

Address to the nation by South African President Thabo Mbeki

21 September 2008

Fellow South Africans,

I have no doubt that you are aware of the announcement made yesterday by the National Executive Committee of the ANC with regard to the position of the President of the Republic.

Accordingly, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the nation that today I handed a letter to the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Honourable Baleka Mbete, to tender my resignation from the high position of President of the Republic of South Africa, effective from the day that will be determined by the National Assembly.

I have been a loyal member of the African National Congress for 52 years. I remain a member of the ANC and therefore respect its decisions. It is for this reason that I have taken the decision to resign as President of the Republic, following the decision of the National Executive Committee of the ANC.

I would like sincerely to thank the nation and the ANC for having given me the opportunity to serve in public office during the last 14 years as the Deputy President and President of South Africa.

This service has at all times been based on the vision, the principles and values that have guided the ANC as it prosecuted a difficult and dangerous struggle in the decades before the attainment of our freedom in 1994.

Among other things, the vision, principles and values of the ANC teach the cadres of this movement life-long lessons that inform us that wherever we are and whatever we do we should ensure that our actions contribute to the attainment of a free and just society, the upliftment of all our people, and the development of a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it.

This is the vision of a South Africa that is democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous; a country in which all the people enjoy a better life.

Indeed the work we have done in pursuit of the vision and principles of our liberation movement has at all times been based on the age-old values of Ubuntu, of selflessness, sacrifice and service in a manner that ensures that the interests of the people take precedence over our desires as individuals.

I truly believe that the governments in which I have been privileged to serve have acted and worked in the true spirit of these important values.

Based on the values of Ubuntu, the significance of which we learnt at the feet of such giants of our struggle as Chief Albert Luthuli, OR Tambo, Nelson Mandela and others, we as government, embarked, from 1994, on policies and programmes directed at pulling the people of South Africa out of the morass of poverty and ensuring that we build a stable, developed and prosperous country.

Accordingly, among many things we did, we transformed our economy, resulting in the longest sustained period of economic growth in the history of our country; we introduced an indigent policy that reaches large numbers of those in need; we made the necessary advances so as to bring about a developmental state, the better to respond to the many and varied challenges of the transformation of our country.

This is, of course not the occasion to record the achievements of government. An additional critical few are however worth mentioning. They include our achievements with regard to many of the Millennium

Development Goals, the empowerment of women, the decision to allow us to host the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup and our election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council two years ago.

Despite the economic advances we have made, I would be the first to say that even as we ensured consistent economic growth, the fruits of these positive results are still to be fully and equitably shared among our people, hence the abject poverty we still find coexisting side by side with extraordinary opulence.

Importantly, we had an obligation to ensure that democracy becomes the permanent feature of our lives and that all our citizens respect the rule of law and human rights. This is one of the cornerstones of our democracy, which we have consistently striven to protect and never to compromise.

We have also worked continuously to combat the twin challenges of crime and corruption, to ensure that all our people live in conditions of safety and security. We must admit that we are still faced with many challenges in this regard.

Work will therefore have to continue to strengthen and improve the functioning of our criminal justice system, to provide the necessary resources for this purpose, to activate the masses of our people to join the fight against crime and corruption, and to achieve new victories in the struggle for moral regeneration.

With regard to the latter, our successive governments from 1994 to date have worked consistently to encourage the entrenchment in our country of a value system whose observance would make all of us Proudly South African, a value system informed by the precept of Ubuntu - umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye. Among other things this means that we must all act in a manner that respects the dignity of every human being.

We have sought to advance this vision precisely because we understood that we would fail in the struggle to achieve the national and social cohesion that our country needs, as well as the national unity we require to enable us to act together to address the major challenges we face.

