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## CELEBRATING SOUTH AFRICA'S DIVERSITY

ADDRESS BY H.E. SIBONGISENI DLAMINI-MNTAMBO, HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
SOUTH AFRICA, AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY, OTTAWA,  
23 OCTOBER 2017

Dean of the faculty,

Professor Teddy Samy, Director of the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

Lawrence David Lederman, Chair of the Ambassadors Speakers Series

Dean of the diplomatic Corps, H.E Florence Zano Chideya

All Heads of Mission present

Members of the diplomatic corps,

Special guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I don't know whether I should thank the organisers of this event for putting me through three weeks of hell. For quite some time now my stomach has been churning in anticipation of this event. I was okay until I learned that some in the audience are academics and I have thought of nothing else but my audience in colourful robes, gowns, hoods, piercing eyes above the low hanging glasses sliding down the nose bridge; Teachers of the highest academic rank at university, who have been awarded titles of doctorates or Professorship.

What have I subjected myself to? It was only last week that I foolishly told myself that it will be okay. This after I came across a quote by Cher where she says: "Until you are ready to look foolish, you'll never have the possibility of being great." *Cher of all people!*

So, it is in this light that I thank the organisers for inviting me **to be this evening's** speaker on this series of talks, thus giving me an opportunity to possibly be great one day.

Honourable guests, Ladies and gentlemen Good evening!

*"We, the people of South Africa, Recognize the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity".*

Ladies and gentlemen, **this** is a very important section in the preamble to our constitution and it is particularly relevant to today's discussion, Celebrating South Africa's diversity.

South Africa has a unique and inspiring story to tell, a story filled with tragedy and triumph, a story of horror and humility. My discussion will start at the end of our recent history ....where we are today. Thereafter, I will dive into our history (so that I give context into how we arrived at this point); how the world helped shape our destiny; the role played by Canada in the battle against apartheid; the need for the transformation of our economic landscape; and will finally conclude by highlighting why we celebrate our diversity as a country.

### **TODAY – IN OUR DIVERSITY**

Ladies and gentlemen, South Africa today is grounded in its Constitution. Upon its adoption in 1996 it was lauded as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. This is probably due to lines like these from our bill of rights which states that *</i quote>*

*"The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth."*  
<end quote>

Exactly who are we and what is this diversity that we speak of?

At the Southern tip of Africa, flanked on the west by the cold Atlantic Ocean and on the east the warmer Indian Ocean, is South Africa, with a population of about 55.9million of which the majority, 80.7% could be classified as Black Africans, 8.8% as Coloureds (or mixed race), 8.1% as White, and 2.5% as Asian or Indian.

A country with *eleven* official languages and the three most spoken being isiZulu with 22.7%; isiXhosa, with 16%; and Afrikaans with 13.5%.

Let me hasten to say that although English is the fourth-most spoken first language (9.6%), it is the second-language of the majority of South Africans, so if you have booked a holiday to South Africa, you don't have to panic and run to Chapters to buy phrasebooks! South Africans feel right at home in a bilingual country.

We are a society which holds various religious beliefs. Christianity is followed by almost 80% of the population. Other major followers of religions include Muslims (with 1, 5%), Hindus (with 1, 2%), and Jews (with 0, 2%).

South Africa is a parliamentary representative democratic republic. The President serves both as head of state and as head of government and elected by the National Assembly. Citizens are free to join any political party and they freely exercise their democratic right to elect a party of their choice.

Home for South Africans is a country with four main population groups spread over nine provinces, who are united and proud of the country's diverse, breath-taking landscapes which boasts iconic mountains, canyons, waterfalls, winding rivers, valleys with fields and more fields of wild flowers, the varying coastline of the warm Indian and cold Atlantic oceans, which matches no other.

Equally, they are extremely proud of their country's wild life, the big five and of course tolerate the mosquito - it too has a claim in the bigger scheme of things.

That, in a nutshell, is who we are: a people made up of various races, cultures, beliefs, officially speak eleven languages (but, in reality much more). One Nation, none more South African than another.

## **YESTERDAY- An Institutionalized system of segregation**

Ladies and gentlemen, our history is a wrenching pain and sheer disbelief that unethical, immoral acts of cruelty and discrimination by one race over another were institutionalised and passed as laws. It is even more alarming and ironic that the custodians of these laws, were settlers or immigrants and they imposed them on the **citizens of the country.**

During my school days, the first lessons in history began with the telling of the arrival of the Dromedaries, and *Goede Hoop*, mighty ships which landed in the Cape carrying Jan Van Riebeeck, a Dutch East Company employee who arrived from the Netherlands in 1652 to establish a refreshment station for ships passing Cape Town.

