

Speech at a State Banquet Elysee Palace, Paris

17 November 2003

Your Excellency, President Jacques Chirac and Madame Chirac,
Your Excellencies Ministers and Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests,
Friends, ladies and gentlemen:

My wife, our delegation and I feel greatly honoured to have been invited by His Excellency President Jacques Chirac to visit France. We have been deeply moved by the warmth of our welcome to the Republic and this magnificent city, Paris.

We are also privileged to convey to President Chirac, the government and the people of France the warm greetings and best wishes of our own government and people. This we can say without any fear of contradiction that our people share the hope that our visit to France will result in the further strengthening of our relations.

As the President of the Republic and the honoured guests are aware, our continent, Africa, has set itself the critically important task to achieve its renaissance. In this context we have made bold to say that we will, as a result of our actions, make the 21st an African Century.

You, Mr President, are as aware as we are of the enormity of the task we face in this regard. In a real sense we have to address the legacy of a painful and tragic African history that is half-a-millennium old, that began with the export of millions of Africans as slaves.

Successfully to address this legacy we must, among other things, even focus on the fundamental issue of the affirmation of our capacity as Africans to determine our own destiny. What we do from day to day must, in practice, confirm our confidence in ourselves as the makers of our own history.

For these reasons, our continent took the correct decision that we must ourselves set the agenda for the transformation and renewal of Africa. This has resulted in the establishment of the African Union and the adoption of its programme for social and economic development, the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

We were very pleased, Mr President, that shortly before we left our country to travel to France, our continent took two more steps forward in the struggle to attend to the two and related questions of democracy and peace.

Following its ratification a few days ago by the requisite number of African countries, the Protocol authorising the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament will come into force in a month's time. This is of great importance to the continuing effort to entrench democracy and human rights in Africa.

Yesterday, the negotiations aimed at bringing peace and democracy to Burundi took a decisive step forward, opening the way for the inclusion of the principal armed group in that country in the Burundi Transitional Government, which will happen within the next 10 days. We are moving forward steadily, towards a situation of peace within and between the countries of the Great Lakes Region.

I make these comments about Africa to pay a special tribute to you, Mr President. We count you as one of the outstanding and leading champions of the African Renaissance. We deeply appreciate your unswerving, passionate and selfless commitment to work with us to achieve Africa's renewal. That commitment gives us enormous strength as we confront the obstacles we must overcome to achieve the humane goals we share with you.

In this context I must also convey our sincere appreciation for everything that you and France have done and are doing to help to bring peace to the Cote d'Ivoire.

Mr President, the relations between France and South Africa have never been better and stronger than they are today. I am convinced that this is because they are based on common values, shared interests and sentiments of human solidarity and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Over the last few years, the political relations between our countries have achieved new heights in terms of their quality and maturity. Similarly, our economic relations have also continued to deepen. Daily, France gains in strength as one of our leading international economic partners. Cooperation in other areas is also growing apace, helping us greatly in our continuing efforts to eradicate the legacy of the criminal apartheid system.

Once again, I thank you Mr President for everything you have done to help bring about these outcomes. Through you, Mr President, I would like to convey the message to the sister people of France that we are determined to ensure that South Africa develops as a non-racial, non-sexist, peaceful and prosperous democracy. We will also contribute whatever we can to help ensure that Africa outgrows her misery. We will do what we have to do not to disappoint the expectations of the people of France with regard to these important matters.

Let us please rise and drink a toast to the continued good health of President and Madame Chirac, to the excellent relations between our two countries, and to friendship between the peoples of South Africa and France. To friendship!

Thank you.