Fellow South Africans, Since the attainment of our freedom in 1994, we have acted consistently to respect and defend the independence of the judiciary. For this reason our successive governments have honoured all judicial decisions, including those that went against the Executive. This did not mean that the Executive did not at times have strong views which we would have publicly pronounced upon. The central approach we adopted has always been to defend the judiciary rather than act in a manner that would have had a negative impact on its work. Indeed, on the infrequent instances when we have publicly expressed views contrary to those of the judiciary, we have done so mindful of the need to protect its integrity. Consistent with this practice, I would like to restate the position of Cabinet on the inferences made by the Honourable Judge Chris Nicholson that the President and Cabinet have interfered in the work of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). Again I would like to state this categorically that we have never done this, and therefore never compromised the right of the National Prosecuting Authority to decide whom it wished to prosecute or not to prosecute. This applies equally to the painful matter relating to the court proceedings against the President of the ANC, Comrade Jacob Zuma. More generally, I would like to assure the nation that our successive governments since 1994 have never acted in any manner intended wilfully to violate the Constitution and the law. We have always sought to respect the solemn Oath of Office each one of us made in front of the Chief Justice and other judges, and have always been conscious of the fact that the legal order that governs our country was achieved through the sacrifices made by countless numbers of our people, which included death. In this context it is most unfortunate that gratuitous suggestions have been made seeking to impugn the integrity of those of us who have been privileged to serve in our country's National Executive. Compatriots, Again, as you know, we have often pointed to the fact that our liberation movement has always been pan-African in its outlook and therefore that we have an obligation to contribute to the renaissance of the African continent. All of us are aware of the huge and daunting challenges that face our continent. In the short years since our freedom, as South Africans we have done what we could to make our humble contribution to the

regeneration of our continent. We have devoted time and resources to the task of achieving the Renaissance of Africa because this is what has informed generations of our liberators, even before the ANC was formed in 1912. We have done this fully understanding that our country shares a common destiny with the rest of our Continent. I therefore thank the many dedicated compatriots - men and women - who have made it possible for us to contribute to the resolution of conflicts and the strengthening of democracy in a number of countries including the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Comoros, Zimbabwe, Sudan and elsewhere. We have also done this work conscious of our responsibilities as a State Member of both SADC and the African Union. I would like to thank my colleagues, the many Heads of State and Government on the African continent whose abiding vision is that Africa must be free; that all our countries, individually and collectively should become democratic, developed and prosperous, and that Africa must unite. These African patriots know as I do that Africa and Africans will not and must not be the wretched of the earth in perpetuity. Similarly we have worked to contribute to the achievement of the aspirations of the countries and peoples of the South, conscious of the need for us to act in solidarity and in unity with the billions with whom we share the common challenge to defeat poverty and underdevelopment. Accordingly, I depart the Office of President of South Africa knowing that this country has many men and women who have dedicated their lives to ensure that South Africa, Africa and the countries of the South will, in time, manage to ensure a better world for all of humanity. I depart this Office conscious that the sterling work done by the Presidency, the Ministries and departments, the provinces and local government structures will continue, driven by the determination to achieve the goal of a better life for all. I am convinced that the incoming administration will better the work done during the past 14-and-half years so that poverty, underdevelopment, unemployment, illiteracy, challenges of health, crime and corruption will cease to define the lives of many of our people. I have received many messages from South Africans, from all walks of life, through e-mails, telephonically and through cell phone text messages as well as those conveyed through my colleagues. I thank all of you, fellow South Africans, for these messages. To everyone, and responding to these messages, I would like to say that gloom and despondency have never defeated adversity. Trying times need courage and resilience. Our strength as a people is not tested during the best of times. As we said before, we should never become despondent because the weather is bad nor should we turn triumphalist because the sun shines. For South Africa to succeed there is more work to be done and I trust that we will continue to strive to act in unity to accelerate the advance towards the achievement of our shared national goals. In this regard, it may be worth repeating what I said during the inauguration of the President of the Republic in 1999. Using the metaphor of the Comrades Marathon, I said then that: "Those who complete the course will do so only because they do not, as fatigue sets in, convince themselves that the road ahead is still too long, the inclines too steep, the loneliness impossible to bear and the prize itself of doubtful value." Once more, I thank you most sincerely for affording me the opportunity to serve you and to serve the people of Africa. Thank you,

Ngiyathokoza,
Ke ya Lebogang,
Ndo livhuwa,
Ndiyabulela,
Ndza khensa,
Baie dankie,
Ngiyabonga