

## **Speech on Accepting his Election as President of The Republic of South Africa**

14 June 1999

National Assembly, Cape Town

Madam Speaker,  
President of the Constitutional Court,  
Leaders of political parties,  
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,  
Comrade Nelson Mandela,  
Ambassadors, High Commissioners and other members of the diplomatic corps,  
Our international guests,  
Fellow South Africans;

Today, with the swearing in of the members of the National Assembly, we began the process of constituting our country's second democratic national parliament

Today, with the election of the President of the Republic, we commenced the process leading to the formation of our country's second democratic national government.

The simplicity of the procedures in this House has disguised the profound importance of their outcomes with regard to the future of our country.

None in our country or anywhere else in the world can, with any justification, question the fact that this House holds within its walls the legitimate, true and freely chosen representatives of the people of South Africa.

None in our country or anywhere else in the world can, with any justification, question the fact that the Government that will be composed of tribunes drawn from this House will be a government of the people of South Africa.

The President of the Constitutional Court has presided over our proceedings, to affirm the supremacy of the Constitution and the illegality of arbitrary rule.

Here the separate powers, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary sit cheek by jowl, affirming their individual identities, while, simultaneously, confirming their cohesion within one system of governance and, therefore, the integrity of one democratic state.

Present in the House today are also the Premiers-designate, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and other judges, the National Director of Public Prosecutions, the Commanders and Heads of our country's security organs.

We also have Heads of Government Departments, the state corporations and statutory bodies. Also present are traditional, religious, business, trade union, community and other leaders of our people, including the first President of our democratic government, Nelson Mandela.

If all of us stand tall today, as all of us surely do, it is only because we are borne aloft by the firm hands of the ordinary people of our country.

As they did in '94, in '99, these masses have confirmed that all they had been saying through the generations was given peace a chance!

All they had been saying was - give us, the people, the chance freely to determine the future of our country!

All they had been saying was - give a chance for the curtains to part, so that we can see the world beyond, the world of progress and human dignity, in a country which truly belongs to all who live in it, both black and white, both women and men!

If all of us stand tall today, as all of us surely do, it is only because we are borne aloft by the firm hands of ordinary people of our country who, through the generations, have said all they want is peace, progress and liberty.

If all of us stand tall today, as all us surely do, it is only because we are born aloft by the firm hands of the ordinary people of our country who fought for generations to make '94 and '99 possible, who gave birth to guaranteed the democratic system which has enabled us to be here today.

If all of us stand tall today, as all of us surely do, it is only because these masses carry us high, convinced that we will not hold them in contempt.

They have put us in the positions all of us hold because they are convinced we will serve their interests, faithfully, honestly, to the best of our abilities.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to congratulate all members of this National Assembly, both old and new, on your election to serve in this House as tribunes of the people.

Because you are here by virtue of the will and the sacrifices of the people, you have a special responsibility, over the new five years, actually to serve the people faithfully, honestly and to the best of your abilities.

Among other things, this will require that the necessary measures are taken to enable the Honourable Members to spend more time with their constituents, as a defining feature of our democracy which we wish to be a participatory system

Throughout the election campaign the people showed great interest in the issues which the political parties raised. At the same time they showed a willingness themselves to participate in confronting the challenges facing our country.

To help address both these issues and further entrench the democratic system in our country, we would urge the Members of Parliament to reach out more regularly to the electorate.

We are, of course, also conscious of the fact that as in the last parliament, you will be fundamental to the process of the transformation of our country.

The demands on your time will therefore be great, but I am certain that building on the experience of the last five years, we will be able to plan so that everything that needs to be done is done. Similarly, the executive will have to work in a manner which strengthens the links between itself and the people. Among other things, this would provide the Government with the opportunity to assess, directly from the people, whether its policies are producing the intended results.

Any isolation of the Government from the people would be inconsistent with the democratic system we seek to build.

Again building on our experience of the last five years, we will have to improve the interaction between the executive and the legislature to ensure that both branches of our system of governance are able

effectively to carry out their work as defined in the Constitution while contributing to the enrichment of our democracy.

Congratulations to the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker on their election to the high positions they hold. I am certain they will continue to discharge their responsibilities with the wisdom, dignity and fairness required of their posts.

Finally, let me thank all the Honourable Members of the National Assembly for the confidence you have shown in me by entrusting me with the responsibility of President of the Republic.

I am aware that the millions of our people expect that we will move faster in pursuit of the goal of a better life for all.

Equally, I am aware of the negative consequences of any failure to move forward faster in a credible and sustained fashion.

Many of the problems we face require the greatest possible unity among ourselves as South Africans so that we use our massed strength for the benefit of the country as a whole.

And yet all of us are aware that our country continues to be divided along racial and other lines and is, therefore, that much more difficult to unite around common objectives.

The new Presidency will have to focus on all these matters, in the interests of the country as a whole.

I am very pleased that I can count on the support of this House. And we will, ourselves, strive to maintain regular contact with yourselves.

Once more, thank you very much and best wishes to you all