

Statement at the State Dinner in Rwanda

19 October 2000

President of the Republic of Rwanda, General Paul Kagame,
Prime Minister Bernard Makuza,
Honourable Ministers,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,
Distinguished Guests,

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to President and Madame Kagame, Prime Minister and Madame Makuza, the Rwanda Government and indeed the Rwandan people for the warm reception and welcome with which you received the South African delegation to your country.

My visit to your country today, the first Official Visit by the South African Head of State also affords us the opportunity to reciprocate numerous visits by Your Excellency, President Kagame to South Africa when he was Vice President and Minister of Defence of Rwanda.

Whilst your past visits to South Africa related mainly on ways of resolve Rwanda's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conflict, I wish to point out that my visit here today is not concerning political conflicts. Rather, it comes at a critical time when our relations are not only defined in terms of finding ways to resolve conflicts in our regions, but also to explore other ways to expand our countries' trade and economic relations.

Most of us gathered here this evening are aware of the unfortunate experiences of inhumanity that the people of Rwanda and South Africa went through at the hands of unjust and repressive regimes, the political tragedies our people suffered, and which resulted in millions of lives being lost, and the reconstruction challenges our countries faced with.

Whilst many of us may already remember the historic dawn of a new era, South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994, at about the same time, a gloom chapter in our Beloved Continent, one of the greatest tragedies since the Second World War befell this beautiful country – Rwanda.

South Africa has evolved through the freedom struggle, through transition to democracy and now in the reconstruction and development processes.

Your country too, has evolved through the struggle against repression, gross human rights violations, ethnic intolerance and prejudice, and now in the transition phase to true democracy and the reconstruction and development.

I am particularly pleased that by the time we (South African delegation) leave this country, we would have concluded a number of important agreements with the aim to boost our existing economic and to reaffirm our sound political relations.

I am convinced that the establishment of a fully functioning South Africa Embassy in your country, to be opened early next year, represent a testimony to the expanding ties between our countries, and will also help to further promote co-operation and better access to each other.

The South African government, business community and people are indeed looking forward to working with you in ensuring that your undertakings to rebuild and defeat socio-political and economic underdevelopment are met.

We look forward to working with your government and the people of Rwanda in ensuring that the African community, the international community, particularly the rich develop states commit and increase their focus on the development challenges facing us (developing countries).

Recognising a number of prospects for partnership between us, among other things, in trade and investment, scientific and technical exchanges and on the promotion and protection of natural resources and energy, I firmly believe my visit here is surely to yield positive results to our benefit.

In conclusion, Your Excellency, President Paul Kagame, I wish to re-extend to you, to your government and people of Rwanda our sincerest gratitude for inviting us to your country. It is indeed a great pleasure to visit Rwanda and to know that out here there are millions of friends (Rwandan people) who are prepared to join in our resolve to tackle development challenges that are facing all humanity.

Thank you for your willingness to be part of the community of nations united by a common resolve to build a better life for all, committed to contribute what you can to ensure a more equitable international political and economic order, which shall address the aspirations of billions of people across the globe.

I would now like to propose a toast to President and Mrs Kagame and to the strengthening of the ties of friendship that binds our countries.

To President and Madame Kagame, the Rwandan people and our continued friendship.

I thank you