



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

TOAST BY MR JACQUES CHIRAC PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

AT THE STATE DINNER GIVEN IN HONOUR OF MR THABO MBEKI PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ELYSÉE PALACE

MONDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2003

President Mbeki, Mrs Mbeki,

My wife and I are especially pleased to welcome you to the Elysée Palace on your first State visit to Paris. The French are honoured to host the President of a great country that symbolises both the tireless struggle for human dignity and the African Renaissance. On behalf of the French people, President Mbeki, I wish you and your wife a very warm welcome. Mrs Mbeki, kindly accept my respects. I extend my appreciation to the senior officials accompanying you.

In living memory and in history, the end of the twentieth century will remain forever marked by two great victories for freedom: the disappearance of the Soviet empire and the end of apartheid. You, President Mbeki, are one of the heroes of that glorious and peaceful revolution. Fraternity has developed between France and a democratic, modern South Africa. For the French, your country is among those that best upholds the universal values of civilisation. For that reason, France hopes to become a trusted ally in the new enterprise on which you have embarked the African Renaissance. We can thus contribute together to a fairer, more caring globalisation, in which everyone has their place.

We know how much South Africa owes to all the men and women who, through hardship, but with courage and unshakeable determination, were involved in the bitter struggle for liberation and dignity. President Mbeki, you are one of those people, together with President Mandela. Although deeply affected by those years of struggle, you have never lost faith in humankind and in the future and have never been swayed by revenge or resentment.

On the contrary, you have been in the forefront of peace, national reconciliation and democratic transition. Your country offers the world an admirable lesson in political wisdom, which owes a great deal to your own foresight and vision. The choice of dialogue and forgiveness over violence has won hearts and minds over to the "new patriotism" you have instilled. Through it, a nation has been born, to which forty-six million South Africans, now united regardless of their differences, feel a full sense of belonging.



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We also salute the rise of a booming, modern country, a "New South Africa", transformed by a new economic model and a modernised society.

In a decade, a once closed economy, dependent on capitalistic mining and agriculture, has become healthier and diversified. South Africa has carved out a place for itself in international trade, particularly in the new technology sector, with major corporations that have become leading players in the world economy. South Africa's economy attests to Africans' dynamism, energy and entrepreneurship.

You have also sought to repair the injustices inherited from the apartheid system, to calm the dangerous tensions they engendered, and to build a social democracy based on equal opportunity, universal access to basic services, and integration of disadvantaged groups, whose suffering and, often, despair moves us all.

France salutes that engagement. It recognises itself in your combat for justice and solidarity. Its desire to contribute is impelled by a sense of moral obligation and necessity. The peoples of Africa must have a place in globalisation, from which they feel excluded today.

That is why I attach such importance to closer ties between our two countries.

Political ties, first of all, as demonstrated by our meetings and regular exchanges between members of our governments. We are building a genuine partnership, notably through our "Forum for Political Dialogue". We are working together to bring peace and to resolve the crises that are devastating the continent. France supports your mediation efforts in the Comoros and Burundi. By the same token, we appreciate your support for our efforts to bring peace in Côte d'Ivoire. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, our soldiers have worked side by side in Ituri to protect civilian populations in danger.

Economic ties also, through increased trade and French investment in South Africa, testifying to the confidence of French companies. Cooperation has also intensified in a wide range of promising sectors, such as aeronautical engineering, nuclear power and aluminium. I hope that France will become a key economic partner for South Africa.

Ties of solidarity, as the French Development Agency has made South Africa its second largest beneficiary. In accordance with your priorities, the AFD is involved in supporting social development in disadvantaged districts, financing SMEs created through Black Economic Empowerment, and expanding health services. We are also together, in Africa and on the international scene, in the difficult combat against the scourge of AIDS, which we must not allow to endanger the hopes of development for your continent.

And lastly, cultural ties. You are aware of the prestige that South African artists, writers and performers enjoy in France. You also know the French acclaim that has greeted the award of the Nobel Prize to six of your



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compatriots. I hope that we will develop this essential dimension of openness to others and dialogue between cultures, so necessary at this crucial time. I hope we will develop ways to show the world the ancient and prodigious cultures of Africa, so rich in meaning for the future of humanity, in experience, joy and beauty.

President,

The "New South Africa" has put its powerful economy and respected influence at the service of the African continent. You have also given Africa a vision of hope and an ambition the "African Renaissance". That project is about Africa rejecting fatalism and becoming master of its destiny again. It is about Africa choosing peace and democracy, good governance and economic growth, for the progress of humanity.

That is the ambition of NEPAD, of which you are one of the main architects and promoters. NEPAD establishes a partnership, of which France is the most determined advocate. We have made it a priority of our presidency of the G8, so that unfailing commitment from the international community matches Africa's firm engagement. The Forum we created last week in Paris will be the place for our work aimed at enabling Africa to become, as it aspires to, the "continent of the twenty-first century".

Beyond Africa, we share the same views on many other issues. Motivated by a similar approach, our positions coincide on the Middle East and Iraq, on the role of the United Nations, and on respect for cultural diversity. In Johannesburg last year, I saw the strength and efficiency of your engagement in favour of sustainable development. I cannot emphasise enough the driving role you play among the large emerging countries and the influence you have on developing countries.

Let us stand together in the major, ceaseless, struggles for human dignity, the future of humanity and peace in the world. Cooperation between South Africa and France is replete with hopes that reach far beyond the destiny of our two peoples. We can and must launch ambitious joint initiatives that will change the course of events and show that North and South know they are now united as a community of destiny, in which our divergences matter little. Let us continue the work we began together in Johannesburg and Evian, to build the equitable, democratic global governance so necessary to the world today and to future generations.

The message that France extends to you at the start of your visit is one of welcome and confidence in South Africa, a country of such promise and that is more essential than ever to the African continent. It is a message of ambition, that we will enhance still further the exceptional relationship being forged between our two nations.

Imbued with this confidence and ambition, I raise my glass in your honour, President Mbeki. In honour of a combatant for freedom, an architect of



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democracy, an activist for peace, justice and solidarity, and a statesman whose friendship honours us. I raise it to the friendship between our two nations, whose ever closer ties must unite our peoples.

Long live the African Renaissance! Long live South Africa! Long live France!
Thank you, Nkosi! (Thank you). |

