

## **Toast of in honour of the prime minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

The Presidential Guest House, Tshwane: 24 November 2004

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai,  
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,  
Ambassadors and business leaders,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to extend a very warm welcome to you and your delegation on this historic first visit by a Vietnamese leader to South Africa and the first at Africa after three decades. We thank you humbly for paying us a visit.

Vietnam is blessed with magnificent beauty and a charming and resilient people. It was this resilience that ensured that the Vietnamese were able to defend their country from the invasion by two of the most powerful global forces of the day, France and the USA. Prime Minister, we were greatly moved by the sacrifices that Vietnam made to secure its liberation and unity, and did what we could to act in solidarity with heroic Vietnam.

During our own struggle against apartheid, we gained strength from your own heroism and steadfastness. As you know, Your Excellency, both our peoples learned a great deal from each other to bring freedom to our respective countries.

As we celebrate our decade of liberation, we are honoured that you have graced our shores to give us the opportunity to thank you and the wonderful people of Vietnam for your unwavering solidarity with the masses of the people of South Africa, which enabled us to attain our freedom.

Today, Vietnam and South Africa are poised to build strong bridges and partnerships across the Indian Ocean.

The Long Bien (Doumer) Bridge across the ancient Red River in your capital, Hanoi, has stood defiantly since 1902 as a mighty symbol of strength and courage. Even when damaged during over 200 sorties by US bombers, the Vietnamese people displayed courage and determination by repairing the bridge, succeeding to keep it open.

Since their liberation, both Vietnamese and Africans have been preoccupied with matters of development, fighting poverty and rebuilding our nations. This day marks a new chapter in building partnerships that should help us overcome our common challenges.

Indeed, I am very pleased that, during your visit, our two governments have signed important agreements through which we can work together to improve the life conditions of the people of Vietnam and South Africa. These agreements are:

- A Joint Declaration on Co-operation and Development;
- An Agreement Concerning the Establishment of a Partnership Forum for Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Co-operation;
- An Agreement on Visa Exemption for Holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports.
- An Announcement on the Establishment of the Vietnam-South Africa Joint Trade Committee.

I am very pleased that since 1998, our bilateral trade has increased substantially to over R800 million. Clearly, through the Joint Trade Committee we have an opportunity further to strengthen and enhance the trade and economic opportunities between our two countries.

I wish to take this opportunity to welcome the large Vietnamese business delegation which has accompanied you and trust that they have been able to forge the necessary links with their South African counterparts for the benefit of our countries.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen:

Our partnership is, of course, much broader than trade and encompasses our vision to regenerate our continents, Asia and Africa.

Quite correctly, we are united in our quest to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment on our continents. There are opportunities for Vietnam to be one of our partners in the New Partnership for Africa's Development and to play a key role in the Africa Asia Sub-Regional Organisations Conference (AASROC).

In this regard, I am very pleased that Vietnam is one of the leaders in Asia, actively building bridges across the vast distance between our continents. I would like to congratulate you, Your Excellency, on your hosting of the successful Africa Conference in Hanoi last year. It is through such initiatives that we can fulfil our aim to build a strong Africa-Asia Strategic Partnership.

It is also very inspiring to see that Vietnam is at the forefront of South-South Co-operation and, together with the Food and Agricultural Organisation, you have provided agricultural expertise to many African and other developing countries.

Tomorrow, the 25th, is the Vietnamese festival of Ooc-om-bok and I wish all the Vietnamese peoples good luck, happiness, good weather and a bountiful harvest.

May the bright lights and hearts of South Africans shine up your visit so that the blessings of Ooc-om-bok may remove the poverty, disease, underdevelopment from our countries. May we live to see the day when each and every citizen can enjoy com dep (sticky rice) each and every day.

Your Excellency, I am truly delighted to welcome you to your home from home and salute all those who made it possible for Hanoi and Tshwane Metropolitan Council to become twinned cities. This augurs well for our partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Please rise and join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of His Excellency, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and to the wonderful friendship between the peoples of South Africa and Vietnam.

To friendship!

I thank you.