

Speech on the signing of the Treaty on the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Xai-Xai, Mozambique

9 December 2002

Your Excellencies, Presidents Joaquim Chissano and Robert Mugabe,
Your Excellencies Ministers, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Fellow Africans:

On Wednesday last week, a total eclipse began a magical journey from the Atlantic Ocean in the early hours of the morning. It went through the Angolan town of Sumbe, then travelled to Mongu in Zambia and turned day into night, visited the south of Zimbabwe and crossed into the South African town of Musina.

As if to anticipate what we have convened to do today, it went through the Kruger National Park and visited this town of Xai-Xai before it departed our continent into the Indian Ocean and beyond.

This marvelous natural phenomenon, that comes once in a long time, has been variously interpreted. Some see it as a mystical occurrence that presages famine, pestilence and death. Many others, and I trust this includes all of us here, see it as a good omen that will usher a new beginning of progress, development and success, marked by rain and plentiful crops and a vibrant life for plants, animals and human beings.

Last week's magical phenomenon of nature occurred at the beginning of a century that we have defined for ourselves as an African Century. It descended on a part of the African continent currently experiencing one of the worst droughts in living memory, with the grave consequences of failing crops and food shortages.

Wednesday's morning told us that the brief dark interval will pass, and the radiant glow of the African sun will once again shine over the entire continent, warming the air that grew colder as the eclipse passed over our shores.

It told us that we were right to have decided that we will not allow ourselves to be conditioned by circumstance, that we will determine our own destiny.

Today, in this African town that was blessed by the eclipse, an important programme is being launched. This initiative will act as a new framework of interaction between our countries, based on an agenda set by the African people themselves, turned into reality through reliance on our own resources.

All this happens when the people of our continent have decided to combine in the African Union, and address their development imperatives through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). These decisions constitute an expression of the collective decision of all Africans that the time has come for us to take full responsibility for the regeneration of our continent.

The birth of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park today, tells the citizens of our continent that the AU and NEPAD are not merely a set of good and grand ideas whose accomplishment will be in the distant future. This Transfrontier Park says that each passing day transforms the dream on an African Renaissance into reality.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park combines the three pillars of sustainable development.

First, it promotes economic development in a number of important ways. This new park will become one of the most sought-after wilderness places in the world. I am confident that it will feature on the list of must-see destinations for global travelers, as well as the citizens of our countries and region.

It will increase Southern Africa's share of the global travel and tourism market, thus creating many job opportunities.

The Transfrontier Park will also encourage infrastructure investment in roads, bridges, lodges, hotels, upgrading of border facilities and game fences.

Because it requires the co-operation of our three countries, it will make an important contribution to our regional economic integration.

Secondly, the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park will promote social development.

Amongst other things, the park will serve as an educational facility for the adjacent communities, especially the youth. It will also require the services of people educated as tourism practitioners, conservationists and scientists, and provide opportunities for young interns and trainees.

I am confident that it would also be used more and more as a place of recreation and spiritual regeneration. In addition, the malaria-eradication programme will contribute decisively to the improvement of the health of the local communities.

Thirdly, the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park will protect the environment.

As one of the world's most ambitious conservation efforts, the Park will restore the integrity of an ecosystem artificially segmented by colonial boundaries, stretching 500km from north to south, and covering a surface area of 38 000 square kilometres.

It will open up the natural migratory routes of the great herds of African elephants and other animals.

This project is an important contribution by Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa to the achievement of the global target to reverse the loss of bio-diversity by the year 2010, as adopted at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development earlier this year.

Further, this project proclaims to the entire world that, notwithstanding the reality of political boundaries imposed on Africa to serve colonialism, we are determined to rebuild the unity of the African people.

As the eclipse told us as it travelled across our Region, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, from the coastal town of Sumbe in Angola to Xai-Xai in Mozambique, we are bound together by a common destiny.

Accordingly, together we have to do our utmost to advance the development of our countries, individually and collectively, and help bring a better life to all our people.

The successful merging of our individual parks into the Limpopo Transfrontier Park tells us that nothing is impossible. And yet this increases the challenge on all of us to ensure that we create the correct conditions for the balanced development and advancement of our countries and peoples.

With the inauguration of this Park, we have further reinforced that important process of creating the necessary conditions. The challenge ahead of us is to create these conditions, to build a new world of boundless peace and prosperity for our peoples, even as the animals of the wild learn to live in the new world created by the open frontiers of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

I thank you.

