

STATEMENT OF DEPUTY PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEBATE ON  
THE BUDGET VOTE OF THE OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,  
JUNE 3, 1998**

Madame Speaker,  
Honourable Members of the National Assembly:

Our Constitution enjoins the President of the Republic to "promote the unity of the nation and that which will advance the Republic."

In that context, we would like to devote this intervention on the budget of the Office of the Deputy President further to reflect on the matter of national unity and reconciliation which we started discussing last week.

As the Honourable Members are aware, our mass media has, quite correctly, also joined this discussion.

Accordingly, and with apologies to the Members who have read these opinions, I would like to quote some of the editorial comment which has appeared in the newspapers since Friday.

In its issue of June 1, "The Citizen" wrote:

"Thabo Mbeki has grossly oversimplified the divisions in South Africa by talking about two nations: rich whites and poor blacks. In doing so, he has not helped foster the reconciliation he purports to be striving for. If anything, he has set down a marker, showing a clear distinction between the mainly conciliatory approach of President Mandela and his own brand of Africanism which highlights racial differences... The overall impact of his message has been to cast a damper on the prospects of reconciliation... But Mr Mbeki especially asked for time to be set aside in Parliament where he could disseminate his negative message. Considering that Parliament has a large volume of work to get through, his was an unnecessary and fruitless intervention. It will take more than that for the poor to believe he is their champion."

The "Cape Argus" wrote on... June 1st:

"As Mbeki pointed out, in seeking to change this historic imbalance, all in South Africa have a duty to make a contribution, especially relatively affluent whites. But Mr Mbeki and his Government also have a duty: to recognise the limitations of what can reasonably be contributed by whites, and to recognise the obligation which falls on the Government to utilise and nurture that contribution with wisdom and good leadership... One way is to accept that opposition parties in South Africa which, more because of our contorted history than their own inclinations, happen to speak for the relatively wealthy, and have a democratic right and obligation to represent the interests of those who support them..."

The "Beeld" said on May 30th:

"From a cynical point of view, one would say this debate demonstrated the importance of reconciliation to the person in the street and that it is too important to be left to the politicians whose job is to differ rather than to seek common ground... In this process, politicians are trapped in their own corners, with their starting point being mutual accusation and self exculpation. If this tendency persists, with no one moving closer to the other end the end result in all likelihood will be the explosion of which Mr Mbeki warned... Only if there is genuine understanding in both "nations" for each other's progress and suffering, ideals

and fears, can there be hope in the country, with all its nations and interest groups, of being able to address its problems in a common effort."

On May 31st, the "Sunday Times" said:

"Deputy President Thabo Mbeki's speech in Parliament on Friday on reconciliation has launched an important and long overdue debate on South Africa's racial divide... To heal the deep divides in our society, we will need a sustained focus on breaking the stereotypes that underlie racial tension. Opposition parties need to ask themselves what they are doing to break these stereotypes... Business must ask what it is doing to break racial stereotypes about the economy. Affirmative action window dressing and carping about declining standards must give way to a real effort to remove the real, if somewhat crude, suspicion that the South African economy is still all about rich whites who have made their profits at the expense of poor blacks... Mbeki... needs to ask himself what he is doing to defuse racial hostility in his speeches and to produce those all-important public gestures that speak of a single united nation... The government needs to recognise (the challenge of job creation) by jettisoning every piece of legislation - including some of its cherished labour laws - that impede job creation. More than that, Mbeki and the ruling ANC need to make sure that government works."

"Rapport" of May 31 commented:

"(Mr Mbeki) again confirmed that his main priority as an African is ending poverty among the black masses, and no one should hold it against him since the millions of black voters, still living in terrible conditions, voted the ANC into power and Mr Mbeki and the ANC are dependent on their vote... However, nation building and reconciliation will remain a dream for so long as crime persists and white farmers are killed day in and day out and week after week by blacks... Naturally, the government does not have the necessary funds to do everything that has to be done, but surely government should ask the question on how much of the available funds are spent well and how much is lost due to mismanagement and corruption... The only definite way of ensuring the upliftment of the blacks is by creating more jobs through economic growth... The ANC is at loggerheads with its alliance partners regarding the macro-economic policy and serious violent crime remains a deterrent to potential investors..."

"The Sunday Independent" commented on May 31st:

"The parliamentary debate on reconciliation on Friday was a refreshing indication that our elected representatives are able to rise above political point-scoring when it comes to matters affecting the very survival of our delicate emerging democracy... This newspaper has consistently argued that a national forum - similar to the Codesa that produced South Africa's political compromise - is needed to reach a national consensus on how to fund the developmental challenge. The already heavily taxed private sector would clearly need to take a central role in such an initiative."

