

Statement at The Millennium 2000 Media Launch

3 September 1999

Master of Ceremonies

The door into another millennium is about to open. As it does, we are called upon to think up signs to guide us along the road to the future, to sketch a landscape in which to act out our collective dream and to fabricate a plan to deliver us from the consequences of our human weaknesses.

We are proud to say that, as a people, at the foot of the African continent, we are now full participants in the affairs of the human race.

We have begun to emerge, as if in tandem with the new millennium, into a nation confident of itself, aware of its immense possibilities and prepared to do extraordinary things to attain the goal that comes from creating a better quality of life for all.

Thus it is fitting that the Millennium 2000 Trust in partnership with the SABC is spearheading millennial activities and celebrations at this pivotal point in our history to showcase the resilience, talents and cultures of the people of our country and our continent.

We are moving into a century in which our priorities must be an end to the poverty of our people, a century in which the divisions of the past must truly cease to exist.

As we reconstruct South Africa and reclaim the whole country for all, we break down all the divisions and attitudes of the past, freeing everyone from the last vestiges of oppression.

The emerging century must be a century of the African peoples, working together building continental unity. For it is only as we strive towards this unity as the people of the continent that we will release our energies enabling us to create something that is truly great.

It is our task to make the most of our freedom, to entrench it in our new epoch as a fundamental and a permanent feature of our very existence.

It is our task as part of the continental quest to continue to work for democracy in the next century, ensuring that peace and stability prevail throughout the length and breadth of this continent.

We are pleased that the Millennium 2000 Trust and the SABC have forged a national, regional and continental perspective in their vision of the celebrations and the contents of the exciting package of events they are going to present.

That can serve not only to imprint the memory of this moment on all who live through it, and emphatically to make the point that the struggle against underdevelopment, for emancipation, for the renewal of the South African people is inextricably bound with the fate of our region, our continent and the downtrodden of the earth.

Master of Ceremonies,

The challenge facing all sectors of societies: government, artists, historians, educationists, intellectuals, non-governmental organisations, etc. is to contribute to a complete and rounded picture of the millennium celebrations. Certainly that complete and rounded perspective cannot be contained only in political speeches, song, dance, poetry and in the construction of monuments.

An integral element of the celebration is that we should feel the greater need, now more than before, to educate ourselves and the world about what amalgam of historical events has given birth to our collective human experience.

It is only by understanding this that we can be forewarned and forearmed about the challenges that lie ahead in our effort to construct a better world. Only this experience can prepare us to be a nation of sages, statesmen and stateswomen who can inspire others and help solve problems besetting our world.

Through the modern mass media, the world is given minute by minute accounts of the pogroms in Kosovo, the calamity of the earth quake in Turkey, the inferno of the air crash in Buenos Aires, the incessant rattle of the gun fire in the Congo Brazzaville and the human misery in the Cape Flats left by the vicious whirl of the tornado.

All these things are an unfortunate part of experience.

More than ever before, we become aware of the tragedies of our times, the horrors of conflict, the extent of suffering, and the reality of our common destiny.

With this daily bombardment of images from all over the globe, there may be those among us who would rather forget the reasons for the suffering and how to end that suffering. There may also be those who may feel numbed and helpless and rather wish to blot out what they have seen. We believe that instead of succumbing to the temptation of switching channels, instead of thinking only of ourselves, we can and must do all we can to make our world a better place in which to live.

We need to educate ourselves about our own national history. We need to educate ourselves about the reality that we come from centuries of dispossession and resistance, we come from the history of Jan van Riebeeck, Isandlwana, of e-Ncome, of the Anglo-Boer War, of the Voortrekkers, of Bambatha, of February 2nd 1990, of April 1994.

This might be a historical tapestry painted with blood and tears of grief, wines and tears of victory, but it remains still the full canvas of our journey over the centuries.

The challenge to our communicators, our artists, our linguists, is to ensure that we celebrate in all our languages and develop ways in which our languages can, through the process, further grow and flourish so that our experience can be recorded in many different ways, many different voices, contributing to a national convention without anyone of us feeling we are not part of the collective experience.

Master of Ceremonies,

I thank you for the opportunity to be here at the SABC to help give meaning to the Media Launch and help take these events closer to the imagination of the people. This media launch should help to give added impetus to a sustained campaign of education and information.

We make the point about a sustained campaign partly because, in as much as the year 2000 is unmistakably the target year of major celebrations, the fact is that the calendar millennium will in reality begin on 1 January 2001.

This reality presents us with an extended period of celebration and education.

We also take this opportunity to call upon the business sector to support the effort of the South African Millennium Trust and the SABC to make this period a memorable time to the people of our country.

The sustained period of partnership between the business sector and the Millennium Trust is rich with possibilities for everybody who will join the partnership.

We are also pleased that this initiative will help, among other things, to raise resources in order to attend to the plight of, and to empower the children and the disabled as well as to preserve our heritage, promote our environment and consciously water the tree of peace in our land.

This project will add value to our task of forging our nationhood and to display to other nations of the world, as well as to ourselves, our capacity to give to humanity what is proudly the product of the composite effort of all our people.

All the data of human experience is within our reach, let us use it to build the high road to destiny.

It is the data that will help us "think up the signs, sketch the landscape, fabricate a plan in order to invent, once more, the reality of this world".

When we talk of the African Renaissance, there are those even within our country, who accuse us of being happy-go-lucky dreamers with a fertile sense of humour.

But how can we build the high road to a better life without some form of a dream, without some form of a vision. Don't dreams ignite a little spark within us towards longing, towards creativity, which opens the whole universe as a theatre where nothing is impossible?

Dreams are those little things on to which we need to put flesh, colour and light and turn them into visions, which become the reality of our existence.

We believe the millennium celebration is one such big spark, which springs from our common aspiration as citizens of the world for everything that is good and life enhancing.

For once the millennium experience will answer the noble question by the poet, Walt Whitman who asked:

"Are all nations communing? Is there going to be but one heart to the globe?"