

Toast remarks at the state banquet in honour of President Sellapan Ramanathan of The Republic of Singapore

Presidential Guest House, Tshwane, 19 April 2007

Your Excellency, President S.R. Nathan and Mrs Urmila Nathan,
Your Excellency, Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Your Excellencies, Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the government and people of South Africa and on my own behalf, I wish to extend a warm welcome to you, Your Excellency, your wife and the entire delegation from the Republic of Singapore.

We are indeed highly honoured that Your Excellency has paid us a State Visit, further to strengthen the economic, political and cultural ties between our two peoples.

Despite the early onset of the winter season I am confident that Your Excellency and his delegation will find our people warm and most friendly and welcoming.

Your Excellency, when we asked you, in April 2005 during our State Visit to your beautiful country, to visit South Africa, we knew that you would not hesitate to reciprocate because the close relations between our two countries, our common commitment to the development of the countries of the South, to democracy and human rights, to peace and security in the world, defy the long distance and the turbulent seas that separate our countries.

We are indeed happy that you came to South Africa, because among other things, this has given us the opportunity further to strengthen our bilateral relations, especially to give better effect to the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Bilateral Cooperation in areas such as Trade and Investment, Transport, Housing, Tourism, Maritime matters, Aviation, Academic Cooperation, Human Resource Development and Crime and Terrorism.

Your Excellency, our close economic relations are reflected by our trade figures which indicate that South Africa and Singapore's total trade rose by 50 percent with a value of R11, 3 billion during 2006 compared to 2005.

Further, we are confident that we will continue to pursue the objective of a Free Trade Agreement, working together with our Southern African Customs Union fellow-members. We will also work to finalise the Open Skies Agreement, the better to cement our already improving economic relations.

You will be proud, Your Excellency, that our relationship is both practical and mutually beneficial, as demonstrated, among others, by the fact that Straits Chemicals of Singapore has committed an estimated US\$5 billion for investment at Coega, one of our Industrial Development Zone. Any outstanding matters in this regard will soon be addressed so as to finalise this project.

Your Excellency, I would like to thank you personally, as well as the government and people of Singapore for helping us to respond to one of the biggest challenges facing us, which is skills development. South Africa has benefited from the Singapore Cooperation Programme hosted by your Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has trained almost 700 officials and other representatives from South Africa in a wide range of fields and interests.

We have also forged close links and co-operation in areas such as exchange of expertise in terms of research; programmes of collaboration between the University of Witwatersrand and the Nanyang Technology University (MBA programme) and the University of Pretoria (Gordon Institute of Business Science) and the National University of Singapore (Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy).

Indeed, this training programme for our people is not new. As we were preparing for a democratic order before 1994, Singapore trained a number of South Africans as part of the preparations for the new challenges. One such recipient of your training programme is our current Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, who in 1993 spent three months at the National University of Singapore doing a course in Executive Management.

Accordingly, I have no doubt that the on-going discussions for further training of South Africans to address the critical skills shortage in our country will bear fruit.

Further, we are happy that we have strengthened our cooperation with regard to combating organised crime and terrorism.

Clearly, Your Excellency, given these encouraging developments, our political, economic and strategic relations in many key areas can only grow from strength to strength for the mutual benefit of our two countries and peoples.

Your Excellency, we appreciate the fact that both our countries share a common vision of maintaining a secure and stable environment politically and economically in and around our regions.

Accordingly, we are aware of the critical role the Republic of Singapore is playing as a member of such important regional groups as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

While the Republic of Singapore is committed to the regional unity and development in Southeast Asia, we are equally committed to regional unity, co-operation, stability and development within the context of the African Union and our regional body, the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

I am confident that as the Republic of Singapore becomes the next Chair of ASEAN later this year, it will strengthen the relations between our regional organisations so that our countries and peoples can derive more benefit from closer cooperation.

Your Excellency, our two countries share a vision of a peaceful, stable and democratic world. Indeed, together with other countries of the South we support the reform of the United Nations; we want the further strengthening of this world body so as to better discharge its mandate to ensure, peace, security and development in all parts of the world.

We are indeed inspired by the contribution your country made towards the achievement of these ideals during its two-year term as a Non-Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, which it completed in December 2002.

Your Excellency, in line with the principles of striving for a better world, your country has been making ongoing contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, including in Timor-Leste, especially following the difficult situation in that country in 1999.

Following on the excellent example set by the Republic of Singapore, South Africa will, as a Non-Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, strive to make the necessary contribution to ensure that the UN represents the voice of the countries of the South and that this world body addresses global

challenges consistent with the principles and prescriptions in its Charter. In this, I am confident that we can always count on the support of the government and people of the Republic of Singapore.

Once again, I am very delighted that you, Your Excellency, your wife and your delegation have come to South Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Please join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of their Excellencies, President Sellapan Ramanathan and Mrs Urmila Ramanathan and to the ever-lasting friendship and co-operation between the wonderful peoples of Singapore and South Africa. To good health and happiness!

Thank you.