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ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

TOWARDS A NEW SOUTH AFRICA  
THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF OAU  
H.E. SALIM AHMED SALIM  
AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

FEBRUARY 1994

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be in South Africa and to visit this distinguished institution which has been such an integral part of the tormented history of this country and the suffering which its people were forced to endure under Apartheid. That the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity stands before you here, is itself the sign of the times we now live in. Such is the magnitude of change which has taken place in this country and such is the enormity of the tasks which lie ahead to consolidate this change and to create out of it, a new South Africa, for which so much African and global effort was consecrated and so much sacrifice paid by so many, especially the people of this country.

The world found convergence in its collective view that Apartheid was wrong and an affront to humanity. That collective abhorrence crystallized in an equally collective resolve to fight that system. In Africa, that fight acquired added significance as the ascendance of Apartheid coincided with the wave of political independence in the Continent. Apartheid was therefore an anachronism embodying the gross and blatant denial of the black majority in this country of their inalienable right to freedom. Africa saw that denial as a serious infringement of their own freedom and therefore set out with determination to fight the system.

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The Organization of African Unity which was founded in the aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre, was faced with the challenge of not only eradicating colonialism from the Continent but equally fighting against racism and its institutionalized form of Apartheid.

But right from the outset the Organization of African Unity understood that Africa is and will always be a multi-racial and multi-cultural Continent, in which all the people who inhabit it have equal claim to it. It was thus the denial by Apartheid of this tenet of equality, which the OAU set out to fight against. The struggle against Apartheid was never against a people or a race. It was rather a struggle against a system conceived and deployed with the express objective of denying the human worth of other races, dispossessing them and brutally suppressing their claim to their rights. True to the universality of the struggle, Africa formed alliance with all races, all over the world including in this country where many whites also joined in opposing Apartheid and they suffered as a result. The fight against Apartheid, was a struggle transcending race, geography, religion and colour. It was the struggle for humanity to redeem itself by defeating the evil system.

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Africa and especially the neighbouring and frontline countries paid a heavy price for their opposition to Apartheid. Armed attacks, wholesale invasions and acts of destabilization launched by Apartheid South Africa, exacted a very heavy price on these countries in terms of loss of human lives and extensive destruction of infrastructure. Even today those countries continue to suffer from the effects of this misadventure of Apartheid.

But of course the greatest sacrifice was paid by the people of this country who stood for what was right and opposed what was wrong. The humiliation, dispossession, oppression and torture which the opponents of Apartheid endured will take many generations, to efface from memory.

In spite of all this suffering by the people of this country, and by those in the neighbouring countries, it was their consistent view that confrontation and war were imposed on them, having been left with no other option. Africa, as far back as 1969, in the Lusaka Manifesto expressed its



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preference for dialogue if proper conditions for it were provided. The proponents of Apartheid chose, at that time to be deaf to repeated calls for dialogue and instead, retreated into confrontation and war. The rest is the sad history of this country.

What has happened in South Africa in the past four years is very heartening indeed. To imagine that we stand today on the threshold of a new South Africa was something unimaginable only a few years back. Four years ago, this country stood poised precariously on the edge of a precipice with little or no hope at all for salvation. The world around you was changing very fast, a change brought about by the sudden collapse of the old order of super-power ideological confrontation of the cold war.

Fortunately, the leaders of the white minority government in this country were quick to recognize the folly of the continuation of the Apartheid system. The OAU, and indeed the whole of Africa, naturally welcomed this new realism on the part of the Government in this country.

Today, you have a new Interim Constitution in which is reposed the collective wisdom of the leadership of South

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Africa in its cultural and racial diversity. It is the Kempton Park process that has brought you to this critical but hopeful juncture in your history. We, in the Organization of African Unity, have the right, to celebrate your achievements so far and to urge you to carry on with the epic you started at Kempton Park.

Your transition to democracy is progressing notwithstanding some nagging complications along the way. Who ever thought a transition from the kind of the past this country has, would be smooth and happy? What is important, is the ineluctable reality that the last mile you have to walk to reach your destination will soon be over.

