

**Toast remarks in honour of his excellency, the president of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, on the occasion of the state banquet**

Presidential Guest House, Tshwane: 12 December 2006

Your Excellency, President Václav Klaus and Madame Livia Klausová,  
Your Excellency, the Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,  
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,  
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your Excellency, my wife and I are very privileged to extend a warm South African welcome to you, your dear wife and the rest of your delegation. We are very happy that you are here with us because South Africa attaches the greatest importance to the building of close and cordial relations of friendship and mutually beneficial co-operation between our two countries and peoples.

We are indeed very grateful, Mr. President, that you found time to visit us, accompanied by important government and business leaders of the Czech people.

Your visit to our country has served further to cement the friendly relations between our two countries and, once more, confirms our mutual commitment to the strengthening of the partnership between our countries and peoples.

Our substantive and wide-ranging talks this morning and the important agreements we have signed constitute a practical expression of our mutual determination to give real meaning to that partnership.

As South Africans, we share with the people of the Czech Republic the vision and commitment to create strong and prosperous societies underpinned by a vibrant democracy, the rule of law and respect for basic human and peoples rights, not only in our two countries but everywhere else in the world.

Accordingly, Your Excellency, I am certain that we will continue to use our relative strengths to translate this common perspective into reality. I am confident that among other things, the agreements that we signed today will help us to achieve this objective. These, as you know, Your Excellency, are:

- The Agreement on Economic Co-operation;
- The Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation between Chambers of Commerce and Industry South Africa (CHAMSA) and the Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic; and,
- The Letter of Intent on Scientific and Technological Co-operation.

Your Excellency, our two countries have already laid a firm foundation from which to proceed to consolidate our economic relations. The trade figures indicate that South Africa constitutes the biggest trading partner of the Czech Republic in Sub-Saharan Africa, with our country accounting for nearly 40% of your total trade with the region.

One concrete example of the possibility to expand our economic relations, extending beyond trade, is that of the major investment of SABMiller in the Czech Republic, which has created a leading beer producer in Central Europe and the largest exporter of Czech beer, reaching more than 50 countries.

I trust that the interaction between the business leaders who accompanied you and our business people will give a further and significant impulse to the strengthening of our economic relations, affecting both trade and investment.

Further, Your Excellency, we should work together to encourage people-to-people contact, through cultural, scientific, educational and sports exchanges, as well as by promoting two-way tourism between our countries.

Indeed, we are honoured that the Czech Republic, well-known for her sporting prowess, allows her best and famous athletes regularly to train at our Potchefstroom University as they prepare themselves to participate in international sports events.

We are very pleased Your Excellency that we also have the possibility to draw on the store of excellent scholarship that resides within the Czech Republic, to train our own people especially in the important areas of science, technology and engineering.

We are also very encouraged by the work the Czech Republic is doing in Africa, and are confident that you will continue to strengthen your partnership with us so as to give meaning to one of the African Union's objectives of creating a developed and prosperous Africa.

In this regard, I must say that the engagement of the European Union with the development programme of the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), is critical because through this programme, together we can help to accelerate the critical process leading to the renaissance of Africa, ensuring that the millions of Africans on our continent have the possibility to defeat poverty and underdevelopment.

As Your Excellency is aware, three weeks from now, South Africa will take its seat in the UN Security Council for the period 2007-2008 as a non-permanent member. We hope that the Czech Republic will do likewise for the 2008-2009 period.

This emphasises the need for us to intensify our collaboration and partnership at the multilateral level. This we should do, among others, to encourage faster reform of the United Nations so that this important world body becomes a truly democratic forum of all the nations of the world, reflecting the political and other realities of the 21st century. I am also confident that together we will use our membership of the Security Council to strengthen peace and security throughout the world.

Your Excellency, during the difficult days of our struggle against apartheid, the Czech people stood shoulder to shoulder with us, and many South Africans regarded your country as a home away from home. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our friends in the Czech Republic and convey to them, through you, Your Excellency, the message that our people still highly appreciate the fact that the distance between our countries did not deter them from identifying with our struggle.

We therefore say to you, Your Excellency, Madame Klausová, your delegation and the people of the Czech Republic, that you too should regard South Africa as a home away from home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please rise and join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of His Excellency, President Václav Klaus and Madame Livia Klausová and to the warm friendship between the peoples of the Czech Republic and South Africa. To friendship!

Thank you.