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**Remarks by H. E. Sibongiseni Dlamini-Mntambo at the  
Freedom Day Celebrations, 9 May 2018.**

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Matt DeCoursey,

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Her Excellency Florence Chideya,

Fellow members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honourable Senators and Members of Parliament,

Deputy Director-General of South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Yolisa Maya,

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Ian Shugart,

Special Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My fellow South Africans here this evening,

Good evening, Sanibonani, gooienaand, bonsoir.

24 years ago – on 27 April 1994 – I joined millions of South Africans who went to the polls for the first time. Following centuries of colonialism and decades of suffering under the crimes against humanity of apartheid, all South Africans in our numbers went to the polls and elected our first democratic government.

I was fortunate enough to serve as a young election officer for that election, counting the ballots until the early hours of the morning. It was incredible being part of such a momentous occasion, and I am pleased and humbled that so many of you have decided to join us as we celebrate our Freedom Day this evening.

Our election in 1994 brought us our first democratically-elected president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela: our beloved *Madiba*. It is in his memory, and as a prelude to the larger celebrations of his centenary that we are also gathered here this evening.

Nelson Mandela, also affectionately known as Madiba, became the father of our new nation and our gift to the world. He called on us to raise our fists when our words of defiance were only being met with gunfire and repression. But then, after serving 27 years of his life sentence, he emerged with compassion and not bitterness. He reminded us in his autobiography <and I quote>

*“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”* <end quote>

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, when peace was within our grasp, he reminded us that if we held on to hatred and anger, we would still be granting the oppressor power over us. He reminded us that forgiveness was the only way we could truly be free.

Tonight I will not talk about the important role Canada played as we fought for freedom, as this will be part of our theme later in the year. However, at this juncture I would like to give a special recognition to the Honourable Senator Cools, who in June 2001 moved a motion at the Senate Chamber that Canada bestows the title of honorary Canadian citizenship on Nelson Mandela. This was in support of the very motion which had been raised by the Honourable John McCallum in the House of Commons that same week.

This year, your citizen, would have turned 100 and tonight we celebrate him. But this is just the beginning.

We intend to roll out a series of events this year to mark this centenary and we look forward to seeing you out *en masse*! We also call on everybody here this evening to consider heeding the call of Madiba himself by doing something good for your community on his birthday – 18 July. You'll see a few posters on the tables encouraging you to do your bit for Mandela Day. You don't have to be a civil servant to serve the public. So let's roll up our sleeves and do good this 18<sup>th</sup> of July!!

This year's celebration also coincides with the centenary of another of our great anti-apartheid struggle giants, Mama Albertina Sisulu.

Our history books are filled with the achievements of men, so we need to place special emphasis on the role of women like Mama Sisulu who fought as hard – often harder – for our freedom. Mama Sisulu was imprisoned several times by the apartheid regime; often spending weeks or month in solitary confinement. In June 1989, when the apartheid government finally gave her a passport, she travelled abroad in her capacity as co-president of the United Democratic Front, and engaged in a series of diplomatic efforts to keep the plight of oppressed South Africans in the minds of the world. She engaged former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and former President George H. W. Bush. Yes, she might be known for being the wife of Walter Sisulu, but she was much larger than that. She was an icon.

These struggle stalwarts, and many other South Africans, epitomised our struggle for liberation. South Africa is the country it is today because of their countless sacrifices to overcome the brutal apartheid system.

## **SOUTH AFRICA TODAY**

Freedom Day is also an ideal platform for reflection on the progress made thus far in transforming South African society.

Where are we today? We can measure progress in a number of ways. At a macro-level, we are a diversified economy; with our market-size ranking 27<sup>th</sup> in the world. We are a G20 country, with the 19<sup>th</sup>-largest stock exchange in the world. We have among the Top 3 banking systems in the world.

But aside from these macro-level achievements, the lives of ordinary South Africans have improved too.

We are pleased therefore that South Africa has shown progress in the 24 years since the end of apartheid. But, ladies and gentlemen - while it seems like just yesterday for some of us - 24 years is a long time for those who are still waiting for the restoration of their economic dignity. We recognise that our freedom and the transformation of the economy are interlinked. The economic barriers and income inequalities created by apartheid are still too prevalent today.

As Government, we will continue to explore ways of levelling the playing fields, so that **all** South Africans – regardless of race or gender – have the opportunity to enter the economic mainstream. As we do so, we will continue to look to our constitution to guide our actions. We also recognise that any interventions or policies we introduce must not jeopardise the sustainability of our robust economy.

## **RECENT POLITICAL CHANGES**

Ladies and gentlemen, we have just witnessed a peaceful – although admittedly *remarkable* - transition from our fourth President, Jacob Zuma, to our fifth, President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Among the many interventions President Ramaphosa has announced in the first 3 months of his presidency, is an Investment Conference scheduled to take place in South Africa in August or September. He has underscored that this conference will not be a “talkshop”, where delegates only talk about the investment climate. Instead, the conference is intended to table actual investment deals. We aim to generate *130 billion Canadian dollars* in new investments over the next five years.

At this stage, I would like to recognise our Consul-General based in Toronto. I have tasked Consul-General Goso with supporting any Canadian corporations interested in participating in this investment conference. Please grab his business card before you grab your fourth glass of fine South African wine this evening!

