



Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Freedom Day celebrations 2018, Dr Rantlai Petrus Molemela Stadium, Mangaung

Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr Nathi Mthethwa,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Premier of the Free State, Mme Sisi Ntombela,
MECs and Members of the Provincial Legislature,
Your Majesties, Traditional Leaders
Leadership of various political formations,
Leadership of our trade union movement,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are honoured by the warm embrace of the people of the Free State today, on this important day marking our country's liberation.

This is the warmth that for years incubated the many brave freedom fighters of this province.

It is the warmth that enveloped the late Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela during her years of banishment in Brandfort.

This is the province where, more than a century ago, the movement that championed the liberation of our people was born.

It was in this province that the women of Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, Winburg and Jagersfontein in 1913 organised the first anti-pass protest in the country.

For their defiance and for their desire for equality, many of these women were subsequently imprisoned and subjected to hard labour.

Today we are here to celebrate an important day.

On this day 24 years ago, we were able for the first time in our lives to exercise our democratic right to vote as equals before the law for a government of our choice, marking our country's historic transition from the dark period of apartheid oppression to a free and equal society.

It is the day on which our rightful place as a people deserving of respect and dignity was restored, where the humiliation of racial discrimination formally came to an end.

This is the day when the struggles of our forebears, of Ngungunyane, Moshoeshe, Sekhukhune, Bambatha, Dube, Maxeke, Luthuli, Mandela, Sisulu, Tambo, Ngoyi, Mompati and many others were finally vindicated, as the dream for which they sacrificed now became a reality.

With our new democratic constitution embracing equal rights and opportunities for all we ceased to be pariahs in the land of our birth.

We had, at last, an opportunity to build a new and better life for all our people.

Through our democratic constitution and progressive laws, through a concerted programme of social and economic redress, we have made great progress in transforming this country.

Women now exercise significant influence in public life thanks to the Constitution, transformative legislation and other affirmative action measures.

The lives of many poor women have improved through better education, accessible health care and the provision of basic services.

And yet, while we have done much to address the racial and gender distortions of the past, so much more remains to be done.

So many of our people still experience hunger, millions are still unemployed, many still do not have houses, electricity or clean water.

There are still huge gaps in wealth and opportunity between white and black and between women and men.

Therefore, as we celebrate the freedoms we have achieved and the great advances we have made, let us use this Freedom Day to affirm our determination to intensify the struggle for economic freedom for all our people.

Our people cannot be truly free if they do not have jobs, if they do not have an education and if they do not have livelihoods.

We know that the advent of democracy did not automatically heal the divisions of the past.

We must work resolutely to remove the obstacles that still divide our society and strengthen the many ties that bind us together.

Compatriots

We are celebrating this Freedom Day in the centenary year of former President Nelson Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu, our brave and consummate freedom fighters.

Mme Albertina Sisulu was a valiant freedom fighter, who undertook dangerous work in the underground as she mobilised mass formations of the democratic movement.

We must agree with the then Secretary of Justice, who in the 1960s informed the Police Commissioner that Mama Sisulu needed to be watched carefully because she was as politically capable as her jailed husband and very good in organising and oratory.

Through her strong values, humility and commitment to the struggle for democracy, Mama Sisulu remains an inspiration to us as we navigate the challenges of building a society that is responsive to the needs of the people.

It was Madiba who cautioned us not to be captivated by the allure of the achievement of freedom.

Though we have climbed a great hill, he said, we dare not linger, because there are many more hills to climb.

Though we have achieved a constitutional democracy in which all have equal rights, we dare not linger, because we still have much to do to build an inclusive economy that serves all our people.

We cannot deny that we have made tremendous strides in improving the economic participation of black and women South Africans.

We have a middle class that has grown significantly.

Despite the great disparities in opportunity, we have emerging a new generation of black entrepreneurs, managers, professionals and artisans.

The considerable rise over the last two decades in the number of learners in school and the number of students enrolled in higher education places South Africa in a strong position to achieve inclusive growth and development.

We have done much to reduce poverty through social grants, access to health care and the provision of houses to the poor.

However, if we are to end poverty, then we need to create much broader economic opportunities.

We need to grow our economy and create decent work.