Now what kind of a new South Africa do we as Africans wish to see emerge from this process of building democracy? It may seem needless for me to repeat the axiom of South Africa being the common ancestral home of all, who for centuries past, have been an inextricable part of its soil, its essence and its soul. We have harped on this axiom adnauseum throughout the existence of the OAU. The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress affirms this. No Party at the recent negotiations at Kempton Park advocated any policy to the contrary.

Our vision of the new South Africa is therefore of a country at peace with itself, a country at long last reconciled to its cultural and racial diversity. White South Africans, black South Africans, Asiatic South Africans and Coloured South Africans and all without exception, must be allowed to feel that all of South Africa is their home. How can or should it be otherwise? South Africa is your common heritage. You have pooled your energies - all of you - to build it. You have shed your precious blood and poured out your sweat and tears - all of you - to transform this vast land into what it is today. And in opposing its folly of Apartheid you struggled together.

I see the challenge of building a new South Africa being multi-faceted embracing those of ending conflict in society, building new institutions of government and empowering them, those of building democracy, of fostering freedom and equality, promoting and defending human rights as well as those of economic reform and development.

Collectively, South Africa and the rest of Africa have a shared challenge of fostering closer co-operation and building structures that will accelerate the movement toward

greater economic integration, extricate the continent from grinding poverty and ultimately restore the Continent to the mainstream of the International System.

This is a broad agenda which will evolve the twin processes of political and economic transformation. But in order for that transformation to take place, I see a set of imperatives which must be met and a number of issues to be addressed. This is necessary because in my view, the establishment of the new South Africa we want, is directly linked to the kind of challenges which the future leadership of this country will have to contend with. The ability of that leadership to address these challenges conclusively, will in turn, determine whether that new South Africa can consolidate.

The pillars on which the new South Africa will be anchored, must embrace democracy as their foundation. A country such as this, emerging from decades of extreme political polarization and conflict, can find long term peace and enduring stability - only in true democracy. To South Africa, this task of erecting the structures of democracy will not be easy. Neither the erstwhile advocates of Apartheid nor



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the victims of it, have the requisite experience of genuine democracy. For the irony of oppression is that in order to keep someone down in the gutter, you have to be there with him or her to ensure that he or she does not escape. In a real sense, therefore, both the perpetrators of Apartheid and those against whom it was directed, were all victims - even if at grandly different scales. To build democracy requires tolerance, patience and forbearance on the part of those who are involved. But what is important is to begin.

Indeed the people of South Africa have begun addressing themselves to the challenge of building democracy in their country. It has been possible, through multi-party frameworks to negotiate and agree on an Interim Constitution which will guide the country through transition over the next couple of years. In two months, the people of this country, the overwhelming number of them for the first time in their lives will be going to the polls to exercise their fundamental right to vote and to political choice. They will be doing so under an Interim Constitution which will continually be adjusted to the requirements of the political process and finally replaced with a permanent one once transition is completed.



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The forthcoming multi-party elections will produce a Government for this country. It will be for the first time that this country will be governed by a government elected by all its citizens. As a product of a democratic process, the government will have to embody the virtues of democracy for it to inspire the full trust and confidence of the people. These virtues include transparency and accountability. Yet such a government will still be operating, and for some time to come, against the background of mistrust and suspicion, which runs deep in the body politic of this country. For that Government to function, and do so well, it will necessarily have to rise above this divisive legacy.

Perhaps more than anything else South Africa needs reconciliation and healing the deep wounds and devastation which Apartheid inflicted on it. And this is the hardest of all the tasks that faces the leadership of tomorrow. It will require great vision, determination and perseverance to re-direct emotions, to defeat bigotry and prejudice, to foster a spirit of reconciliation and compromise in the country.

Right now there is great polarization in the country. Expectations are great, fears and contempt are equally deep. In this highly charged atmosphere the government of tomorrow

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faces few choices except to contain both exuberance and extremism, and to attempt to bring into this country a sense of accommodation which will permit order to be maintained and ultimately to begin on the road to social harmony.