## **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE WORLD**

Ladies and gentlemen, in this era, when some are questioning long-standing trade relationships, South Africa recognises that cooperation and **not** isolation is essential in growing our economy and uplifting all of our people.

When we enter the realm of international relations, our young democracy looks to our sisters and brothers in the Southern African Development Community and in the greater African Union. We fully appreciate that *none of us* can truly succeed if *any* of us are struggling. We look to our partners on the continent for continued collaboration.

We also look further afield to other developing and emerging economies. We hope to share experiences; to learn from each other; and to bring the world closer to South Africa and our neighbours. This year – for example - we are again chairing BRICS - the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. We look forward to the BRICS summit that will take place in Johannesburg later this year.

We have long-standing relations with our partners in the developed world and we will continue to engage them bilaterally and multilaterally.

In the midst of all the global uncertainty, South Africa continues to strive for a world where all can be heard; a world that is just and equitable. We remain convinced that multilateralism and bridge-building diplomacy are the best ways to achieve this vision.

## **THE LIONS ARE AWAKENING**

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, South Africa dreams of a world that is just and equitable. This dream is shared by many, but I would like to take a moment to recognise a fierce champion of the dream of equality: the great Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Speaking in 1976, Mama Winnie reminded us that <and I quote>

*"Any acceptance of humiliation, indignity or insult is acceptance of inferiority."* <end quote>

What type of indignities might she have been speaking of? In last month's National Geographic, its Editor-in-chief, Susan Goldberg, admitted what Africans knew all along: that indigenous populations have persistently been portrayed as savages or as unintelligent. Ms Goldberg's editorial goes on to discuss the magazine's reportage of South Africa during

apartheid. She painfully points out that *“questions arise not just from what’s in the magazine, but what isn’t.”*

In other words, when we were not being portrayed as violent, naked, uneducated and ignorant, we were being ignored.

We live in a changing world order. Technology and interconnectivity makes it harder to ignore Africa: a growing continent of 1 billion people; a young continent; an increasingly-wealthy continent.

Society continuously reminds us that rehashing the same stories with the same faces over and over is lacklustre. An example of this perhaps is the success of the recent movie, Black Panther, whose success at the Box Office continues to break records. Society is trying to tell its leaders: “There is a lot going on in the world. And we want to hear their stories.”

As High Commissioner of South Africa here in Canada, I have taken the apology of National Geographic to heart. For I believe that “It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that kills”

I will continue to engage society here so that the narrative about Africa and South Africa in particular is told truthfully, and the truth is not ignored.

I also raise this tonight in the spirit of Mama Winnie Madikizela Mndela; a juggernaut whose story and contribution to the struggle for justice was conveniently riddled with lies as some in the media fixated on her weaknesses, branding her as Nelson Mandela’s divisive ex-wife; or “controversial; murderer etc..” The reality is that neat dichotomies did not fit Madikizela-Mandela. She was neither “perfect” nor “evil”. She was merely a human being, weathered by both the apartheid atrocities she was subjected to and her commitment to see us freed.

## **SA – CANADA RELATIONS**

On that note, I wish to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the people from around the world – represented here by their elected and diplomatic representatives – who turned up in droves to extend their condolences to us following the passing of Mama Winnie. Our appreciation also goes to our diaspora especially in Montreal, Toronto, BC, whose touching letters we have forwarded to the family of Mama Winnie at home.

I especially wish to extend our appreciation to the government and people of Canada, who were represented by two dignitaries, both of whom are here at this event. To Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Matt DeCoursey, and the Canadian High Commissioner to South Africa, H. E. Sandra McCardell, thank you for attending Mama Winnie’s funeral in Johannesburg last month. Your solidarity continues to encourage us.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, in my one year here in Ottawa, the intensity of Canada’s engagement with South Africa has been humbling for me.

We have just concluded our 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Consultations earlier this afternoon. The discussions were led by South Africa’s the Deputy Director-General of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Yolisa Maya; and Canada’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Ian Shugart. I am pleased that they are also both here this evening.

We held discussions around trade and investment; climate change and the environment; science, technology and innovation; defence; mining; education; border management; and arts and culture; amongst others.

Indeed we are positive that our cooperation in these and more areas will move a notch higher as we all agree that trade has to be intensified. South Africa is ready. LETS DO THIS

## **CONCLUSION/THUMA MINA**

In conclusion, I wish to turn to my fellow South Africans and friends of South Africa here this evening. Creating a better South Africa cannot be the work of government alone. We are therefore calling on *all* South Africans to play their part in building a free and prosperous society. To the South Africans

here this evening, let's take up the call of President Ramaphosa, who reminded us all in his February State of the Nation Address of the words of the late Bra Hugh Masekela. *Thuma Mina*. But I've asked my office to please save you the torture of hearing me sing, so they'll soon play a portion of Bra Hugh song, in which he reminds us that an ideal future is **so** close, and that the power to create a better world lies in our hands, when he sings:

*"I wanna be there when the people start to turn it around*

*When they triumph over poverty*

*I wanna be there when the people win the battle against AIDS*

*I wanna lend a hand*

*I wanna be there for the alcoholic*

*I wanna be there for the drug addict*

*I wanna be there for the victims of violence and abuse*

*I wanna lend a hand*

*Send me."*