The true history of South Africa does not begin with the written history of being “discovered” in 1652, with the arrival of Europeans. Mrs. Ples, a 2 million year old humanoid fossil found just outside Pretoria, proves that there has been life in South Africa long before the first Europeans arrived.

The once-proud Kingdom of Mapungubwe, may have been wiped from my history books, but it stood in South Africa one thousand years ago, trading with nations in the East. The Dutch arrived in 1652, the British in 1820. The South African War between the descendants of the Dutch, the Afrikaners, and the English followed.

The land act of 1913 stripped the indigenous populations of the right to own land and effectively handed 90% of South Africa’s land to 20% of the population. The indigenous people were shoved to the 10% of land which was neither arable nor had any known mineral deposits.

Racial segregation and white supremacy became central aspects of the South African policies.

In the late 1940’s those of European descent under the National party devised and introduced apartheid into law. Apartheid, a system whose goal was not only to separate South Africa’s white

minority from its non-white majority, but also to separate non-whites from each other, and to divide black South Africans along tribal lines in order to decrease their political power.

The system progressively disenfranchised the indigenous black people, stripped them of their dignity, curtailing their rights, their citizenship and they could not vote in their country. Repressive laws like the group areas act; separate amenities act; and the prohibition of mixed marriages act were introduced to control the movement of the indigenous people now deemed non-citizens.

The most disabling act of the apartheid system was when its claws extended to the education space, suppressing whatever glimpse of hope or dreams there was for a black child. Bantu education was introduced to shape the future of a black child for the lower echelons of the labour market.

Hendrik Verwoerd the architect of apartheid, who was South Africa's Minister of Native Affairs from 1958-1966, addressing parliament on governments education policies said < I quote>

*"There is no place for Bantu in the European Community above the level of certain forms of labour.... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? Education must train people in accordance to the sphere in which they live."* <close quote>

As I speak to you today I am sure you can tell from my pronunciation that I am a product of that Bantu education, but I am not ashamed .... Like most other South Africans we are proud of what we have achieved. We have defeated the system and today I am addressing diplomats, doctors, professors...in every space we find ourselves in, we will continue to unravel the legacy of apartheid.

The vindictiveness of the Bantu education system and the degrading comments in reference to blacks and attempts to keep the black child away from school made Chief Albert Luthuli, President of the African National Congress (ANC) from 1952 to 1960 and the first African who in 1960 received the Nobel Peace Prize to comment that <I quote>

*“Take every opportunity to present us in the world as sub-human beings incapable of assimilating civilization, this matter of dwarfing our personality and trying to make us believe that we are nobodies is the worst sin the white man has committed against Africans”*

Of course some countries had similar segregation mechanisms but South Africa took it to a different level of extreme. Racial discrimination was institutionalised and it touched every aspect of our existence, excluding non-whites from the economy. The control of the economy was firmly in the white hands, and the oppression of the indigenous population had become entrenched and deeply systemic.

So, understanding how the system was enforced will make you understand why the apartheid legacy has been so enduring, twenty three years after democracy.

## **INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION**

With the barrel of a gun, military occupation, violent suppression of protest and threats of imprisonment became the order of the day. Many of our people were *exiled, some jailed, murders were committed with impunity, and some of our people even to this day cannot be accounted for.*

With the domestic and international pressure mounting, South Africa faced international condemnation. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), for example, demanded sanctions against South Africa; Pope John Paul II added his voice and many other institutions and individuals as well. The Sharpeville massacre of 69 black people on 21 March 1960 made the UN reconsider its stance about South Africa’s membership; declaring apartheid as a crime against humanity.

South Africans during that time lived under a censored media. Only those who managed to leave our borders, were able to grasp how many friends we had abroad. We saw the display of the spirit and philosophy of *ubuntu* from other nations. “I am a person because you are”.

We remember and appreciate how our humanity was recognised by so many of our African neighbours and countries across our great continent. African countries who sheltered our liberators when others called them criminals or terrorists. For this South Africa is forever indebted to you.

We appreciate the role that was played by some countries abroad but given my limited time, I would now like to focus on the role Canada played during our struggle

### **APARTHEID AND THE ROLE OF CANADA IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

It was not a coincidence that immediately after his release from prison; Nelson Mandela listed Canada as one of the priority countries to visit.

