

## **SPEECH AT A STATE BANQUET IN MALI**

4 November 2001

Your Excellency, President Konare,  
Your Excellencies:  
Prime Minister Mande Sidibe,  
Ministers,  
High Commissioner of the District of Bamako, Mr Ismail Cisse,  
Mayor of Bamako, Mr Ibrahima N'Diaye,  
Esteemed guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is our privilege and honour to be here this evening. On behalf of the people of South Africa, I would like to express our pleasure at having been invited to visit your country.

Since our arrival in Mali, we have been overwhelmed by the warmth of Malian hospitality, so much so that we feel we are truly among friends.

Our visit is both to renew and consolidate our ties and friendship. In a sense, we are on a pilgrimage to this ancient place, to this home of some of the greatest leaders of Africa and strongest empires of our rich African history.

We are here to pay homage to these centres of spiritual, intellectual and commercial excellence that gave birth to great scholars, artists, poets, philosophers, traders, entrepreneurs and through their exemplary work, shaped Africa of the past.

I am sure that everyone in my delegation is truly humbled to be in a fellow African country which has made these immeasurable contributions to the advances, not only of Africans, but of the rest of humanity.

We marvel at the seminal contribution of the 12th Century Kingdom of West Sudan under the legendary ruler, Sundiata Keita, to the evolution of the notion of the state. This great Malian leader, Sundiata Keita, was the champion of reconciliation and a symbol of lasting unity.

We are profoundly inspired by the remarkable achievements of Timbuktu and Djenne, its technological sophistication and advanced educational institutions at a time when much of the world was still in darkness and backward.

We think of this rich history of nearly a thousand years that clearly establishes modern-day Mali as the heir to many ancient and thriving African empires which include amongst others, those of Ghana, Malinke and Songhai. A country that united separate nations and states and dominated the West of Africa and whose influence at different times spread to the North and East of this continent and to Europe.

We feel most welcome and at home, here in this place of great griots who still tell tales of wondrous times, a place of inspiring musicians. We are truly moved to be at a place whose culture, for centuries, married various traditions and influences into a truly African melting pot. A home of great sculptors and carvers who through their artworks, have demonstrated to us what it really means to be African and to project a truly African worldview through their art.

Clearly, our journey here should be a return to the forging of intra-African relations that were vibrant and thriving in ancient times. It must surely be to restore and consolidate the trade routes of the past that linked Africans in various parts and to create a united and renewed Africa through new interconnections, networks, and markets of our own.

Your Excellency;

Despite the geographic distance between our countries, we are united in our shared history in Africa, by our turbulent past of subjugation to slavery, centuries of colonial exploitation and oppression and our historic opposition to apartheid. But we are also united in our aims of achieving the social and economic progress of the African people and of durable peace and sustained development in Africa. These common aims will forever bind our peoples together.

Modern Mali under the visionary leadership of its founding father, Modibo Keita, played a central role in the formation of the OAU. Furthermore, Mali was also instrumental in the establishment of ECOWAS which is a key building block for the regeneration of Africa.

Recently, we counted on the leadership of Your Excellency, in the transformation of the OAU into the African Union. We are proud of Mali's steadfast and principled leadership role during its tenure as a member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

We are confident that Mali will provide the same leadership as part of the Presidential Implementation Committee of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

History will record the role played by President Konare in all these and other processes and in ensuring that Africans take control of their own destiny. Undoubtedly, we are immensely inspired that a country such as Mali with limited resources, continues to make outstanding contributions to the region, the continent, and the world.

Our joint conviction for the realisation of the dream of the African Renaissance, our firm belief in the necessity of the economic recovery of the African continent and our support for the restructuring of the political agenda in Africa through the African Union is something we share with the majority of African leaders.

The fight against poverty and the struggle for sustainable development are clearly battles that no single African country can accomplish on her own. Our strength lies in our abilities to stand together and support each other's national and regional projects towards the regeneration of the African continent.

I am confident that our meeting here will also serve to bring the peoples of our two countries closer together, so that through interactions and common programmes of action, we forge an everlasting friendship and partnership, and build a united common future.

Accordingly, the bilateral relations between our countries will be further enhanced by the presence of various Ministers, leaders from South African parastatals and the private sector who together with their Malian counterparts must lay the groundwork for the first meeting of the Joint Commission on Co-operation to be held in Pretoria in 2002.

Already, there is a strong bond between our countries through trade links and a number of South African companies operating in Mali. I am confident that our interaction during this visit will ensure a long and enduring partnership.

I salute the indefatigable Malian spirit which still holds dear, its ideals of a better life for all her people, of good governance and democracy. This is the real spirit of Africa, which the people of Mali embody, a spirit which, slavery, colonialism, poverty, and economic exclusion could not extinguish. This unconquerable African spirit today illuminates and drives forward the African Renaissance.

I strongly believe that Africa's time has come, that we shall attain our economic and social objectives and improve the lives of the African people.

Through the co-operation of the people of Mali and the people of South Africa, through this committed African family, together we shall create a caring, people-centred African future and the African child will prosper.

As we nurture our overall plans, we need at the same time to work assiduously towards strengthening relations between our countries and peoples. Over the next few days, I trust that our respective delegations will explore ways of deepening and consolidating these ties even further.

Friends, I want to pay special tribute to one of the finest sons of Africa, His Excellency President Alpha Oumar Konare, for promoting the fraternal relations between our peoples and for contributing towards building a united effort by Africa to take control of its destiny.

We are, through no small contribution of His Excellency and the people of Mali, entering a new chapter in the history of our continent that will see us realise our common yearning for an African Renaissance and an African Century.

Thank you.