

Address at the Presidential Sports Awards

4 April 2003

Master of Ceremonies,
Honourable Minister of Sport and Recreation, Ngconde Balfour,
Members of Parliament and MECs,
President of the National Olympic Committee,
Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of the Sports Commission,
Leaders of National Sports Federations,
Award Winners and Sportspersons,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We meet a few weeks after the end of one of the most exciting sporting events this year, the ICC Cricket World Cup 2003. Although we were naturally disappointed that we did not do well, we are happy that all of us as a country emerged victors, for we demonstrated, once again, that we have adequate capacity to handle events of such magnitude.

Together with Kenya and Zimbabwe we confounded sceptics about the capability of our continent to run world-class tournaments successfully.

Though defeated in the World Cup, we convey to our cricket team a message of hope not despair. It should be the hallmark of a true South African to celebrate our victories with humility and accept setbacks with dignity, always learning from such setbacks and avoiding the easy temptation of apportioning blame without being constructive.

Indeed, we are strengthened by the fact that we know and have seen our capabilities in the cricket team and I believe that working together to rectify the mistakes of the past we will, in future, perform to our potential.

Once more, let me take this opportunity to thank our cricket team, the administrators, the volunteers and others for ensuring that those who came to our country for the Cricket World Cup, went away with fond memories.

Our Rugby team will be engaged in the World Cup this year. I am confident that despite the recent loss of form we will bounce back and claim our place amongst the best in the world.

Later this year, in October, our sportsmen and women will represent us in the 8th All Africa Games in Abuja, Nigeria. I am confident that they have the ability to do even better than when we hosted the same event in Johannesburg in 1999.

I trust that the preparations for this premier event on our continent are going well. Our athletes should be given all the necessary support by all of us, government, the private sector and our people as a whole.

Many of our sports bodies are engaged in numerous international competitions. We wish all of them the best of success and are confident that they will make us proud by continuing to perform like the true champions that they are.

During the ICC Cricket World Cup we said that the tournament is a peaceful contest of human skill, ingenuity and endurance. This of course is applicable to all sporting contests. The gathering of people in this room today, and the award winners in particular, represent some of the finest protagonists who have

successfully deployed their skills, ingenuity and endurance in competition with their peers in the past calendar year.

I am very happy that we are also honouring some of our sportspersons who sacrificed a great deal in the past but were never accorded the recognition that they so much deserved. Unfortunately, some of them are no longer with us today but we can all take comfort from the fact we will always ensure that their contributions continue to inspire us as we attempt to reach the highest summits in the area of sport.

We do this because we have to acknowledge the achievements of our sporting heroes and heroines, not only in gratitude for the glory and honour that they bring to our country, but also as an expression of our desire to use these achievements as a foundation for the future.

I am aware that recently Sport and Recreation South Africa hosted a conference aimed at developing a strategy for hosting major international sports events in our country. Government fully endorses this initiative because, as I indicated earlier, we do have the necessary capacity to successfully host these events.

In this context, we fully support the Bid of our football association for the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Government will give whatever necessary support so as to ensure that our Bid succeeds. I am encouraged by the support from the private sector and I would like to appeal for more assistance so that we bring this great sporting event to our country.

In celebrating with the award winners today, we would all agree that their role is much broader than in the specific sporting code in which they are engaged.

As we know, one of the impacts of modern technology is that there has evolved sedentary lifestyles; through the push of a button we have easy access to information, either in the comfort of our office or home. We have better access to transportation even to locations that are within reach. These and many other factors have meant that many people hardly engage in any form of normal exercise.

In addition, we have examples of many youth who, in part because they are not involved in any cultural activities, are easily attracted to criminal activities as well as engaging in abuse of drugs and alcohol.

In this situation we need more role models like yourselves to demonstrate the benefits of sport among the youth and helping to organize young people and the rest of society into sport and recreation activities through which we can all develop into useful, productive, healthy and proud citizens of our country.

Clearly, as leaders in the field of sport, you have a contribution to make both in combating anti-social behaviour and providing alternatives to these unacceptable activities. Together with you, we must use sport to promote social cohesion that would assist in the overall growth and development of our people.

Government will continue to support sport and recreation so that we rebuild our nation and develop the talent of our youth. Working in partnership with the private sector we must ensure that we increase access of the people of South Africa to sport. We must build more facilities, especially in poor urban and rural areas. Sport is one of the beneficiaries of our national lottery. At all times, we need to evaluate whether, through the various interventions, we are making the desired impact.

I am aware that the Minister is in the process of establishing a National Academy with appropriate facilities, equipment and other resources necessary to improve our competitiveness. This will provide a good possibility for our athletes to prepare and hone their skills here at home, rather than elsewhere.

Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the various sponsors who continue to ensure that our different sporting codes function as they should. Without your support, we would not have

achieved what we have achieved in sport, despite the fact that we have re-entered the global sporting community in the last decade.

At the same time, we still have a big challenge ahead of us because there are many parts of the country that still do not have even the basic sport facilities.

Accordingly, government, business and civil society must strengthen their partnership and work on a programme of injecting resources into poor areas, unearthing talent in these areas and ensuring that all our sporting codes are, in reality, national codes.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Our special gratitude goes to our athletes with disabilities. The people of this country are proud of your consistently high performances, particularly in international events everywhere you go, you make us proud and I would like to wish you continued success.

I believe that your substantial presence at these ceremonies, year after year, is testimony to the success of our efforts to ensure equity in access to and participation in all facets of life. Government will continue to do whatever it can to ensure that you have the necessary support.

In addition, I would like to say I am very happy that we are making progress with regard to participation and good performance in sport of women. This is demonstrated by the number of women award winners. Yet, we should double our efforts to ensure that we use sport to help our society to move forward faster with regard to equity of all the people of this country so that the dream of a non-discriminatory society is realized sooner rather than later.

Next year will be the 10th year of freedom and democracy in South Africa. This will give us an opportunity to assess the progress that we have made in developing a non-racial and non-sexist democracy in our country.

We have to do the same in the field of sport. We have to pose the question about the extent to which we have unified our sporting codes? How far have we ensured that all South Africans have equal opportunities in sport and what measures are in place to ensure that different sectors of sport truly reflect the mosaic that constitutes our society?

We should answer these and other relevant questions about sport conscious of the fact that this constitutes a vital component of our social life.

A number of sporting codes have always been at the forefront of transformation, even during the dark days of apartheid. Yet there are many areas of sport that must still fully transform. I am therefore looking forward to the 'Sport Transformation Charter' that the Minister is working on, which is intended to ensure that sport does not fall behind in the process of transforming our country.

In conclusion I want to say to our award winners that we celebrate here today in a heartfelt salute to you all. Through your good work you have earned more responsibilities of working with all of us, using sport to confront the challenges that we all face. From time to time we will call on you to be good role models as we fight crime, drug and alcohol abuse and as we mobilise the youth to engage in constructive programmes.

Honoured guests, award winners, ladies and gentlemen, please enjoy the rest of the evening in celebration of our achievements as a nation in sport. Once more, congratulations to the award winners.

Thank you.