



Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of the Presidential Inauguration

Your Majesties, Kings and Queens,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Chairperson of SADC and President of Namibia, Dr Hage Geingob,
Former President Thabo Mbeki and Mrs Mbeki,
Former President Kgalema Motlanthe and Mrs Motlanthe,
Former President FW de Klerk and Mrs De Klerk,
All former Heads of State and Government,
Chairpersons of the African Union and African Union Commission,
Distinguished representatives of respective countries and of international organisations,
Speaker of the National Assembly,
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces,
The Chief Justice of the Republic,
Members of the newly elected Parliament
Premiers, MECs and Mayors,
Members of Parliament,
Leaders of political parties,
Religious and traditional leaders,
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Veterans of our struggle,
Distinguished Guests,
Fellow South Africans,

I stand before you having just taken the oath to be President of our beautiful country South Africa.

I am humbled by the trust you have bestowed upon me, aware of the challenges our country faces, but also alive to the fact that our people are filled with hope for a better tomorrow.

We gather here on the day that the people of our continent celebrate the unity of Africa.

It is a day of friendship, solidarity and cooperation.

It is a day on which we reaffirm our common commitment to an Africa that is at peace, that is prosperous and that promises a better existence for its people.

As South Africa, we are honoured and deeply humbled by the presence here of leaders from across the African continent.

Your Excellencies,

We are profoundly grateful to you for choosing to celebrate Africa Day among us, giving further poignancy to South Africa's transformation from a pariah state to a full and valued member of the family of African nations.

We also recognise with appreciation those countries from other continents who have joined us today.

We remain eternally grateful to all nations represented here for the sacrifices and tireless contributions by your people and governments to the liberation of our land.

Today, we reaffirm our determination to work with our sisters and brothers across the continent to realise the African Union's vision of Agenda 2063.

To build the Africa that we all Africans want.

To forge a free trade area that stretches from Cape Town to Cairo, bringing growth and opportunity all African countries.

To silence the guns and let peace and harmony reign.

Today, we declare that our progress as South Africa depends on – and cannot be separated from – the onward march of our beloved continent Africa.

Esteemed Guests,
Fellow South Africans,

Twenty-five years have passed since that glorious morning on which Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was sworn in as the first President of a democratic South Africa.

In the passage of that time, our land has known both seasons of plenty and times of scarcity.

Our people have felt the warm embrace of liberty.

They have rejoiced at the affirmation of their essential and equal humanity.

They have found shelter and sustenance.

They have found opportunity and purpose.

As the shackles of oppression have fallen away, they have felt their horizons widen and their lives improve in a myriad ways.

But they have also known moments of doubt.

They have felt the cold shadow of a past so cruel and iniquitous that it has at times threatened to eclipse the very achievement of their hard-won freedom.

Despite our most earnest efforts, many South Africans still go to bed hungry, many succumb to diseases that can be treated, many live lives of intolerable deprivation. Too many of our people do not work especially the youth.

In recent times, our people have watched as some of those in whom they had invested their trust have surrendered to the temptation of power and riches.

They have seen some of the very institutions of our democracy eroded and resources squandered.

The challenges that we face are real.

But they are not insurmountable.

They can be solved. And we are going to solve them.

In the face of all these challenges our people have remained resolute, resilient, unwavering in their desire for a better South Africa.

Through the irrefutable power of the ballot on 8 May, South Africans declared the dawn of a new era.

They have chosen hope over hopelessness, they have opted for unity over conflict and divisions.

As we give effect to their mandate, we draw comfort from the knowledge that that which unites us is far, far more powerful and enduring than that which divides us.

Despite our differences, despite a past of conflict and division and bitterness, despite the fierce political contestation among 48 political parties in recent months, we share the same hopes and fears, the same anxieties and aspirations.

We all want our children to have lives that are better than our own, to have work that is dignified and rewarding.

We are bound together by our determination that never again shall the adversities of our past be visited on the people of this land.

This is a defining moment for our young nation.

Today is the choice of history.

It is a time for us to make the future we yearn for.

It is through our actions now that we will determine our destiny.

South Africans want action and not just words and promises.

And there will be action.

It is through our actions now that we will give form to the society for which so many have fought and sacrificed and for which all of us yearn.

All South Africans yearn for a society defined by equality, by solidarity, by a shared humanity.

They yearn for a society in which our worth is determined by how we value others.

It is a society guided by the fundamental human principle that says: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Motho ke motho ka batho.

Muthu ndi muthu nga vhangwe vhathu.

Munhu yi munhu yi vanhu.

Our Constitution – the basic law of our land – continues to guide our way even at the darkest hour.

As a nation we therefore can no longer abide the grave disparities of wealth and opportunity that have defined our past and which threaten to imperil our future.

