



**Remarks by H. E. Sibongiseni Dlamini-Mntambo at the Reception of the Annual
General Meeting of the Canada – Africa Chamber of Business,**

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Chair of the Canada –Africa Chamber of Commerce, Ms Avril Cole

President of the Canada-Africa Chamber of Commerce, Bruce Shapiro

Members of the board

Special guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening, Sanibonani, Gooienaand.

Before I begin, I thought I would take a moment and confess that this is my first winter here in Canada. I remember vividly when the first snow fell in November last year (2017), my family and I were very excited taking pictures outdoors, sending them home to South Africa! I am positive that my office got tired of hearing me going on and on about the snow, they must have rolling their eyes behind my back! It is brutal and relentless!

However, I must hasten to say on freezing days like this, the warmth of the Canadians does make up for the weather. As I engage with Canadians during this time, I tend to

forget that in South Africa, it is summer at this time of the year. That, it is the time when the beautiful sun - soaked unending coast with its white beaches and blue oceans beckons one to experience lazy beach days with friends and family, getting right up close to a thousand dancing and diving dolphins or braving it in a cage surrounded by Sharks at sea.

These are the moments that make South Africa special. It is our hope that as you seek to invest in our country you will fall in love with its beauty, the weather, the people and its offerings as an investment destination. There is plenty to see and experience while you make money from your investment.

So, I am grateful for the invitation here this evening. I see organisations like this as essential for bridging the divide between this country - that knows so much about hockey - and my home - that never really sees snow.

NELSON MANDELA CENTENARY

Ladies and Gentlemen, 2018 is an important year for South Africa – perhaps for the world. On 18 July, our struggle icon, and the symbol of our freedom, Nelson Mandela would have turned 100 years old. South Africa has dedicated 2018 to this selfless leader and will spend the year reflecting on his legacy.

Kofi Annan, the Chair of Elders, - in a letter to the current President of the United States - repeated Mandela's words uttered during his 1964 trial. Facing the death penalty, Mandela said <and I quote>

“During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination. I have fought against black domination. And have cherished the ideal of a democratic, free society, in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for. And to achieve, but if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.” <End quote>.

Mr Annan then reminded President Trump that these words provide a model for all heads of state and government to follow.

Indeed, Ladies and Gentlemen, South Africa will spend the year reflecting on Mandela’s legacy. We would like to invite all members of the Chamber, and all guests here this evening, to consider joining in this centenary. At the very least, you can consider engaging in a volunteering activity that will benefit society on Mandela’s birthday – 18 July.

AFRICA’S IMAGE

This brings me Ladies and gentlemen, to the developments of last week, when reports linked the President of the United States of America to some disturbing comments. These Comments have led the African Union to express “infuriation, disappointment and outrage;” comments which the African Ambassadors describe as “outrageous, racist and xenophobic”. *Shithole countries!* These reported comments necessitated that my government summons the American Embassy in Pretoria to make it clear that we align ourselves with the shock expressed by the African Union and the African group of Ambassadors. We made it clear that mutual respect and understanding are essential. I will get back to the need for understanding in a bit.

But first, I want to touch on another way Africa is reported on. It is often portrayed through the lens of corruption. “Africa is corrupt!” they proclaim. But rarely question “who is the corrupter?” The days of companies – both within and outside of Africa – paying their way to tenders are numbered. If, for example, a Canadian corporation feels that it is wrong to pay bribes in Europe, but assume that it is just the way things are done in Africa to remain competitive; then perhaps they are not competitive at all. Perhaps, they are just vile corrupters.

HOPELESS AFRICA TO AFRICA RISING

Let’s take a step back, Ladies and gentlemen. In recent years, almost every Africa-themed conference in recent years has touched on previous decades’ penchant for labelling Africa as the “third world”, “the hopeless continent”.

The last few years saw the birth of the “Africa rising” discourse. Our economies boomed. Opportunities seemed endless.