In June 1990, four months after 27 years of imprisonment, Nelson Mandela, a non-head of state addressed a joint session of the House of Commons and the Senate here in Canada. In his address he said <and I quote>

*“We are made better human beings by the fact that you have reached out from across the seas to say that we too, the rebels, the fugitives; the prisoners deserve to be heard.” <End quote>*

Canada’s fight and involvement stretched to over 3 decades, notably from when the then Prime Minister Diefenbaker made his stance known at the Commonwealth gathering in 1961. Diefenbaker told the gathering *that Canadians as a whole unequivocally deplore the practice of apartheid and believed that... the principles of equality without regard to race or any other considerations must be generally acceptable to all the member nations.*

An impasse ensued whereby; Mr. Diefenbaker proposed that, instead of rejecting South Africa, they declare racial equality an essential principle of the Commonwealth. *This angle saw South Africa’s application being rejected.*

We recognise also the efforts of your former Prime Ministers like Clark, Mulroney and Trudeau. Clark often engaged with the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa in enforcing sanctions. In the 80’s

Prime Minister Trudeau reaffirmed Canada's opposition to apartheid saying that racial discrimination was an insult to mankind and could not be acceptable

The South African presidency acknowledged that Prime Minister Mulroney's firm anti-apartheid stance at times put him at odds with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

After a particularly critical August 1986 meeting in London which left an isolated Britain on the sidelines, Canada moved with other Commonwealth nations on 11 additional sanctions such as bans on new air links, new investment in South Africa and promotion of tourism to the country. Even after the release of political prisoners, now under Prime Minister Jean Chretien, Canada ensured that sanctions were not lifted until just before the first democratic elections.

In 2004, Mandela sent a letter in which he said Mulroney had provided strong and principled leadership in the struggle against apartheid. He also said this was not a popular position in all quarters, but South Africans today acknowledge the importance of his contribution to South Africa's eventual liberation and success.

As a symbol of our appreciation to Canadians, the South African Government awarded former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney with the Order of the Companion of OR Tambo in Gold on 8 December 2015.

## **THE END OF (LEGAL) APARTHEID**

It was through the efforts of your ethical leadership whose strong moral conviction helped dismantle the formal system of apartheid.

The early 1990s saw political parties opposing apartheid unbanned, political prisoners like Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathadra released; Exiled politicians like OR Tambo; Joe Slovo; Denis Goldberg; Frene Ginwala; Ruth Mampati made their way back home.

Negotiations started. South Africans of all races engaged one another – not in a battle of gunfire, but a battle of *words*.

The remarkable thing about the negotiations for our freedom is, perhaps, that the solution came from within. If a country's citizens are disagreeing in today's world, it is not uncommon for external powers to swoop in and prescribe – or even enforce – an end to such disagreements. This was not the case with our negotiations. While we had many international friends who we knew we could call on, the parties in South Africa sat down - the oppressed and the oppressor - and we painstakingly ***talked*** our way to freedom.

The arrival of democracy in South Africa shines as an example of the strength of dialogue, but so too does South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation of 1996. An attempt to heal the wounds of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid, by seeking answers to painful questions, and granting amnesty in exchange.

That, ladies and gentlemen, was 2 million years' of history in a few minutes. We have had a divided past, which we overcame through tough negotiations, to realise a democratic society.

### **Today - LACK OF ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

23 years of democracy! Where are we? Was *reconciliation* the end goal? Should we not, instead, have focussed on economic transformation? Did the end of apartheid lead to the end of *economic* segregation? Do *all* in our economy have the same likelihood of succeeding? Has the *economic* playing field been levelled?

South Africa's Commission for Employment Equity reports that – despite only making up 9.5% of the economically active population today – white South Africans still occupy 69% of top management positions and 58% of senior management positions. To repeat: 9.9% occupies 69% of top management and 58% of senior management.

Looking at the gender disparities is also sobering: Males occupy 78% of top management, and 67% of senior management.

Statistic South Africa's Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2017 tells us that the unemployment rate for black South Africans, is 31%. For the white population group in South Africa, it is 6.6%. I'm told that is coincidentally the exact figure for Canada's unemployment rate for May 2017: 6.6%.

### **BUILDING A UNIFIED SOUTH AFRICA (CANADA'S ROLE)**

Should Canada continue to play a role in building a unified South Africa? And if so, what should this role be?

In addressing the first question the answer is informed again by the philosophy of ubuntu: we are all interrelated, and what impacts on one, impacts on another.

**Government:** Canada, given its deep engagement in the fight against apartheid, ought to *understand* how entrenched the system was. You will understand that democracy only addressed one layer of the apartheid system, that of colonialism.

We are yet to address racial oppression in the form of classification and hierarchy which still exists (Whites, Indians, coloureds and blacks – in that order). We have not touched that topic.

The obdurate nature of racism and privilege still thwarts real transformation in South Africa. The poor and black of South Africa largely live and function outside of the formal economy. They have virtually no access to the market place. Jobs for poor black South Africans are few and offer slave wages.

This is the layer in which we invite Canada to partner with us in addressing.

Canada, we acknowledge and appreciate the role you played in ending apartheid. The fight continues. As we roll our sleeves we need you to partner with us as this country still has an important role to play.