This country will not reconcile with itself unless its people are prepared to put the past behind them and look to the future. Of course, you will need to look back to draw the necessary lessons from your tragic history. It will, however, serve no useful purpose to linger in the past simply because it is politically expedient to do so. In this objective of evolving a new perspective to the country, the political parties, organizations and the Government have a crucial role to play.

Likewise, in the new South Africa academic institutions have a pivotal role to perform. In this task, it will of course be necessary to begin with introspection, to change the attitudes and thinking of the institutions themselves. In addition and most importantly, that re-orientation, will have to be discernible and clearly demonstrable to those who look to the academia for intellectual guidance, but who, for reasons of history have grounds to harbour doubt.

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I place accent on the need for a new outlook because we all are painfully aware of the role played by some Universities and academic institutions in defending racism in this country. Apartheid was justified, rationalized and defended by some Academicians and Institutions on grounds of fundamentally flawed and self-serving racist theories. It was these Academicians and Institutions who wrote the Apartheid Constitutions and who devised all the elaborate means of their enforcement. It was the same people and institutions who saw it fit to give the overwhelming part of the population of this country sub-standard education. In the new South Africa, therefore, I see need for these institutions to free themselves from the shackles of their prejudice and join the mainstream of academic thinking. And for the people to begin having faith in them, these institutions and indeed the individuals in them will have to be seen explicitly to have broken with the past and embraced change. Without this change, they cannot play a meaningful and constructive role in helping determine a right course for the future of this country.

Mr. Chairman,

A central element to the strategy of promoting reconciliation in this country is to deepen the process of dialogue, and building a culture of tolerance of diversity.

South Africa, like the rest of the continent, is a quilt, held together by a diversity of races, religions, ethnic groups, cultures, traditions and languages. All these are forces which hold the great potential either for the strength or weakness of this country. If creatively managed, this diversity can be a factor of unity and strength. If however your differences are abused, or exploited for political ends, they will unleash destructive forces which will have serious consequences. The leadership of tomorrow will have equally the task of ensuring that tolerance and unity in diversity are promoted. Whether in ethnic, racial or religious terms, it will be necessary to put in place the kind of arrangements which assure equity, legitimacy and identity within the setting of a united South Africa. This country needs to find new basis for maintaining unity : Apartheid held the country together by the use of force and physical separation. Now that Apartheid is on its way out, it should not give way to old-age rivalries and misplaced enmities of your forbears.

To reverse five decades of bigotry, prejudice, fear and oppression, will require more than just political accommodation and compromise expressed in free and fair elections and a government of the majority. It will have also to take efforts to bring down those psychological barriers and



misplaced fear, on which Apartheid was supported. It will require mutual assurance and embrace into a partnership for a new South Africa. I am not in the least unaware of the serious difficulties which lie ahead. It is not easy, nor is it appropriate for a government to attempt to legislate against individual prejudice or idiosyncracies. But it is possible for a government, through its policies of building bridges of co-operation, of reaching out to the people with a message of hope and friendship to foster a spirit of entente and co-operation in the country. Experience everywhere has shown that most people don't manifest hate towards others because they are intrinsically evil or ill-willed. Rather they do so out of misplaced prejudice and fear both of which feed and prosper on ignorance. Separation, especially that which is enforced by the government through a system such as apartheid, is bound, as it did indeed, to breed wrong assumptions and fear that those disenfranchised and dispossessed would come to take away the prerogatives and material comfort of the few, destroy the country as well as their way of life.

It follows therefore that with a legacy of such polarization the government will have a vexing task of assuring every one of continuity and change but to do so on



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the firm premise that the status quo cannot be allowed to continue under any guise. To so assure the country must also mean to open the country to equal access and competition with rewards accruing from merit and not from the subjective criteria of race. Equal access and equal opportunity will, in the long run, bring greater equality in society.

South Africa is a country endowed with immense resources. It has a fairly sophisticated economy backed by a good industrial base, modern agriculture and vast reserves of mineral resources. To those in whose favour and interest Apartheid placed these resources, South Africa has been a paradise, a land of opportunity, a land of plenty, a place of happiness and material comfort. But to those whom Apartheid condemned to manning the factories, working the land, digging out the minerals and in appalling working conditions, South Africa has been a land of gross injustice.

