

Remarks at the state banquet in honour of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Pretoria, 7 February 2003

Your Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo,
Your Excellencies, Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mr President, it is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you and your distinguished delegation to South Africa. We receive you to our country not as visitors but as truly part of us. We are therefore honoured to say to you - welcome home!

Even as we were engaged in struggle against the apartheid regime, you, Mr President, visited our country. You did not come as a tourist or a friend of the system of racism that was claiming the lives of many of our people. You came as a liberator, an opponent of tyranny, a proponent of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

At that time, we too, Mr President, came to Nigeria at your invitation, to strengthen the co-operation between our peoples in the common struggle for a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

Accordingly, when we say welcome home, Mr President, we say welcome home to a fellow combatant for the liberation of our people. We receive you here in our capital city of Tshwane as an architect of the victory that has enabled us to embark on a route of reconstruction and development. This route will lead all our people out of the division and misery imposed on them by the system of colonialism and apartheid.

When Nigeria took her place among the front ranks of the African and world fighters against apartheid, she did so to assert the common responsibility that Africans have towards one another. She did so because she upheld the view that an injury to one is an injury to all, because she is firmly of the view that as Africans, we share a common destiny.

When Nigeria fought to end apartheid tyranny in our country, she did so because she wanted to see our people unite across the colour line to confront the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment together. She wanted to see our country working together with other African countries, no longer a force for aggression and destabilisation, but a partner in the common struggle to defeat the legacy of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

In a lecture entitled "The Empire Fights Back", the renowned Nigerian and African writer, Chinua Achebe, said: "Looking back now on that incredible 1950s decade (which saw the publication of a relatively large number of books about Africa, written by Africans)...it does become easy to indulge a temptation to see History as mindful, purposeful; and to see the design behind this particular summons and rendezvous as the signal at long last to end Europe's imposition of a derogatory narrative upon Africa, a narrative designed to call African humanity into question."

When Nigeria joined the struggle against white minority rule in our country, she, together with Chinua Achebe, responded to the particular summons and rendezvous, at long last to end Europe's imposition of a derogatory narrative upon Africa, a narrative designed to call African humanity into question. Nigeria fought against apartheid to assert the dignity of the African people and to open the way to Africa's renewal.

Your presence in our country today Mr President serves to underline all these objectives. It emphasises the imperative for the peoples of Africa to act together in unity in conditions of peace, together to

determine their collective destiny, together to defeat poverty and underdevelopment on our continent, together to achieve Africa's renaissance.

As South Africans, we are privileged to have you and your country, Nigeria, as a steadfast, tried and tested partner in the challenging quest to achieve these objectives. We are greatly strengthened by the fact that the relations between our countries and peoples are growing from strength to strength, helping us equally to respond to the task of development and the improvement of the lives of our people.

We have moved from this common base to enhance our shared capacity to contribute to the realisation of the continental objectives represented by the African Union and NEPAD. This includes the urgent challenge to achieve peace and stability throughout our continent, including the Cote d'Ivoire, the DRC, Burundi and Sudan.

It is also from this common base that we have sought to do everything we can to contribute to the resolution of other international challenges such as the issues of Palestine and Israel, Iraq and an equitable global economic system.

Your visit, Mr President, has given a further impetus to all these common endeavours, confirming the permanence of the relationship between our two countries and peoples, a relationship among proud, African comrades-in-arms.

May I therefore request everybody to rise and drink a toast to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, to friendship between the peoples of Nigeria and South Africa, to the renaissance of Africa!

Thank you.