

# POLITICS TODAY



AN EXECUTIVE BACKGROUND BRIEFING FOR PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS

## DEPUTY PRESIDENT KGALEMA MOTLANTHE'S FAREWELL

### Farewell Speech in The National Assembly, Cape Town

I sincerely thank you for this Farewell Tribute to me today. It is truly humbling to have time set aside for oneself for a Farewell Tribute by as august a House as the National Assembly of our Republic.

At times life seems inscrutably hard to make sense of precisely because one has to study life while still living it.

I wonder whether Charles Lindbergh was moved by the self-same realisation when he memorably remarked that 'Life is like a landscape. You live in the midst of it, but can describe it only from the vantage point of distance'.

Forgive me upfront, therefore, that, since I am still a serving member, albeit for a few days more, I may not be able to lift myself from the spatio-temporal limitations imposed by my formal presence in this House so that I share a retrospective account that may appeal to your sense of history.

In other words my adjacency in time and space to the National Assembly makes any reflection on the historical landscape covering my six year experience all the more difficult.

On an occasion such as this I stand in this house that makes the laws of our land caught up in an ambivalent frame of mind.

After six years of history, I am running the whole gamut of human emotions...from melancholy to elation. Humanity is conditioned to experience emotions attuned to the peculiarities of the moment.

Yet for me right now this is a moment laden with mixed emotions. For one thing, I am disconsolate for parting ways with members of the party I come from, the African National Congress (ANC). You will know that my presence in this House is attributable to the

ANC, which has, for all this time, been my extended family.

As such I stood here about six years back, on ANC platform, in a prospective mood; looking forward to making my own little contribution to the vision that defines our nation. Entailed in this vision was, as still is, the need to consolidate unity, democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism, all of which constitute the strategic goal of post-apartheid South Africa.

On the ticket of the ANC I took oath of office, both as Minister in the Presidency and subsequently, the President of our country.

Both these occasions were of historical moment in various ways.

As the minister I assumed office intent on serving our nation in keeping with the philosophical tenets of the ANC. At the same time, as the President of our Republic, I took office under anomalous circumstances.

This was the time during which our nation, for the first time since the onset of democracy, faced its sternest test. Eight months before the end of the third term of office (of the democratic state) for the sitting President, Honourable Thabo Mbeki, destiny commandeered me to assume the reigns of the Presidency to see the term through.

As the world turned many were beginning to wonder whether this conjuncture signalled the beginning of the end for our nation. Unprecedented, it was a defining moment. This House knows, as do many of us, that there is a standing assumption that our nation is no exception to the sad experience that has befallen many a post-colonial country, not least our continent, Africa.

No sooner had we disarmed Afro-pessimists with a smooth transition to democracy than

this difficult historical period emerged, seen in some quarters as sounding a death knell to our nation.

Those less given to hyperbole saw our country as being on the cusp of a new era, the contours of which, though, were as yet indistinct.

In the event, we proved the doomsayers wrong. But I am losing my bearing. The story does not begin here...

Into these murky conditions of uncertainty thrown up by the unrelenting hand of contingency I was plunged. As it turned out I was, in this epochal task, guided, supported, assisted and encouraged by the ANC.

Instinctually, I would affirm that whatever I managed to help our nation do correctly during those trying times, I did so leaning on the ANC as my pillar of strength. For this, I am eternally grateful.

Yet, I would be insincere if I stood in this House right now and not acknowledged the support that Members of this House as a whole gave me, both as the President of the Republic and later, the Deputy President.

I have always understood our relationship in this House as elected representatives of the people of our country in their diversity in the light of the advice of Joseph Joubert, the French philosopher, that: "The aim of an argument or discussion should not be victory, but progress."

I will submit that largely proceedings in this House lent colour to this conclusion.

Yet, it looks to me that by definition politics, especially Parliamentary politics, is at least partly about self-preservation, to the extent that key players strut and preen themselves

on the political stage, all with the tacit aim of capturing the hearts of the electorate.

This much seems to be a permanent feature of democratic politics across time and space. Happily, while we have not been exceptional to this universal characterisation, we have also been able to hold on to the purpose for which we are here...i.e. to serve our people.

