

Address at the Afrikaans Handels Instituut Awards Gala Dinner

Lynwood, Pretoria: 1st August 2003

Master of Ceremonies,
Advocate Lamprecht, Chairperson of the AHI Board of Trustees,
Dr. Franklin Sonn,
Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen: I am pleased to be part of this important gala dinner of the Afrikaans Handels Instituut. I am very happy to receive the honour given to me. I think this honour belongs to all the people of South Africa for the efforts that they have made and continue to make to ensure that the story of this country would be that of unity, harmony among our people, development and prosperity.

Accordingly, the Afrikaans Handels Instituut is saying, through this honour, we recognise the hard work that every South African is making to bring about change. You are saying that although the task of bringing a better life to all our fellow South Africans is not easy, we acknowledge that indeed there are many ordinary people who are prepared to push back the frontiers of poverty.

Again, on behalf of all these South Africans, black and white, rich and poor, professionals and workers, thank you very much indeed for the award.

Brett Bowes and Steuart Pennington have edited a book called 'South Africa The Good News', which traces what they call 'the remarkable progress achieved since 1994' in our country.

They write in their introduction that: Many South Africans here and abroad have a sense of being African, and many are, or want to be, proud of their country. Yet so often they are confronted with negative media reports, critical conversation and bad news. Not only does this make the land of their birth hard to defend, but it also creates doubt about its future. People interested in visiting South Africa, or investing here, have the same problem. They are confronted by negative perceptions of the continent as stories of land grabs, corruption, disease and war dominate."

They then boldly declare that the book 'South Africa - The Good News', will change these negative perceptions forever, and 'restore your pride in South Africa and give you unshakable confidence in its future'. (Cover introduction.)

The book deals among others with what it refers to as 'Building the South African Reputation', and explains that reputation 'signals the overall attractiveness of the entity to all its stakeholders, both internal and external. A positive reputation has value because it represents the standing you hold relative to your competitors'.

As businesspeople I am sure that we know that reputation is important in attracting new customers and retaining old ones. It is important for the growth and prosperity of our businesses, hence we spent a great deal of effort and resources to ensure that we have a good and positive reputation.

Clearly, a negative and bad reputation would give our rivals a competitive edge and may herald, not only bad performance of our companies, but possible collapse of our enterprises.

Similarly, countries that have bad reputations always find themselves at a competitive disadvantage and would accordingly fail to attract tourists as well as investment, which is necessary for economic development and social progress.

At the same time and as the book observes, we know that reputation can also be a function of perception. As South Africans, I am sure that as we travel abroad, we have come to appreciate this observation very well.

In this regard, Bowes and Pennington write that:

"South Africa's reputation is tarnished by a wide-ranging number of factors; not least of which is the general view of the country by its own citizens; being part of Africa; and, perhaps, an over critical media."

They continue that:

"Right now, South Africans, both local and abroad, do not demonstrate the kind of passionate patriotism we see in many other countries. We are a proud people but we are in the habit of focussing on the negative and saying little about the positive."

Chairperson;

I believe that this award is an eloquent answer to the observations that are made by the two writers. Instead of looking and concentrating on the negatives, we are saying let us focus on the many positive things that are happening daily in our country.

We are saying that although we are faced with many difficult challenges as we build a non-racial and non-sexist society, we have reason to celebrate our achievements; we have a duty to consolidate them and have an obligation to accelerate our march towards a truly prosperous future.

As we do this, we need to look internally at ourselves as South Africans, draw from our own strengths and resources working in partnerships between government and the private sector and community to ensure that we sustain the momentum of change for the better and that, together, we pronounce on the good news of our country.

This is necessary if we are to instil self-confidence among all our people and bring about the spirit of self-reliance that has always been pivotal to the process of change.

In this case, the history of the economic evolution of the Afrikaners is instructive. You know this history better than I do.

Apart from the misguided and wrong approach to their fellow black South Africans, the economic history of the Afrikaners remains one of the most illustrious and enduring whose lessons are important for all of us in this country.

Of particular importance is the manner in which the challenge of the Poor White Afrikaner was dealt with.

As we know, almost all the Afrikaner institutions, which include among others, the Dutch Reformed Church, professional bodies like Die Onderwysers Unie, this very body, the Afrikaanse Handels Instituut as well as the political formations focussed largely in eradicating poverty among the Afrikaners and empowering the Afrikaans speaking people so as to overcome the economic dominance of the English.

This history tells us that without strong economic development of a people, political emancipation can get compromised.

Faced with the challenge of the Poor White Afrikaner it was necessary to ensure that there existed commercial enterprises that were not hostile to the needs of these poor people, but which had to be partners in pushing back the frontiers of poverty among the Afrikaners. Accordingly, banks, enterprises

such as the railways, and other businesses as well as state departments and state enterprises were mobilised to achieve this objective. Appropriating the historical concept of "Helpmekaar", wealthier Afrikaners, especially the Cape Wine Farmers, pooled their resources and together with the mobilisation of the savings of poor Afrikaners in the main, made an economic intervention to assist poor Afrikaners. The results of this bold vision were, among others, the establishment of the South African National Trust Company (Santam) and the South African National Life Assurance Company (Sanlam).

The fundamental conceptual basis for the economic growth of the Afrikaners was the mass upliftment of a people who had been poor and dis-empowered.

This notion of affirming the previously oppressed people had an enduring legacy in the historical annals of the Afrikaners.

Undoubtedly, these were the historical markers that defined and shaped the character of the Afrikaner future as we see it today. Today the whole of our country is faced with the challenge of Poor Black South Africans. This is the single biggest challenge facing our country.

When we talk about change, about transformation, we are in effect referring to the need to create conditions that would ensure that we eradicate poverty among these poor black South Africans in the same way that poverty was defeated among poor white Afrikaners.

Accordingly, together we have to answer the question whether we are ready and able to make the necessary interventions to address this challenge. We have to work out programmes that would compliment those of government so that we can accelerate the process of change in this country. This is in the interest of all South Africans, because the more prosperous we are, the better we would be to address other social ills that are occasioned by poverty. I am confident that we would agree that this challenge does not only face the government. Indeed, I am happy that an increasing number of South Africans, including many who are present in this conference, have positively responded to the call to enter into a people's contract for a better tomorrow. This people's contract should among other things, ensure that we engage in programmes of Helpmekaar, of Vuk'uzenzele and Letsema, to assist one another as South Africans, to share our skills, to mentor our compatriots, to broaden economic participation to all South Africans so that together we can strive to reproduce the economic prosperity that marked the era of Afrikaner development in our country.

In this regard, the government fully supports the unity process in which the Instituut is engaged with other business formations like Nafcoc. I witnessed the signing of the co-operation agreement between your organisation and Nafcoc, as well as between Nafcoc, Sacob and Fabcos last September. I am told that there was a follow-up to that initiative in May this year and that the process will be taken forward in October. We support this process, which would ensure that business speaks with one voice while each organisation retains its identity and independence. I am sure that the Afrikaans Handels Instituut owes much of its philosophical origins to the challenging times we have pointed to earlier.

As an important economic factor in our country, the AHI has a major contribution to make to the reconstruction and development of our country so as to achieve a shared prosperity.

This we must do so that all South Africans can stand together, shoulder to shoulder and pronounce to ourselves and the world that, indeed, this country is defined by nothing else but the good news.

Once more thank you for inviting me and for the award given to me. I thank you.