"Business Day" wrote in its own editorial on June 2nd:

"But what is also striking about Mbeki's speech is its exclusive focus on the duties of whites - there is no mention of the growing black business, professional and political elite, of which he is a member. A schizophrenic attitude may be observed in governing circles on this issue: sacrifices are demanded from whites while black businessmen are encouraged to enrich themselves without a word being uttered about their social responsibilities... A socially responsible black elite, and a government that cracks down, regardless of race, on all freeloading, incompetence and graft, are also a vital part of the equation."

Again, we must express our appreciation for the serious responses of the editors as reflected in these editorial extracts.

But it is also necessary that we return to the reality of the South Africa of two nations to which we referred.

Accordingly, let us restate some of the stark truths which define our common South Africa.

According to the Report on "Poverty and Inequality in South Africa" issued only a few weeks ago, 61 per cent of the Africans are poor with the figure among Whites being 1 per cent. The figures for Coloureds and Indians are 38 and 5 per cent respectively.

In 1993, 59 per cent of the national income accrued to the 13 per cent who are white, with the figure for Africans who were 76 per cent of the population being 29 per cent, representing a white-black disparity of 11.8 to 1.

In 1995, while 50 per cent of white households had after tax income of R60 000 per annum, only 6 per cent of African households enjoyed the same standard of living.

93 per cent of the unemployed poor are African.

Of those who are employed but earn less than R1000 a month, 42 per cent are African while 4 per cent of whites fall into this category.

If we speak about the quality of life more broadly, the same basic feature of two nations emerges. For example, 85 per cent of white households have a telephone line compared to 14 per cent for African households.

The infant mortality rate for whites was 7.3 per 1000, and 54.3 for Africans, this being the same as Zimbabwe and Kenya.

As those who seek a proper understanding of the serious problem of crime and understand the relationship between poverty and crime would know, Africans are 20 times more at risk from death through murder, while, in 1995, 95 per cent of reported rapes were of African women.

We must also consider these crime statistics bearing in mind that in 1996, 75 per cent of all police stations were in historically white areas.

A point has also been made about the place and role of the black elite.

Again, it is necessary to get the facts right.

The introductory remarks to the Employment Equity Bills say, among other things:

"In the three-year period to 1997, the number of black senior managers increased by 2,3 per cent, with a paltry 1,6 per cent among middle managers."

It goes further to say, drawing on a 1997 survey of the Public Service:

"Whites (who are 21 per cent of the public service) are 62 per cent of management... The survey found that the percentage of Africans in senior management, at 47 per cent, was just above that of whites who stood at 43 per cent."

In figures published in September 1997, the "breakwater Monitor" of the University of Cape town Graduate School of Business, covering virtually the entire South African economy, stated that 87,43 per cent of management was white, while Africans occupied 6,18 per cent of management positions and blacks as a whole, 12,57 per cent.

With regard to the issue of black business, McGregor Information Services puts the percentage of market capitalisation on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange under "black control" at 10,3 per cent as at February 1998.

The organisations falling under this category are described as those "where the predominant number of individuals is black" with sufficient directors to veto or approve a motion at a board meeting."

Whatever our views about the figures given, let us nevertheless accept the figure that when we talk of black business at this level of the economy, we speak of 10 per cent of national wealth, as well as black participation in management to the tune of 13 per cent of the cadre of managers in the country.

Undoubtedly, these figures represent an improvement on the past, but also illustrate the reality of the two nations of which we spoke.

We have given these statistics to say that the fact of the gross racial disparities in our country is not the creation of the fertile imagination of an individual, who is driven by a desire to be nasty in order to gain political advantage.

It helps nobody, except those who do not want change, to argue that the difference in income between a senior black manager and an unskilled black worker is as high as the difference in income between an equivalent senior white manager and an unskilled black worker, and therefore that, like many other countries, we are now faced with the challenge of class differentiation rather than the racial differentiation which is the heritage of white minority rule.

During the debate last Friday, the Honourable Tony Leon posed a question as to whether some of the remarks I made constituted a threat and, I suppose, an attempt at intimidation therefore.

One of the fond slogans of China during the Mao years was - "let a hundred flowers bloom! Let a hundred schools of thought contend!"

Given the complexity of the issues we have to address, I would like to believe that we too face the challenge of allowing a hundred flowers to bloom and a hundred schools of thoughts to contend!

Responding to the Honourable Melanie Verwoerd's appeal to all of us to listen and to hear, we must also learn to allow ourselves to speak to one another.