While bare-knuckle engagements were par for the course, with bruising exchanges that went beyond the pale not uncommon, I have found this House to be an epicentre of rational and level-headed discourse that left many bloodied but unbowed. I dare say, at the end, we are all the richer for it.

Our system of democracy is ultimately about creating a multi-vocal society, thriving on irreconcilable ideological differences, none of which, paradoxically, can survive without the other.

It is a political ecology, which, while rife with discordant voices and atonal noises on the surface, needs every voice for the survival of all, at least at an imperceptible level.

This is what we have in mind when we speak of our indissoluble future as a nation. Mahatma Gandhi would have had us in mind when he admonished that 'civilisation is the encouragement of difference'.

Accordingly, I have learnt to understand political liberalism conservatism, nationalism, socialism, and the numerous other ideologies represented in this House.

While poles apart from all these other ideological orientations, I never for one moment doubted the abiding sincerity of each political party represented in Parliament to contribute to the reconstruction and development of our country.

Misguided as some may be, and I think some, indeed, are, all these political parties in this august House are here as organic expression of popular sentiments.

So I am filled with sadness because I am leaving this House after about six years of history.

Being asked to serve one's country at any point in history is always an honour. However, the truth is our nation is replete with luminous talent. Not only that, at some point serving leadership must give way, so that new blood, fired up with life-changing ideas, can take society to a higher level of development.

Necessarily, the time comes when all 'leaders', as H.G. Wells advises, 'should lead as far as they can and then vanish. Their ashes should not choke the fire they have lit'.

I would not let my ashes choke the verdant future that is beginning to assume some discernible outlines on the horizon. Few have been the moments in human history when the time was ever right for a leader to leave.

On another level, I am happy to have played the small part history has assigned me. I leave office over the moon that the ANC and by extension the people of our country have entrusted me with the responsibility to help steer our nation to the future.

Just as misperceptions about our country being yet another case of flash in the pan were proven hollow, the world was, in 2008, struck by the most devastating financial meltdown ever seen in decades.

As only South Africans know, once again we employed social dialogue as a mechanism to bring together all role players, government, the trade union movement as well as organised business, the better to compare notes fully aware that any looseness in our relations would spell doom for all of us.

This is a key lesson about our national character. Going forward, let us consolidate the principle of social dialogue as the central defining tenet of our nationhood.

I have come to the conclusion that as this house moves into the fifth term of office, we will need to come to terms with the imperatives of our age. We need to service a large vision bigger than the clutter of the age.

Right now South Africa does not need homo politicus (man the politician) but, in a classical sense, homo creans (man the creator); bold

visionaries whose sights transcend the frontiers of time.

The imperatives of our time enjoin this august House to rise above beguiling but small-minded discourse adorned with rhetorical embroidery to think realistically about the future of our nation.

We have a duty to this nation and a responsibility to posterity. That responsibility has just begun.

We have to do this bearing in mind Francois Chateaubriand's assertion that 'Every revolution is the consequence of one revolution and the beginning of another'.

We are in the middle of another revolution. We dare not sell out.

I would like to end by thanking President Jacob Zuma for his unwavering support through all these years, my colleagues in Cabinet, both Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Members of Parliament as well as Presiding Officers with whom I have interacted in my capacity as Leader of Government Business.

On a lighter note, when I was appointed Leader of Government Business I was approached by many people who said that now they have appointed the right person.

They are interested in business. This of course was said in whispers until I explained that Leader of Government Business is the bridge between Cabinet and Parliament. It has nothing to do with Public Enterprise and business contracts.

Let me also acknowledge the stellar support from the staff in my office and The Presidency in general. Lastly, I wish to thank the people of our nation for the trust they have shown in me.

In conclusion, I ask myself, what is to be a man's last word in the face of this historic day?

And all I can say is: 'fare thee well friends, since I must needs be gone'!!

Na Khensa, Ndo a livhuwa, ngiya thokoza, dankie, I thank you, Keya leboga!!!!

**The PBF has valued its relationship with Deputy President Motlanthe and wishes him well on the road ahead.**

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