And Just then ... of course the global financial crisis hit, having been triggered by the bursting of housing bubble, the expansion of securitisation which changed incentives for lenders and lowered credit standards. The effects soon spilled over to the rest of the World and some countries in Africa experienced falling equity markets, capital flow reversals and pressures on exchange rates. Obviously, this turn of events - which was not Africa’s doing - had a huge negative impact on the continent.

How are we doing today? Trading in the current environment continues to be difficult. Ugandan Professor Augustus Nuwagaba reminds us that – on the one hand – the global economic infrastructure is skewed in favour of the west. The so-called Bretton Woods Institutions are difficult to influence.

And, on the other hand— when trading is attempted – unfair and anti-competitive subsidies and other protectionist measures stifle Africa’s ability to engage competitively. To this day issues of tariffs, quotas, unfair trade policies which favour the West create unfair trading environment, curtailing the marketing capacity of developing countries.

ROLE OF THE CHAMBER?

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, it seems at times that the reputation of Africa is littered with assumptions and stereotypes. Perhaps it is fitting that in the month of January when the United States celebrates Martin Luther King I draw on his wisdom when he said

<and I quote>

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” <end quote>

Why this quote? In the midst of all this doom – we need our friends in this Chamber and in Canada to not be silent.

In the run-up to this address, I approached various stakeholders to enquire casually about that very topic. I spoke to members of the business community, members of the diaspora, and even members of the Canadian public service.

People acknowledge the importance of closer economic ties between Africa and Canada and they recognise that this Chamber’s rebranding from the Canada – *South Africa* to Canada – *Africa* was necessary. But they appear trepidatious. They feel that trust needs to be earned. Not just through words, but through actions that show commitment to enhancing ties between Africa and Canada.

Admittedly, this chamber has held a host of activities. I attended some of the series of sessions at the last event you had here in Toronto. For the most part I could not shake off the feeling that brilliant as the presentations were, I was the wrong audience. Coming from Africa, I was expecting to meet some potential investors, but encountered mainly my fellow Africans. I expected presentations to cover opportunities available and how we can position Africa to fetch those opportunities through partnerships.

Put differently, are the messages of Africa's potential reaching the correct audience? Please tell me what the Chamber is doing to facilitate linkages with the Chambers in African countries. The business delegations you will be taking to Africa?

In addition to concrete activities with the correct audiences, we also need Chambers to work together; not in competition with one another. We need to work together to increase our influence.

The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business, for example, is a very powerful organisation with reputable members in its fold. Members, with powerful platforms of influence, and who constantly engage decision makers. In our joint endeavour to position Africa as an investment destination it is our hope that the Chamber and its members will use these platforms to correct the negative stereotype meant to only propagate Africa as a nest for poverty and problems.

“THE RIGHT TO DIGNITY”

Ladies and gentlemen, any company with an international footprint will tell you that different regions have different local cultures and requirements. Assisting Canadian companies with understanding Africa is another area we feel the Chamber can assist with.

What are the peculiarities that relate to engaging Africa? One of the stakeholders I engaged in preparation for this address this evening said that he would like to see the Chamber encouraging its members to espouse the philosophy of “Ubuntu” when they conduct business in Africa. An understanding of the African philosophy of Ubuntu – which suggests that a person is a person through other people - is important when engaging Africa.

Engaging Africa also requires an understanding of where we have come from. As usual for a South African, I recall the wise words of Mandela often. This time, I recall his words in 2004, 10 years after the onset of democracy in South Africa. He said <and I quote>

“Let us never be unmindful of the terrible past from which we come – that memory not as a means to keep us shackled to the past in a negative manner, but rather as a joyous reminder of how far we have come and how much we have achieved.”<end quote>

Recalling these words by President Mandela, and then the comments attributed to President Trump last week, I feel we need to be reminded that gross atrocities and crimes against humanity have taken place on our continent. Our daily reality continues to be shaped by the effects of centuries/decades of slavery, colonialism, the apartheid system, economic marginalisation, and international looting, to name a few. The West seems to forget the role they played in all of this. And then just label us as shithole countries.

