Speech at the Opening of the Zimbabwe Trade Fair

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, May 5 2000

Your Excellency, President Robert Mugabe,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Worship the Mayor,
General Manager of the Trade Fair, Mr. Graham Rowe,
Participating Exhibitors, Distinguished Guests,
Comrades,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The first time I came to this city nearly forty years ago, it was as a detainee, our group travelling to Tanganyika having been arrested by the Southern Rhodesian police who held us in a prison in the city for a number of weeks.

Whereas the white minority regime of Southern Rhodesia wanted to deport us back to apartheid South Africa, where we would have been imprisoned for many years, members of this country's liberation movement worked hard and ensured that, instead we were sent back to the then British teritory of Bechuanaland.

I stand here today as an elected representative of the people of South Africa thanks in good measure to the fact that when the liberation movement of Zimbabwe acted practically to ensure that we too should gain our freedom.

I am pleased to take this opportunity publicly to salute President Mugabe, t he rest of the leadership and the people of Zimbabwe for what they did t ensure our liberation from apartheid tyranny.

I mention President Mugabe specifrically because I had the privilege to accompany our late President, Oliver Tambo, when he and President Mugabe discussed what Zimbabwe could do to help expedite the process towards our own emancipation.

I can therefore say that whereas Zimbabwe's liberation fighters saved our group from imprisonment on Robben Island, liberated Zimbabwe helped the entirety of our people to break down the prison walls behind which the apartheid white minority regime held the millions of our people in bondage.

And so here we are together in Bulawayo, during the month when all of us will celebrate Africa Day, on May 25th, with both of our countries free of the yoke of white minority rule.

As neighbours and peoples who have shared the same trenches in the common struggle for freedom, it is natural that we must now work together to build on the victory of the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle.

Practically, together we must decide what we have to do, again sharing a common trench of struggle, to address an agenda which includes:

- overcoming the legacy of colonialism and apartheid;
- achieving a better life for the masses of our people;
- protecting the achievements we have scored to ensure that ours is a region of freedom, democracy, peace and stability;
- expediting the process of ballanced and mutually beneficial regional integration; and,
- ensuring that the process of globalisation does not result in our marginalisation and the underdevelopment of our people and countries, but reinforces our efforts to achieve social and economic progress.

In this context, I would like to salute all the exhibitors at this Trade Fair for the commitment to a growing economy and a prosperous Zimbabwe they have shown by their participation at this International Trade Fair.

I am also convinced that all of us share a common desige to see all the other countries of Southern Africa achieve high and sustained economic growth.

Thus will we produce the material resources that will enable us to end poverty among the millions of our people and ensure that these masses enjoy rising and decent standards of living.

I believe that all of us would also agree that our region has to act together to achieve these objectives.

Accordingly, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to indicate our own views on some of the issues we believe we should address together, further to promote the achievement of a better life for all our peoples.

As President Mugabe has insisted, using the instrument of the Southern African Development Community, we have to speed up the process of the economic integration of our region.

More immediately, we have to ensure that the SADC Trade Protocol comes into force during this year.

We must therefore act together to ensure that all our countries have the capacity to take advantage of the opportunity this will provide for us to increase trade among ourselvfes.

Such capacity includes the ability of each of our countries to observe the sanitary standards for agricultural products and the provisions affecting rules of origin provided for in the Trade Protocol.

We will have to work together to inform investors both in our region and the rest of the world about the benefits that will accrue from the common Southern African market, to create the circumstances in which we can attract larger inflows of capital into all our countries.

We will therefore have to speed up the work going on in our region to increase our co-operation and co-ordination in such areas as investment policies, the capital markets, finance and banking.

We must also speed up our co-operation in the promotion of the tourism sector in a significant manner, marketing our region as one tourist destination attractive to all tourists, whatever their income levels, a destination that is unique in the world.

As part of this and for other important reasons, we must also work together to protect our environment which is a common heritage we have to pass on to future generations and which suffered greatly during the long years of colonial domination.

We also have the possibility, which we must seize with determination and enthusiasm, to put our region on the information super highway.

I believe that we would commit a grave and unforgivable strategic mistake if we do not take urgent measures to build and modernise our communication and information infrastructure, to ensure that our region benefits from the information and communication technological revolution.

Similarly, we have to work with greater vigour to improve the economic and physical infrastructure throughout our region. This includes road, rail, air and water transport, telecommunications, energy and water.

We must also act together to develop our human capital. Without a skilled and educated population, we cannot achieve the development objectives we pursue.

One of the realities we have to recognise is that relative to the developed countries of the world, we remain exporters of minerals and other primary products, confronted with the challenge radically to modernise our economies by expanding the manufacturing sector and accessing modern technology.

Another reality we have to rcognise is that as a region we are geographically far away from such large markets as those of China, Japan, Western Europe and North America.

One of the advantages we must offer to people who want to invest in our region and trade with these markets must surely be that we have the people who have the skill and knowledge to work within amodern economy.

I am also convinced that we must enhance our co-operation in the field of health. This includes AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, malaria, TB and other diseases.

The very fact of the movement of large numbers of people across our common borders, which movement will inevitably increase, demands that we co-operate on these matters, among other things jointly to fight against infectious diseases.

Among other things, we are working in our country to enable us to use modern technology to ensure that through resort to tele-medicine we are able to provide better health care especially to the most disadvantaged areas of our country.

