

Address at the Opening of the Khayelitsha Magistrate's Court

17 April 2003

Chairperson, Mr Simon Jiyane,
Minister Penuell Maduna,
Premier of the Western Cape, Mr Martinus van Schalkwyk,
Your Worship the Mayor of Cape Town,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors of Denmark and Switzerland,
Honourable Ministers and MEC's,
Our Traditional Leaders,
Members of our legislatures,
Community Leaders and people of Khayelitsha,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very happy to have this opportunity to open the first magistrate's court to be established in Khayelitsha, the second biggest magistrate's court in the country.

We meet today in Khayelitsha township, a typical apartheid created settlement. Khayelitsha, like many similar townships in our country, was designed according to the disastrous policies of the past, which saw such human settlements as cheap labour reservoirs.

All of us aware of the consequences of these past policies which still define places such as Khayelitsha as areas of high unemployment, high levels of poverty, disease, low level of education, substance and alcohol abuse, high rates of crime and poor social and economic infrastructure.

This profile defines other apartheid creations - Mitchell's Plain, Gugulethu, Bonteheuwel, Kwa-Mashu, Soweto, Mamelodi and many other urban settlements of our country.

The masses of our people fought against these conditions and used their meagre resources to improve their education, engage in sporting and cultural activities, and struggled to establish businesses in a hostile and harsh environment.

The people of Khayelitsha, together with many of us throughout the country, fought the struggle for liberation to give ourselves the possibility to face, in a concerted, integrated and comprehensive way, the challenges we inherited from the apartheid past.

Since 1994 we have put in place programmes towards the creation of a developed and prosperous South Africa.

In this regard, government has adopted among others, the Urban Renewal Strategy as well as the Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development Programme aimed at combining resources, working in an integrated way and ensuring maximum, visible, enduring and sustainable outcomes that benefit our people in the poorest areas of our country.

Through these and many other programmes, and working in partnership with our social partners, we are confident that we will in time achieve the goal of a better life for all.

We have gathered here today to unveil one of such projects, which is an integral part of the programmes within the Urban Renewal Strategy. Through this court, we will ensure that we bring justice within the reach of the people of Khayelitsha, in the spirit of Batho Pele.

This court is part of our response to the unacceptable living conditions of our people as described earlier, and should be seen in the broader context of our readiness to work together to correct the wrongs imposed on us and accordingly attend to our people's housing needs, build the much-needed infrastructure of roads, electricity, water and ensure that those who are ill among us have the necessary health facilities and the requisite resources.

We have more reason to celebrate today because this is the first fully fledged court in the African areas of the Western Cape.

The Khayelitsha Magistrate's Court is here to deliver prompt, courteous and efficient judicial services to our people.

We are determined that we should not merely pay lip-service to justice - it must be seen to be done. This court will ensure that our people do not have to make arduous and long journeys to distant courts to seek justice.

Today, we are all proud that the Khayelitsha Magistrate's Court has been up and running since 1 July 2002. The services provided by this court demonstrate, very clearly, the importance of partnerships between government and the people.

This court also represents a fresh beginning for prosecutors, magistrates, and administrative personnel who have had abnormally high caseloads. We have increased the number of courts to improve efficiency so that we can all focus more effectively and timeously on the cases at hand.

An important element of this building is that it also houses NGO's, so that all of us who are committed to the improvement of the lives of our people, can have an improved opportunity to co-ordinate our efforts.

Through this court, we have the possibility to make many of our people more active in the justice system. It helps greatly that these NGO's are able to provide community services to improve the effectiveness of our justice system.

Furthermore, I am happy that the court is designed to attend to the many challenges that we all face today, including sexual offences, juvenile offences and a Family Court focussing on maintenance and domestic violence.

This court, like others, is an important institution that fulfils a constitutional mandate and brings, in a practical way, justice to the people. All of us in Khayelitsha and other places should be inspired by a development such as this one and I have no doubt that this will strengthen confidence in the administration of Justice.

We all want safer and stable communities. We want our townships to be rid of crime and criminals so that we can face our challenges in a secure environment. I am happy that because of our readiness to make our townships and suburbs safe, many of us have elected to participate in the forums that seek to assist the criminal justice system.

This court is part of the work that we are doing around Community Safety Forums (CSFs), that have been established in many communities around the Western Cape as well as throughout the country.

I am also happy to see the various programmes that the Community Safety Forums in this Province, are engaged in, for instance, the Victim Empowerment Projects and the way in which this programme has been linked to crime prevention and the workings of the criminal justice system.

There are many important lessons that other communities can learn from the manner in which the Forums have worked in the local communities, as well as the way in which you have ensured an on-going interface between government agencies and structures outside government.

I hope that we would be able to involve many more people in our programmes, because I am told that there have been instances of vigilantes and people taking extra-legal measures to deal with crime. There is no need for anyone of us to do this, and I would like to urge that we all unite so as to be effective in our fight against crime.

I would also like to commend the community of Khayelitsha for the initiatives that you have taken to assist the development programme that we have embarked on.

I learn that you had an occasion to reflect on the many challenges facing this community and produced the document called the Khayelitsha Development Programme as an input into the work around the renewal of the area.

I trust that, in the spirit of Vuk'zenzele, we are ready to be volunteers and lend our hand to ensure that we indeed push back the frontiers of poverty and open access to a better life.

We wish to express our gratitude to our friends from other countries who have helped to fund some of our projects as well as provide technical expertise. We value this partnership and trust that it would grow from strength to strength. I am very pleased that today we have with us our good friends, the Ambassadors of Denmark and Switzerland.

This magistrate's court is just one of the many positive signs that we have turned the corner and many of us have already entered into a social contract for a better tomorrow. Let us all protect this asset and use it to address the continuing challenge of bringing a better life to all our people.

I thank you.