

Toast remarks in honour of the President of The Democratic Republic of Congo, Joseph Kabila and Madame Kabila

Tuynhuys, Cape Town, 14 June 2007

Your Excellency, President Joseph Kabila and First Lady of the DRC,
Your Excellencies, Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
The Honourable Presiding Officers of our National Parliament,
The Honourable Premier of the Western Cape Province,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are truly delighted that Your Excellency, your wife and your delegation have honoured us with your important visit. On behalf of the people and government of South Africa, I am privileged to welcome Your Excellency and all our friends from the Democratic Republic of Congo, representing both the public and private sectors.

We would like to take advantage of your presence among us, Your Excellency, to convey our warmest greetings to the wonderful people of the DRC, who have shown immense determination to extricate themselves from more than 40 years of autocracy, wars and the unimaginable looting of the rich resources with which your country is blessed, and thereby crafted a path towards a future that inspires many of us that the regeneration of Africa is not a dream but a living reality.

It is the fervent wish and a united abiding prayer of all of Africa that the DRC, and any country on the continent for that matter, should never again be visited by the misfortunes that have defined the lives of the Congolese people for such a long time.

We are convinced that what the Congolese people have achieved, leading to the advent of democracy, will be sustainable and lead to national reconciliation, permanent stability, increasing prosperity and a better life for all the people of the DRC.

Allow me Your Excellency, on behalf of the Government and fellow South Africans officially to congratulate the Congolese people, under your leadership, for the great victories they have achieved, including the successful 2006 Presidential and parliamentary elections and the subsequent installation of the new government in 2007, with its new programme of action.

Your Excellency, there are a number of similarities between South Africa and the DRC. Our countries consist of societies in transition from turbulent histories. The DRC is at a critical crossroads, similar to that we reached following the historic April 1994 elections, which marked the demise of apartheid and the installation of a democratically elected government. We believe, however, that transitional challenges such as those faced by our two countries are not insurmountable.

As we meet this evening, Your Excellency, no one better enjoins us, albeit posthumously, to pursue our common vision than your own Patrice Lumumba, himself a truly devout freedom

fighter, a great son of Africa and an Esteemed Member of the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo. In one of his famous poems entitled The Dawn in the Heart of Africa, he said:

The dawn is here, my brother! Dawn! Look in our faces,
A new morning breaks in our old Africa.
Ours alone will now be the land, the water, mighty rivers
Poor African surrendered for a thousand years.
Hard torches of the sun will shine for us again
They'll dry the tears in eyes and spittle on your face.
The moment when you break the chains, the heavy fetters,
The evil cruel times will go never to come again.
A free and gallant Congo will rise from black soil,
A free and gallant Congo-black blossom from black seed!

More than forty years after Lumumba told us about 'a new morning (that) breaks in our old Africa', and the 'hard torches of the sun (that) will shine for us again' and 'dry the tears in eyes and spittle on your face, the moment when you break the chains, the heavy fetters', the DRC has risen again, like a phoenix from the ashes.

Ten years ago, when we addressed the US Corporate Council on Africa in Virginia USA, we said: "As Africans, we have a vision, a hope, a prayer about what will come in the end. We see a new Zaire, perhaps with a new name, a Zaire which shall be democratic, peaceful, prosperous, a defender of human rights, an exemplar of what the new Africa should be, occupying the geographic space that it does, at the heart of our Africa.

Much is now written about Zaire. Daily events assume proportions of permanence. The confounding ebbs and flows of social conflict are seen as defining moments.

And yet, as Africans, we would like to believe that we know that, at the end, what all of us will see, thanks to the wisdom of the people of Zaire themselves, is not the heart of darkness, but the light of a new African star."

Today the new African star is a reality!

Your Excellency, our governments launched the South Africa/DRC Bi-National Commission (BNC) in August 2004, as a forum for the exchange of ideas, formalising agreements and serving as an instrument of bilateral co-operation. Since then, our governments have signed well over twenty Agreements. We commit ourselves to do everything we can to ensure the implementation of these Agreements.

Your Excellency, South Africa will continue to do what it can to act in partnership with Your Excellency, the Government and people of the DRC as you respond to the urgent challenges of development.

We will always be ready to work with you in such important national challenges as national reconciliation and post conflict reconstruction and development covering such critical areas as Security Sector Reform (SSR), Institutional Capacity Building, and Economic Development.

We have a duty, among other things, to strengthen our economic relations by enhancing co-operation among our business people and increase trade and investment between our countries, as well as ensuring effective implementation of current and future NEPAD projects, as well as the SADC programmes.

We must work together to improve people-to-people contacts, including through cultural, scientific and educational exchange programmes as well as encouraging two-way tourism.

In thanking you for visiting us, Your Excellency, I would like to say that am certain that your visit to our country will help us to accelerate our advance towards the achievement of these objectives, which will further cement the warm relations that exist between our countries and peoples. We thank you most sincerely for what you have done and are doing to realise this objective, in the interest of both our peoples.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: please rise and join me in a toast to the good health of His Excellency, President Joseph Kabila and the First Lady, and to the ever-lasting friendship, co-operation and partnership between the peoples of the DRC and South Africa. To friendship!

Thank you.