

Reply by the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to the Toast by Prime Minister Jean Chretien, at the Museum of Civilisation, Gatineau, Ottawa.

November 4, 2003

The Rt Hon Jean Chretien and Madame Aline Chretien,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The entire South African delegation is very delighted to be in Canada and to join you here tonight, after a memorable tour of the exhibits depicting the evolution of your great nation in this Museum of Civilisation.

Prime Minister, you are stepping down after your long and outstanding career in politics and government, but we are confident that your best is yet to come in the years ahead. We in Africa know that we can count on your support even in your retirement.

The Museum of Civilisation is a fitting place for us to pay tribute and homage to a great friend of South Africa, of Africa and to one of Canada's most distinguished and esteemed leaders, Prime Minister Jean Chretien. You were part of those, whose dedication and conviction, ensured that in the 1970's, the voice of all Canadians, including aboriginal groups, was heard.

Again, in the 1980's, you played an important role in the protection and promotion of the rights of women, aboriginal groups and other minorities.

We are privileged to congratulate you on the important role you played to ensure that this country has its Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Last year, when you celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Charter, you said in your message, Prime Minister, that this was your proudest achievement in public service and also an example and source of inspiration for many countries around the world. South Africa too is inspired by your achievements.

As our first decade of freedom in South Africa draws to a close, we take pride in the fact that we drew on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as we drafted our own Constitution and Bill of Rights. I would also like to take this opportunity once more to convey our thanks to the people of Canada for the important role they played in the global struggle against apartheid. This valuable contribution to our liberty has served as a solid foundation for the warm relations of friendship and solidarity that bind our countries and peoples.

Since we gained our freedom, Canada has taken her place among the front ranks of those who have been assisting us to build a new society. This has included capacity building within the justice system, anti-corruption programmes and other projects in all fields, such as education and the arts, all aimed at creation of a new South Africa. We are extremely grateful for your material and intellectual assistance in promoting the development of a people centred society, which, like Canada, will continue to grow in conditions of peace and prosperity.

We value the increasing investment and trade between our two countries, and are happy at the important role you have played in this regard, Prime Minister. We are confident that our visit here will further strengthen our bi-lateral cooperation and ensure enhanced economic relations between us.

Last year at the Kananaskis G8 Summit, again, Prime Minister, you showed your solidarity and commitment to the developing world. You demonstrated boldly why Canada shines on the international arena as a beacon of hope in the continuing struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

The Canada Africa Fund is a tangible result of our discussions at Kananaskis. It is what you have done practically that strengthens our resolve further to consolidate and deepen our partnership with the government and people of Canada.

Canada's prominent role in the Commonwealth, the Cairns Group and the WTO, the co-operation in combating terrorism, the Kimberley Process regarding diamonds, the Landmine Treaty, the issue of Illicit Trade in Small Arms, the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances and her visible presence at International Conferences in South Africa, including the recent World Parks Congress and the World Roads Congress, demonstrate this country's genuine commitment to respond to the challenges facing poor countries, especially Africa.

We are keen to continue to work with you to promote the critically important objective of peace in conflict areas around the world and especially in such African countries as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Burundi, Liberia and the Cote d'Ivoire, as well as in the Middle East, including Palestine, Israel and Iraq. The process of globalisation emphasises the need for an inclusive and responsive multilateral system of governance, with the UN at its apex. We look forward to working with you to respond to all the challenges that confront the multilateral system.

We salute you, Prime Minister, for your spirit of ubuntu and solidarity in forging links from as far away as the Northwest Territories, the Prairies and the Arctic, to Africa. One day we will be able to say that we have a prosperous and peaceful Africa because we had among us, a warm-hearted and generous friend called Jean Chretien.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Please rise and join me in a toast to the good health of Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Madame Chretien and to the enduring and deep friendship between the wonderful people of Canada and South Africa. To your good health, and may you be blessed with success and joy in your retirement!

I thank you.