Something has to change. And it appears Canada is listening. In this vein, we recognise and welcome Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Programme. While South Africa has made positive strides in this area, Black women are still the most marginalized group in South Africa

We respect and appreciate Canada's commitment to aiding countries that are battling with climate change. We are optimistic about the pending development funding institute. From South Africa's side, we welcome all of this, but would welcome even more a policy that is explicitly focussed on boosting trade and investment with Africa.

*True* mutually-beneficial, economic engagement can lift our people from the vicious cycle of poverty. We are not looking for handouts but we want to trade as partners. There is a strong business case for investing in South Africa: we have world-class infrastructure, our legal system is resilient, our financial system is one of the most sophisticated in the world, and our natural resource endowment is incredible. We are asking for *partnerships*. Canadian economic interests could be served by considering South Africa – and Africa – as viable economic partners.

We need Canada to continue supporting our regional integration efforts. This will assist in boosting intra-African trade. We need to realise the aspirations we want as reflected on the Africa Agenda 2063, the African Union's vision for where we see ourselves heading.

Canada's global trade patterns show that the entire Africa accounts for just over 1% of this total. Together, we can work towards fixing this. In a globe where fears of economic protectionism are rife, and *long*-standing trade relationships are uncertain; Africa is inviting and open for business. Sure, our business environments might be different. But this is true of any new markets. Investors from other countries are fanning out across the continent at a rapid pace. The time for first-mover advantage is nearly over. Canada cannot linger. It needs to race to Africa.

## Canadian – society.

The Economy is not the only area we need to correct. Incidences of violence and terrorism are appalling *wherever* they occur in the world. But, in Africa, they are often referred to as “killing fields” as in this recent piece from the “Diplomat and International Canada” magazine. In other parts of the world, there is often talk of “lone wolves.”

It would be very strange to see a headline that takes an isolated horrific incident in a tourist hotspot and generalises it to the *entire* North American continent. But I am at a loss for words when I see headlines like this one from Globe and Mail: “Terror drives Canadians out of Africa.”

I want to be clear – we fully recognise and respect the freedom of the press. We are asking for ethical and professional reporting. And what defines “ethical”? I’ll use some of the words of the Canadian Association of Journalists’ ethical guidelines: “*We avoid stereotypes of race, ethnicity, geography. And we take particular care in crime stories.*”

Using the associations’ own guidelines, I cannot fathom how it is acceptable to generalise an incident in one city to an entire country. This is illogical. To generalise it from one city to an entire *continent* is... well, it is absurd. **Somewhere** in the honourable field of journalism – whether through actions of journalists or sub-editors or editors – there is professional misconduct when such ignorant headlines occur. This is not just or ethical. This shows a lack of understanding of Africa – a continent with 55 countries, with rich and diverse cultures and languages.

Until I see headlines that generalise incidents in Quebec City, or in Las Vegas, to the entire North American continent, I will have to argue that the diversity of Africa and Africans are ignored blatantly and unapologetically on a daily basis by certain segments of society.

We urge societies, organisations, movements to work ethically and responsibly. As an aside, a disturbing behaviour is replicated in the field of public relations. There is widespread reportage of a large UK-based multinational firm that appears to have consciously stoked racial tension in South Africa.

We are told that slavery is over. That colonialism is over. That apartheid is over. That we must not complain. We must not be “*uppity*” as the sentiment goes.

But how are we to move forward, when on a daily basis our stories get clouded with words like “killing fields” and Public Relations agencies intervene in our endeavour for unity and use deplorable strategies and prey on our vulnerability to try and divide a nation?

### **WHY CELEBRATE?**

Diverse as we are, South Africa has so much to celebrate. We celebrate our Constitution which:

- Recognizes all human rights;
- Seeks to create the situation in which all South Africans shall be free from fear, including the fear of the oppression of one national group by another,
- Does not define our African-ness by our race, colour, gender or historical origins.
- We celebrate our diversity and embrace our African-ness be it you are a descendent of the Khoi, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi, Europeans, Malay, Dutch, Indian etc. we all agree we are South Africans
- We celebrate the negotiated settlement in which we avoided civil war
- Celebrate the Truth and reconciliation efforts where we chose *forgiveness*.
- *We celebrate that we* can now proudly join a family of countries on our great continent. Countries where the richness of our natural resources are surpassed only by the wealth in our diversity.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to once again thank the organisers for this invitation. It is an honour for me to be here.

At 23, South Africa is still a relatively young country on the global stage. We have come a long way. But we recognise and appreciate that we – as with almost every nation on this great planet - still have

a lot to learn and that we have a long way to go. We also know that we do not want to find ourselves where we were more than years back...because:

*“We, the people of South Africa, Recognize the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;*

*Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity”.*

I thank you.