in the Congo, the elections have been followed by very very high expectations in as far as the consolidation of democracy is concerned and in as far as the social sector is concerned. We are very determined to ensure these legitimate expectations of the Congolese people are met internally and with the support of various partners, of which South Africa is one major partner.

Off course, in order to achieve those results and the objectives we have set ourselves we are looking forward Mr President to seeing you in the DRC in August this year in order to try and consolidate the already very strong relations that exist through the SA-DRC Binational Commission.

Thank you

Questions and answers

Question

President Mbeki we have heard a great deal from you and your officials regarding what has been done so far. You will be aware that our raw materials and capital have been leaving the DRC. What does your government intend to do about this?

What does South Africa intend to do regarding development assistance to the DRC?

Answer

I'm sure you will have heard what has been said: the SA-DRC BNC will meet in August 2007 in the DRC - we have tried to indicate the priority areas in terms of what has been identified by the DRC government for the development of the DRC. Those are the matters that will serve on the agenda for our August meeting. What has to happen between now and then is to make the necessary preparations so we can say these are the priority areas of infrastructure and then to say what it is we can do about this -ie. what are the resources that can be generated to support these processes. Perhaps you would ask this question at the end of August since we have tried to indicate to you where we are going and what are the areas of priority

Off course, we are talking of a partnership between South Africa and the DRC - not of South Africa coming to the DRC without the support of the government of the DRC - we must work as a partnership.

With regard to the second question, I think President Kabila will answer that question. Off course the Congolese government must deal with the illegal export of capital and materials from the DRC.

Question

President Kabila, could you respond to the demands of the Congolese community who gathered outside Tuynhuys this morning - that of the regularization of their situation in South Africa and the achievement of peace in Eastern DRC?

Answer

I had thought that the Congolese had assembled outside Tuynhuys to welcome me to South Africa. The issues raised by the Congolese are certainly ones that need to be addressed - particularly regarding the regularization of their status in South Africa and the security situation in eastern DRC.

Decisions have been taken by senior defence counsel in the DRC with a view to finding a sustainable solution to the problem of peace in eastern DRC. Measures have been taken at political, diplomatic and at a military level with a view to finding a solution. Government and institutions are determined to establish peace in this war torn region. Peace in the region requires a great deal of determination, indeed, passionate determination because the people living in this part of our country have had enough now.

I do not want to tell you any lies so I will tell you that the matter of the regularization of the situation of Congolese people living in South Africa without regular papers was dealt with by President Mbeki and myself in our discussions. However, we hope, possibly through the BNC that the Ambassadors and Ministries of Foreign Affairs will be able to take this matter up and find a sustainable solution for this as well.

Question

Presidents Mbeki and Kabila, have you discussed political issues and more specifically that of Senator Bemba and specifically to President Kabila, is there a possibility of Senator Bemba returning to the DRC to participate in the political process?

President Mbeki are you urging both parties in the DRC towards reconciliation?

Answer

(President Kabila) I will be very brief in my answer since the situation is very clear. It is not up to President Kabila to allow Senator Bemba to return to the DRC or not. That is not part of my job.

Before Senator Bemba left or shortly thereafter, the Prosecutor General introduced a demand at the Senate for his immunity to be waived so that he would respond to a number of charges regarding the events of the 22-23 March 2007 in Kinshasa. It is now up to the Senate to agree to and accept this demand, or not.

Otherwise, the issue is as simple as it presents itself and is not complicated. It is now a matter for the institutions - the Justice System and the Senate.

(President Mbeki) Off course, you would also know that SADC at the SADC Summit in March 2007 agreed with what the President has just said. We now have a democratic country which has its own institutions and procedures and the region said it would be important for everyone, including Senator Bemba, for these institutions and procedures to be respected. So indeed, the matter will be decided by the Congolese in terms of its own processes.

Question

President Kabila, would you outline for us the opportunities for South African entrepreneurs in the Congo, advantages and encouragement that will be given to them?

Answer

What are the possibilities? I addressed this matter in 2002 during a visit when I met the business community. In 2002 however the political situation was very difficult and not attractive to the private sector. What I will say today is what I will say to the business community tomorrow.

What is there to attract the business community to the DRC? Firstly the political situation and political stability with democratic institutions that are in place. Secondly, a number of reforms that are underway - the macro-economic situation that has been stable for a very long time and off course we have put in place a number of laws: the mining and investment codes that are very attractive to the business community from South Africa or elsewhere. The advantages are there and many indeed - peace and security, the justice system that is currently being overhauled so that if and when investors invest in the Congo, there investments are very safe.