The question we posed - what happens to a dream deferred! - was an inquiry which had to be made. The menacing vision it might evoke is not a fault of the questioner, but is inherent to the social conditions which gives birth to the question.

Let none of us pretend that the debate about change will be capable of being handled in the manner of a cosy chat around a bountiful dinner table.

Because of the nature of what we have to do, it will be rough and painful and drive many of us to shout at one another, to curse and use misunderstood and hurtful words that were only meant to soothe, if only they were understood!

Some intellectuals have sought to teach all of us to understand how a person who is white and South African might respond to the national challenges of our day.

What has been said I cannot vouch for but that you and I have to reflect upon it, I do not doubt.

In an article in the "Sunday Independent" Higher Education Supplement of September 15, 1996, David Williams of the University of the Witwatersrand wrote;

"What interests me is the way in which education people are prepared to swallow so readily these legends about (falling) standards."

"I suspect it has nothing to do with medical degrees at all, but is a symptom of a psychosis in white society... It is as if white people feel so deeply threatened they dare not allow themselves hope for the future, because the pain of having it dashed will be too great. So they look everywhere for evidence of decline, in order that they cannot be disappointed."

"Elements of white society to the current vogue, according to which everybody demands that the Government or somebody else other than myself, must do this or the other, David Williams, who is white, concludes his article with the words:

"It is up to the great universities to prove (this army which has lost its morale) wrong. As with many difficult jobs, nobody else is going to do it."

Two intellectuals, both with Ph.D.'s, James M Statman and Amy Ansell have also made their own effort to help us understand the inchoate images that pass through our minds.

In a paper presented at the Second Annual Congress of the Psychological Society of South Africa in September 1996, they write"

"Like the first rumblings of an earthquake, the case of "MW Makgoba versus 13 academics at the University of the Witwatersrand" was profoundly unsettling not simply because it revealed and perhaps heightened the terrible "racial", political and class faults suddenly found lying so close beneath the dominant discursive patina of reconciliatory rainbowism, but more so because in its discovery of a failure of fundamental social consensus even on the question of what was at issue it exposed a clash of seemingly incompatible and perhaps irreconcilable paradigms, discursive systems, or realities."

"Particularly for those who had for so long set the terms of the dominant South African political and social discourse, those used to determining the "public transcript", that such power came to be experienced as the natural order of things, this stark assertion of other realities and other's power threatened to erode a coherent sense of social, psychological and perhaps most fundamentally. of ontological security."

"The Makgoba affair presents a brief instance when conflicts otherwise repressed, hidden, disguised, barely recognised or acknowledged suddenly appear, momentarily revealing the terrifying shape of an alien landscape, a discordant parallel epistemological universe that challenges the basic assumptions of the construction of our world. And like the pathological family system, all collude to quickly deny the forbidden knowledge, to restore the social/psychological mythic reality to its familiar state of covert conflict."

Doctors Statman and Ansell then go on to argue that by July 1996, nine months after "the Makgoba Affair" has burst into the open, it was being "dismissed with a kind of bored weariness as "old news", replaced by excitement about crime and Pagad, the fall of the Rand or Trevor Manuel and the Springboks (itself a nice little example of symbolic conflict."

Then they speak about how the South African Sociological Association virtually ignored the Makgoba affair at its July 1996 annual meeting and write:

" That a sociological congress should choose to systematically ignore what was arguably the most emotive, volatile and contentious conflict of the past year, to itself evidence a kind of social amnesia, is remarkable testimony to the powerful stake of all in maintaining a shared macro discursive consensus..."

"Strewn beneath Desmond Tutu's hoped-for rainbow canopy, the fragmented discursive ruins of the Makgoba affair litter and social landscape. And if in the end the ubiquitous way forward is blocked by such debris, there can be no avoiding these obstacles."

What these authors say is that the repressed, hidden, disguised and barely recognised conflicts of our society will erupt as did the Makgoba affair, into a world which seeks the consensus of incompatible paradigms, in which some came to see their exercise of power as the natural order of things.

The only escape for those who seek the absence of turbulence, and strive to maintain their positions of privilege by stealth, will be the artificial imposition of a social amnesia, until the next conflict emerges above the gentle waves.

I do not believe that anyone of us want to live in this fake and unreal world peopled by ostriches with heads hidden in the sand of the Kgalagadi.

And so, what must we do!

I believe that there are practical steps we can take in the immediate future.

First, all of us, the government, the private sector, the unions and the rest of the non-governmental sector, must combine to ensure that the projected Presidential Job Summit leads to a serious programme of action which will result in increasing the number of newly created jobs.

