

AN EXECUTIVE BACKGROUND BRIEFING FOR PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS

## REMARKS BY PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA

### The South African Heads of Mission Conference

11 April 2013

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation and Deputy Ministers, Director-General and senior officials, Excellencies, Heads of Missions,

Good afternoon to you all.

We meet again, to reflect on our important task of strengthening friendship ties between South Africa and the world.

We meet to reflect on our key foreign policy goal, to contribute to building a better Africa and a better world.

Our national hero and pioneer of our foreign relations perspective and strategy, former ANC President, Oliver Reginald Tambo, had this to say about our foreign relations perspective, in his address to the First Congress of the Angolan ruling party, the MPLA in Luanda in 1977.

He stated:

*"We seek to live in peace with our neighbours and the peoples of the world in conditions of equality, mutual respect and equal advantage".*

This is the vision that drives our foreign policy, premised on the philosophy of *ubuntu*.

This is the vision that informed us when the Constitution of the Republic was drafted.

Excellencies,

Freedom Day 2013 Celebrations will be held on 27 April 2013 under the theme *"Mobilising society towards consolidating our democracy and freedom"*.

Freedom Day represents peace, unity, and the restoration of human dignity of all South Africans. It is a reminder of the countless sacrifices made by many of our countrymen and women and a chance to ensure that no one will ever take our hard won freedom for granted.

South Africa has taken many strides away from its past of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of sex, colour and creed.

The country has been steadily moving forward in a direction that reasserts our humanity. In this march towards humanity, a new culture of human rights and a respect for the dignity of the human spirit have become the characteristics of South Africa.

One of the symbolic moments of our exodus from the past was the raising of the new flag in 1994.

That moment aptly affirmed the pride and dignity of an unfolding country and a celebration of humanity. Another was the unveiling of a new Coat of Arms on 27 April 2000 that embraced the collective historical essence of the people of the country.

The 2013 celebrations for Freedom Day and Month take on special significance as the nation prepares for our 20 years of freedom commemoration and celebrations.

As our heads of missions abroad, you will be able to tell the world in celebrations all over, that South Africa is a much better place than it was before 1994.

We are indeed a country that is better off since our democratic elections.

During this month, South Africans will recall the momentous events leading up to 27 April 1994 and reflect on the next 20 years.

We will also have an opportunity to reflect on the kind of South Africa we want to live in, in the next 20 years as outlined in our National Development Plan.

We are therefore in a much better space than we have been in many years, now that we have a long-term plan around which to unite the country.

We are poised to move faster towards achieving the goal of building a truly united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.

We value the partnerships with many partners in all continents in our pursuit of these development goals. We will also continue to prioritise our goals of promoting a just and equitable society worldwide, in international organisations and other spheres.

Therefore our quest for the reform of international financial institutions or the United Nations Security Council is aimed at achieving this equitable order in



international economic and political relations.

More importantly, all our heads of missions should also continue to prioritise the African continent and the promotion of African renewal, development and reconstruction, regardless of where they are stationed.

Contributing to building a better Africa is the central foreign policy goal of the South African government.

It is for this reason that we continue to applaud the election of one of our own, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as Chairperson of the African Union Commission. We will provide all the support possible, to make her succeed.

We are also pleased that all African nations have pledged their support, as part of the collective determination to make the African Union succeed, as we mark 50 years of the OAU/African Union.

Excellencies,

As you are aware, our country plays an important role in global economic and political relations.

This means that we must prioritise communication and the marketing of the country abroad. In this era of globalisation, since information flows like fire and can easily be misinterpreted, our diplomacy cannot afford to neglect public opinion.

We have witnessed this just recently in our country following the tragic event in the Central African Republic, how information gets quickly distorted and rumours and lies easily flourish.

Prioritising communication and marketing is therefore a key strategic goal.

We should build stronger networks with stakeholders such as NGOs, think-tanks, Universities and other civil society structures both at home and abroad.

This is important because economic decisions to invest in, trade with or visit a country are not always made solely on the facts. They are often emotional and based on perceptions.

Compatriots, as we mark Freedom Month, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on all the hard work and your contribution to the achievements that our country has scored since 1994.

In the roles you have played since then, you have contributed to making South Africa a much better place.

Hard work must still continue. We have to ensure that more people have water, electricity, sanitation, decent housing, functional schools, clinics and police stations and other services.

Most importantly, this month we will be celebrating the Constitution of the Republic.

Yesterday, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April we marked 20 years since the brutal assassination of one of our fearless and outstanding freedom fighters, Chris Hani. In his presentation to the first meeting of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa in December 1991, Mr Hani emphasised the importance of drafting a progressive Constitution for the country.

*"Without a new Constitution there can be no peace. Peace must be based on a secure foundation, on a lasting Constitution enjoying overwhelming support of the majority of our people. Such a new Constitution must also provide a framework within which this society can be transformed from a paradise for a small minority for most others to one where all enjoy peace and social justice".*

Thus, our country has a firm foundation in its Constitution and a firm foundation for the next 20 years in the National Development Plan. That is the message we would like you to impart to the world.

We must communicate the beauty and the successes of our country.

We must communicate the beauty of the South African people, who were able to move beyond hatred, pain and divisions and began building a new country and a new society.

We wish you all a happy and successful Freedom Month!

I thank you.