We need to attract investment on a much greater scale and we need to improve the education and skills of our people.

At the same time, we need to transform the ownership, control and management of the economy so that black South Africans and women are fully represented and equally benefit.

In short, we need to intensify radical economic transformation.

It is for these reasons that, as we celebrate Freedom Month, we are embarking on an ambitious

new investment drive that aims to draw local and international investors into those parts of the economy that have the greatest potential for job creation.

In preparation for an Investment Conference later in the year, we are sending out four special envoys on investment to meet with potential investors in major centres across the world.

We are working to make our economy more competitive and more attractive to investors.

We are sustaining our massive investment in infrastructure, building roads, bridges, railway lines and ports, as well as schools, hospitals, colleges and clinics.

We are fixing our state owned enterprises, ensuring that they can meet essential social and economic needs more efficiently and cost effectively.

We are using industrial incentives, special economic zones and local procurement requirements to expand our manufacturing capacity.

In support of this, we are working to deracialise our economy by strengthening our broad-based black economic empowerment policies, investing in black industrialists, opening up markets for new black entrants through more effective competition policies, and using the buying power of the state to support black business.

We have made important progress in improving the conditions of the working poor.

Parliament is currently finalising legislation so that we can implement a national minimum wage for the first time in our country's history, fulfilling a demand made at the Congress of the People in 1955.

This is a great victory for the workers of this country and is a tribute to the social partners who worked so hard to make it a reality.

Some people have argued that the starting minimum wage of R20 an hour is not a living wage.

They are correct.

Some argue that the national minimum wage will not end income inequality.

They too are correct.

But what the national minimum wage does provide is a firm and unassailable foundation – which is agreed to by all social partners – from which to advance the struggle for a living wage.

We must remember that the introduction of the national minimum wage will increase the income of over 6 million working South Africans.

A wage increase of that size and that extent is unprecedented in our history, and we must

celebrate it.

The national minimum wage is like a great hill that we have climbed, but we dare not linger, because there are still many more hills to climb.

To advance radical economic transformation, we are working to empower the youth of our country through education, skills development and workplace experience.

This year, we have introduced free higher education for students from poor households, which will have a profound and lasting impact on the distribution of skills and opportunities in society.

Together with an accessible and quality basic education system, this measure promises to break the cycle of poverty.

It means that millions of South Africans born into poverty will, through education, be able to live comfortable and secure lives as adults.

We are working also to ensure that young people who graduate from our schools, colleges and universities are ready for the world of work.

Together with our social partners in business and labour, we recently launched the Youth Employment Service programme, which aims to provide work experience opportunities for a million unemployed young people over the next three years.

Economic freedom means that the land that was taken from black South Africans needs to be returned.

We are committed to accelerate the redistribution of land, both in urban and rural areas, to ensure that poor South Africans are able to own land and have the means to work it.

Among the measures we will use to accelerate redistribution is that of expropriation without compensation where it is necessary and justified.

We call on all South Africans to be part of the broad process of consultation on how we should implement this decision in a way that makes redistribution meaningful and which contributes to a stronger economy, greater agricultural production and improved food security.

This is a measure that aims to extend property rights to all South Africans.

Fellow South Africans,

This is a day on which the dream of a free Africa was brought ever closer to realisation – as South Africa, one of the last colonial outposts on the continent, tasted freedom.

It was a culmination of a dream for which many in this country, on this continent and across the entire world sacrificed.

We remain grateful for the solidarity and assistance that we received from the international community, and are determined that we ourselves should be champions of democracy, peace and human rights across the world.

We will use our leadership and membership in SADC, BRICS, the G20, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to forge a new world order founded on equality, dignity and mutual respect.

Our democratic breakthrough was a huge victory for this continent and the freedom-loving nations of the world.

The struggle for liberation consumed the boundless energy and extraordinary talents of our people.

Now we have an opportunity to put our remarkable capabilities as a people to the advancement of human progress.

Our duty, as custodians of this democracy, is to direct all our resources to conquer poverty, joblessness, racial hatred, anarchy, violence and lawlessness, illiteracy and idleness and place our country on a path of growth, development and lasting freedom.

I thank you.

Issued by:
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