This chamber can assist with ensuring that Canadian companies understand this and ensure that they are good corporate citizens. That they exercise the spirit of Ubuntu, that they see us all as interconnected.

We need no reminder that minerals - once they are extracted - do not magically grow back overnight. But corporate social responsibility can leave legacies that last for decades, if not centuries.

CONSTITUTION IS SUPREME

At this stage, I want to address an issue which I have found myself having to explain over and over again each time someone learns that I am from South Africa – the removal of a sitting president. I am raising this issue with the hope that the Chamber will be able to remind its members that the Constitution is the supreme law of South Africa.

South Africa will not engage in undemocratic processes to remove leaders. To be frank, this type of “locker-room talk” might be excused from somebody who is inebriated and ignorant about Africa; but people in this chamber should never try to undermine African democracies by assuming we can chop and change things as they wish. Although South Africa’s democracy is only 23 years old, we are thriving. We have a free press. We have a vocal and active opposition. We have courts that act independently. We welcome different opinions. But just because you might have a *different* opinion,

does not make it more legitimate than the will of the South African people and the Constitution that our country rests on.

LESS GLITZ, MORE LOBBYING

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have said a lot thus far. To me, gently rocking the boat and steering it towards heightened economic engagement with Africa is the new role for Heads of Mission in this interconnected world. This chamber needs to understand this new role of High Commissioners and Ambassadors and – where possible - advise and guide newcomers to Canada about the way the system works here.

If our role is to change minds, how can this Chamber help?

As true friends of Africa the Chamber can help lobby government on issues critical to improve the lives of Africans. The Chamber cannot be silent on matters impacting trade in Africa.

An article in last week's *Hill Times* outlines the top-lobbied issues in Canada for this past November. It says that registered lobbyists logged 440 communications related to environmental issues, 448 relating to health, and the largest group was 573 relating to trade.

What were the issues lobbied for? The paper guesses that that they were around NAFTA and the Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations.

The most active groups in November 2017 included McMaster University (with 22 communications), the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (with 30 communications), the

Mining Association of Canada (with 50 communications). Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society topped the list with 59 communications.

Where is Africa in this discussion? Are we content with trade with Africa comprising 1% of Canada's total trade? What are you as the Chamber contributing to this conversation? It is my sincere hope that you are not merely followers but are attempting to shape the discussions in favour of improving trade with Africa?

So, Mr Shapiro, continue spreading the message that Africa is eager for trade and investment partners. But it is not doing so with a begging bowl. Africa has a lot to bring to the table. It is a continent rich in mineral resources, young labour, and growing spending power. With this comes a need for infrastructure development, digital transformation, the fall of African trade barriers, and diversification. We expect the Chamber to instil this message to its members and the investment community.

Let us work together to engage and refocus attention towards Africa. There is a lot going on in this world. There is volatility and repositioning. But we cannot allow ourselves to be forgotten. We cannot remain silent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, it seems there is much to do together: together as Heads of Mission and this Chamber; together as Africa and Canada.

I wish to once again thank the organisers sincerely for inviting me here this evening. We appreciate all you have done so far; and all you will do in future. I look forward to continued engagement and collaboration to improve the perception of Africa.

I would like to end by once again citing the words of Nelson Mandela. In 1990, four months after his release from prison – where he had been for 27 years – he visited Canada and addressed your House of Commons. At this time, South Africa was still four years away from its first democratic elections. At this time, the man who would be president was merely a former prisoner named Mr Mandela. He reiterated the call for collaboration when he said to the elected representatives of the people of Canada <and I quote>

“Once the democratic transformation has taken place, we will need your assistance to achieve these economic results. We believe that we can and should build on the bonds of friendship and solidarity that we have built up in the course of the continuing struggle against apartheid, to build a partnership for reconstruction of both our country and our region, which have been devastated by the apartheid system. Southern Africa has the human and material resources which will combine to give the millions of our people a bright future and which will make it profitable and worthwhile for the rest of the world to enter into a mutually beneficial system of cooperation.”

I thank you and wish you a wonderful evening.