Among others, I am pleased to inform the House that we are currently involved in detailed and constructive discussions with especially the major players in the private sector, concretely to realise this objective.

Secondly, we must take advantage of the opportunity thrown up by the need for reparations arising from the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. to join in a major effort that will simultaneously address the issues of reparation, reconciliation and sustainable development.

Again, I am happy to inform the House that those we have spoken to in the private sector have responded very well to the proposal that the necessary effort will have to be made to provide the resources to make this possible.

Thirdly, later this year, our religious leadership will convene what they have christened as the "Moral Summit", to address the serious problem of the collapse of moral values in our society, which gives birth to the crime, corruption and immorality which make it so difficult to inspire the millions of our people, both black and white, to respond to the vision encapsulated in the call - "Masakhane"!

The preparation for and the holding of the Summit will provide all of us with the possibility to act together for the moral renewal of our society, without which the noble goals of nation building and reconciliation cannot be achieved.

The fourth point - all of us who lead any constituency among the black people, however big or small, have an obligation to communicate the message that, as much as we were our own liberators, so are we all the architects of our destiny.

Accordingly, we must, each, ask ourselves the question - what have I done to be the architect of that better life for the country and myself! Only a few days ago, African students burnt down offices at the University of Venda. What they were demanding, which, correctly the University administration would not concede, was that the University should give them about R500 000 for a student party, described as "the Freshers' Ball", allow that each student should, on average, have 30 cans of beer at this Ball and readmit to the University University the president of the SRC and a leader of AZASCO who, in four years, had only completed four courses.

The time has come to call and impose a halt to the abuse of freedom in the name of an entitlement, said to arise naturally from our having been the victims of apartheid, especially by those elements among the black elite which have a voice, precisely because they are better off.

Clearly, now, these seek to hijack the sacrifices which millions of ordinary people made to liberate our country for noble purposes, in order to satisfy a seemingly insatiable and morally unbound greed and personal thirst for wealth and individual comfort, regardless of the cost to our society.

In this context, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to express the Government's and my own gratitude for the steps taken by both NAFSOC and FABCOS, after discussion with ourselves, to ensure that their members and the constituency they represent, meet their tax obligations.

Similarly, this I must say, that we felt proud when black medical students stood up to say that they were fully in agreement with the Minister of Health, the Honourable Dr Nkosazana Zuma, and the Government, that they would do community service on completion of their studies.

Fifth, we have to take all necessary steps to transform the machinery of state to ensure that while being lean, it nevertheless serves the people efficiently, effectively and with dedication.

Again, in this regard, as we look forward to an amicable solution of current problems, I would like publicly to recognise the fact of the acceptance by three public sector unions, NEHAWU, SADTU and POPCRU, after discussions with ourselves, of the obligation to act together with the Government to promote the concept of public servants as workers who must be driven by the imperative to serve the people.

Clearly this commitment must be translated into more visible movement forward with regard to the performance of government.

There is a Xhosa expression - ukuthundez'ubityo - to coax along the most emaciated and therefore the weakest ox in a span. As Government, we are ready to live up to this expression - sithundeze ubityo - so that all of us, as South Africans, can pull our weight in pursuit of a common national agenda.

A leader of the NG Kerk writes "the church owes the nation hope!"

Former Generals of the SADF, including Generals Jannie Geldenhuys and George Meiring, write:

"We are patriots. We love our country and its people. We would like to see our country acquire international acknowledgement and status. We respect the Constitution and would like to fulfil our part in keeping it intact... We would like to make our contribution towards conciliation and harmony."

I am inspired by these sentiments and have profound respect for the white and Afrikaner South Africans who have the courage to make them.

In our schools our children are beginning to work and play together. The exceptions are reported in the mass media for one reason only - because they are news, because they are the exceptions and not the rule.

The craftsperson who handles an uncut and unpolished diamond has a vision of what that stone may become, imagination that must bend to the reality of the contours of the given stone. He or she knows that it takes dedicated search for excellence to achieve the final result.

The diamond has true value when it gives life to light and all its faces gleam, when the diversity of its surfaces glitter and sparkle in unison and rejoice in their symmetry and beauty in a multi-faceted unity, such as the South Africa for which we must all strive.

At the end, we must repeat what the "Beeld" said:

"Eers as daar in albei nasies werklike begrip is vir die ander se voorspoed en ellende, ideale en vrese, kan daar hoop wees om die land - met al sy nasies en belangegroepe - se probleme 'n gesamentlike poging aan te pak."

Muito obrigado!