It is our shared will – and our shared responsibility – to build a society that knows neither privilege nor disadvantage.

It is a society where those who have much are willing to share with those who have little.

It is a society where every person, regardless of race or sex or circumstance, may experience the fundamental necessities of a decent, dignified life.

Today, let us declare before the esteemed witnesses gathered here that such a South Africa is possible.

Let us declare our shared determination that we shall end poverty in South Africa within a generation.

Let us declare that when we gather to celebrate the 50th year of our freedom there shall no longer be any person in this land who is unable to meet their basic needs.

That there should be no child who goes hungry.

Every school child will be able to read, and every person who wants to work will have a reasonable opportunity to find employment.

As we make this bold declaration, we are aware of the depth of the challenges we must confront.

We are aware of the debilitating legacy of our past, nor the many difficulties of the present.

To achieve the South Africa we want will demand an extraordinary feat of human endeavour.

The road ahead will be difficult.

We will have to use our courage, wisdom and perseverance to achieve the South Africa we want.

It will require an ambition that is rare.

Like our forebears who gathered so many years ago on a piece of veld in Kliptown to declare that the people shall govern, let us aspire to a future beyond the probable.

Let our reach extend beyond our grasp.

Let our gaze stretch beyond the horizon.

Let us – as we embark on this new era – mobilise our every resource and summon our every capability to realise the vision of our founding mothers and fathers.

Let us forge a compact – not merely as business and labour, not as those who govern and those who are governed – but as citizens and patriots of this great nation, free and equal and resolute.

Let us forge a compact for growth and economic opportunity, for productive lands and viable communities, for knowledge, for innovation, and for services that are affordable, accessible and sustainable.

Let us forge a compact for an efficient, capable and ethical state, a state that is free from corruption, for companies that generate social value and propel human development, for elected officials and public servants who faithfully serve no other cause than that of the public.

We must be a society that values excellence, rewards effort and hard work and rejects mediocrity.

We must be a society that values its young people by creating a conducive environment for them to gain skills and be productively employed to develop our country.

Let us celebrate the great strides we have made – demonstrated so clearly in the incoming Parliament – to raise the prominence and contribution of women in public life.

Let us work together to fundamentally, and forever, change the relations of power between men and women.

Let us end the dominion that men claim over women, the denial of opportunity, the abuse and the violence, the neglect, and the disregard of each person's equal rights.

Let us build a truly non-racial society, one that belongs to all South Africans, and in which all South Africans belong.

Let us build a society that protects and values those who are vulnerable and who for too long have been rendered marginal.

A society where disability is no impediment, where there is tolerance, and where no person is judged on their sexual orientation, where no person suffers prejudice because of the colour of their skin, the language of their birth or their country of origin.

Let us preserve our natural resources for future generations, as we work with greater purpose to end the human destruction of our world.

On this Africa Day, on the day that our nation enters a new era of hope and renewal, we recall and celebrate that Africa is the birthplace of humanity.

We recall that it was around 100,000 years ago that a small group of some of the first humans set foot beyond the continent.

With them they took a sense of perseverance and a talent for innovation which enabled them to progressively occupy every corner of the world.

Humanity has achieved a great deal over the intervening millennia and all by virtue of talents which evolved in Africa.

Africa is poised once again to rise, to assume its place among the free and equal nations of the world. We must use that innovative talent that originated in Africa to embrace and use the fourth Industrial Revolution to develop Africa and create jobs for the youth and empower the women of our continent.

Africa is poised to realise the vision of Pixley ka Isaka Seme more than a century ago, when he said:

"The brighter day is rising upon Africa.

"Already I seem to see her chains dissolved, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science and religion, reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities.

"Her Congo and her Gambia whitened with commerce, her crowded cities sending forth the hum of business, and all her sons [and daughters] employed in advancing the victories of peace – greater and more abiding than the spoils of war."

It is to this brighter day that we now turn our eyes, to a vista rich with the hues of hope and promise.

It is you, the people of South Africa, who have spoken.

With your votes you have placed your confidence and your trust in the men and women who now sit in our sixth democratic Parliament.

These 490 men and women whom you have sent to Parliament seem to have heard the same call that the Lord made to Isaiah when He said: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

They have now said, send us. They have said Thuma Thina.

You have chosen them to safeguard your rights, to improve your lives and to build a country that is united, strong and truly free.

You, the people of South Africa, have sent them, and you have sent me, as your President.

Having taken the oath of office I am saying yes, South Africa Thuma Mina.

And I pledge here today that I will serve you, I will work with you, side by side, to build the South Africa that we all want and deserve.

A new era has dawned in our country.

A brighter day is rising upon South Africa and upon our beloved continent, Africa.

Nkosi Sikelel' Afrika.

I thank you.

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