We must aim to expand this infrastructure throughout our region so that we can use every developed health facility in each one of our countries to support health delivery to all our communities.

As H.E. President Mugabe has stressed, for us to achieve all these regional objectives, it is necessary that we restructure the institutions of SADC to ensure that it becomes a more effective instrument for real change.

We must together ensure, therefore, that the work being done to address this issues is concluded correctly and speedily.

I must also make the point that our two economies, those of Zimbabwe and South Africa, are the largest in our region. They also enjoy a considerable degree of integration though also characterised by such negative factors as the gross trade imbalance in favour of South Africa.

I am convinced that Zimbabwe and South Africa share a common obligation to ensure that their economies help to drive the process of growth and development throughout the SADC region.

Inevitably, therefore, both of us have responsibilities that extend beyond our borders and have to respond to these, basing ourselves on the regional solidarity and unity in action we achieved during the difficult years of the struggle for liberation.

It is obvious that the regional programme I have spoken of requires that we also address the issue of peace and stability throughout our region.

Our region needs no education about the fact that without such peace and stability, we cannot achieve sustained development, the fundamental condition for the realisation of the objective of providing a better life for all our people.

Our two countries, together with Botswana and Mozambique, on behalf of the SADC region, have worked together to defend democracy and peace in Lesotho. We continue to work together even as I speak here to help the Government and people of Lesotho to maintain the peace, to develop a national agreement on various political and constitutional questions and to prepare the conditions conducive to the holding of free and fair elections later this year.

We are also working together for the speedy implementation of the Lusaka Agreement on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We share a common commitment to assist in the important struggle to secure peace, democracy and development in the Congo, respect for the sovereignty and national integrity of that country and stability for the whole region of the Great Lakes.

Acting together with all the other countries involved, including President Kabila and his government, as well as all the member states of SADC, the OAU and the UN, I am certain that the results towards which we aspire will be achieved.

Thus the DRC, this important SADC country, will, in time, come to play its own positive role in the promotion of the common agenda.

Similarly, both our countries and the rest of our region earnestly desire peace for Angola. As you know, to contribute to the realisation of this objective, Zimbabwe participated in the UN peace efforts launched in the aftermath of the adoption of the Lusaka Accords on Angola.

Whatever the difficulties, our countries, our region and Continent will have to work together to assist the long suffering people of Angola, a valued member state of SADC, to achieve peace, democracy and development for themselves as well.

As peoples who share a common destiny, defined by more than the mere fact that we are neighbours, we have to be concerned about what happens in each of our countries.

In this context, Mr President, I might take advantage of this occasion to mention the concern you had, a few years ago, that we, the black people of South Africa, should not make the grievous mistake of allowing the outbreak of a civil war among themselves.

I am convinced that the interventions you made in this regard contributed to turn us away from a path that would have been truly disastrous.

Land dispossession was one of the most iniquitous results of the colonisation of Zimbabwe.

As we grew up as activists of our own liberation movement, we knew that among the objectives of our struggle were the repeal of the Land Act in South Africa and the Land Apportionment Act in this country.

Both of our countries, which experienced extensive land dispossession of the indigenous majority by those who colonised our countries, are confronted by the challenge to address this colonial legacy.

Our peoples, on both banks of the Limpopo, both black and white, have a responsibility to recognise the fact that the land question constitutes an important part of the national agenda.

Accordingly, they must commit themselves to work together to address this central question, to advance the common good.

Clearly, the resultant land redistribution also imposes the obligation to ensure that such land is used productively, to help provide a better life for the people.

It is therefore inevitable that any resettlement programme must be accompanied by investment in agricultural development as well as the rural social and economic infrastructure.

Our economies must therefore generate the necessary resources to ensure that this happens.

This is one of the important lessons we ourselves have learnt from our own limited process of land redistribution and resettlement.

To you, the people of Zimbabwe, I would like to convey the message that the overwhelming majority of your brothers and sisters south of the Limpopo, share with you the hope that the land question in Zimbabwe will be addressed successfully.

At the same time, as a people, we are convinced that it would be best that this important matter is dealt with in a co-operative and non-confrontational manner among all the people of this sister country, both black and white, reflecting the achievement of a national consensus on this issue, encompassing all Zimbabweans.

Accordingly, we trust that ways and means will be found to end the conflict that has erupted in some areas of Zimbabwe, occasioned by the still unresolved land question in this country.

Peace, stability, democracy and social progress in Zimbabwe are as important for yourselves as they are for the rest of the region.

Peace, Stability democracy and social progress in South Africa and each one of the countries in our region are important both within each of our national boundaries and in the context of the successful evolution of all the other SADC countries.

In as much as we know from our own history that you are ready to assist us to achieve peace, stability, democracy and social progress in our own country, so are we, in the common interest, willing and ready to work with you for peace, stability, democracy and social progress in Zimbabwe, in our region and the rest of our Continent.

The motto on our new national coat of arms, which we unveiled a mere eight days ago, expressed in an ancient African language says - people who are different come together.

The challenges we all face demand that we who live together in the southern part of Africa must come together, bearing in mind, to use an historic slogan of our trade union movement, that an injury to one is an injury to all.

I am pleased that at this International Trade Fair, representatives of the peoples of the world are working side by side, together saying they share a common commitment to do everything they can to ensure that Zimbabwe and the rest of southern Africa thrive and prosper in conditions of freedom and peace.

I have the honour and privilege to declare the 20th Zimbabwe International Trade Fair open.