

Address at the Annual President's Awards for Export Achievements and the Technology Top 100 Banquet

Mid-Rand 23 November 1999

Master of Ceremonies
Ministers Alec Irwin and Ben Ngubane
Dr. Roy Marcus, Chairperson of the Technology 100 Awards
Members of Export Councils and Committees
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am privileged to be here tonight as we honour the achievements of those who are contributing in vibrant, dynamic and creative ways to the export sector of our economy.

Through their hard work and dedication, we have been able to cultivate a globally competitive manufacturing and service sector, develop export programmes in disadvantaged areas and create the jobs that our country and our people need so much.

At the second National Export Week held at NASREC last month, we projected an exporting nation that is becoming more professional, more determined and more organised in how it conducts its business with the rest of the world.

The successful partnership between government and the organised exporting industrial sectors has also brought new entrants into the formal economy. Notable in the last two years has been the formation of Export Councils and the convening of the Small Exporters Programme to assist exporters in formulating and implementing export strategies. It is a significant achievement that especially women in rural areas, who are the main drivers of some of these projects, have benefited from this assistance.

It should be clear to all of us as South Africans that this competitive manufacturing and exporting sector is vital to the welfare of our society. Through increasing our economic activity, we are also accelerating the creation of jobs and laying the basis for sustained development. In this way, we are also assisting in the fight against poverty by empowering the poor to take their economic future into their own hands.

Similarly, the achievement of the goal we have set ourselves as a country, to build a better life for all depends on our capacity and ability to insert ourselves more favourably into the world economy, as active and equal players rather than dependants.

Our own long-term structural development is linked with that of our neighbours and other countries on our continent. Thus, it is certainly in our interest to build economic ties and strengthen co-operation among ourselves as African countries. It has been agreed that the SADC Free Trade Protocol should come into force in January 2000. This will be an important step forward toward a mutually beneficial process of regional economic integration.

We have also seen remarkable progress in the consolidation of our trade links with the developed countries of the North. The recent trade agreement between South Africa and the European Union will create new opportunities for us to access the EU market, while requiring of us that we maintain high standards in the production and delivery of goods and services.

At the forthcoming World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Seattle, we shall do all we can to argue for greater participation by developing countries in the multilateral negotiations. At the same time, we will continue to urge that the rules-based system of international trade should have as one of its central aims, the sustained development of the developing countries such as ours.

Master of Ceremonies,

Given the highly competitive nature of the global market, considerable thought has been given to finding ways to promote South African products and services. We have sought clear understanding of what it means when we say "Made in South Africa" or "Visit South Africa" and what exactly "Buy South African" means.

I believe that our understanding of who we are as South Africans and what we imagine ourselves to be, can only be further enhanced by the launching of the "Imaging South Africa Campaign". This process of branding South Africa has already begun, not only through ongoing political and cultural efforts towards nation-building, but also through the coming together of key players in the South African exporting industries, tourism, the arts, advertising and government departments and their willingness to combine their diverse and collective talents towards this specific purpose.

Together all of us as South Africans must be active in this process of demonstrating our unique identity to ourselves and to the world. We have to do this with self-confidence and the conviction that the world is indeed our marketplace and that the future belongs to us.

I have been told that this "Imaging South Africa campaign" will also highlight the advanced levels of technology that emanate from South Africa. We are all in agreement that technological innovation is fundamental to economic growth and development and the efficient use of resources and social progress.

Therefore, it is fitting that tonight we also honour technological innovation by identifying and congratulating technologically excellent companies which have been effective in developing and using modern technology.

Finally, the President's Award for Export Achievements received entries from most economic sectors. All these were of a very high standard. I congratulate all the high achievers, not only for being excellent exporters, but also for being model South Africans, leaders in their respective fields in contributing to the growth of our economy and thus changing the face of our country for the better. Our common wish is that you should continue to excel.

I congratulate you all, in bringing about the social and economic upliftment of the South African people and ensuring that through our efforts, we do, indeed, brand the next century as an African century.

I thank you.