The long-term security and stability of South Africa will not come about in the absence of equality of opportunity and fairness in the access to the national wealth. Democracy likewise will not endure in conditions of extreme inequality which Apartheid created and which has confined the majority of this country into poverty. There is need to restore balance

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so that new opportunities are opened up and mechanisms of accessing them are created and made available on an equal basis, to all the citizens of this country without regard to race, religion or gender. South Africa needs to maximise the potential of its human resource through the provision of the means required just as much as it needs to bring about social justice as an insurance against social instability. Either way, South Africa stands to gain from this duality.

Of course expectations from the new South Africa and its future leadership are not confined to the borders of this country. The sub-region and the Continent as a whole, is looking anxiously forward to a free, peaceful and a democratic South Africa out of more than the fundamental belief, that it will mark the restoration of justice, for so long denied to the majority of this country. We see in it as well, the opening of immense opportunities which future co-operation will present. South Africa has a fairly sophisticated economy. It has the technological and scientific know-how as well as the resources which have combined to generate the critical mass for this country's impressive economic advancement.

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If these resources and the know-how are deployed creatively and in partnership with those available within the rest of the region, they can generate a momentum for shared growth and development. It is to this new partnership that the new South Africa will have to convert. To retreat from confrontation and war, to transform itself from being a factor of destabilization, into a new engagement with the sub-region - one of sustained economic partnership for growth and development and one of promoting security and stability. We want a South Africa that will be a factor of economic stability in the region.

Naturally, for this to be achieved, the whole question of co-operation will have to be approached creatively and dynamically so that the potential that exists is maximized, on principles of equality and fairness to the advantage of all. This new approach must be founded on principles of equity and fairness. The opportunities for trade and investment, those for scientific and technological exchange, hold the potential to be the engine of development in the region. In this region, whether on a bilateral basis or within the Southern African Development Community or within COMESA, we expect South Africa to play the catalytic role, in promoting and spearheading economic co-operation. For that co-operation to be meaningful, it will be necessary for South Africa to be seen not as a domineering economic giant coming

to swallow up the rest of the region, but as a partner in development. This is to say that, the region must be allowed to offer more in their economic relations with the new South Africa more than just cheap labour; accessible resources and ready markets. We expect an open economy, accessible and reciprocal and not one insulated from meaningful international economic exchange by restrictive tariffs and other protectionist measures.

This is most important especially as the new South Africa will be rejoining the region on an active and direct participation basis, when the pace of integration is quickening. All partners in this enterprise will therefore have to be assured that integration will offer mutual advantages and that it will not be allowed to erode and be used by those more economically able as a facility to perpetrate their dominance.

Beyond this region, we in the Organization of African Unity look forward to the new South Africa as a powerful addition to our African family of nations. The experience you will have gained in resolving your own conflict, in building democracy and democratic institutions, of dialogue and reconciliation, of managing an efficient economy, will be



useful to other countries as they also grapple with the very same problems. Equally, South Africa, with its economic power, scientific and technological know-how, we expect, will come both to spearhead economic development in the Continent and to strengthen Africa's hand in the International System. The end of Apartheid will liberate Africa from one of its most important commitments and allow it to redirect both attention and resources to meeting other pressing imperatives. Additionally, therefore, the peace dividend which will accrue from savings of resources otherwise diverted to the fight against Apartheid as well as those resulting from increased economic co-operation stand a real chance of propelling the Continent to new heights of growth and development.

After the elections and the emergence of a democratic, non-racial Government, we hope to welcome the new South Africa to the OAU fold. South Africa will be joining an Organization that holds both hope and promise for the Continent. It is an Organization, which, after thirty years of existence, has had its ups and downs, its successes and failures but on the whole, which has stayed true to its mission and in which remains reposed the collective will, hopes and aspirations of our countries.



Thirty years ago, when thirty-two of our countries founded the Organizatgion of African Unity, they were just emerging from colonial rule. They had no experience of modern government much less of International Organization. They were however guided by their collective determination to found joint framework within which their identity of being African could be projected, their view articulated and their common problems tackled. Today, that vision is part of the reality in the Continent. The identify of being African and not an appendage to some distant colonial power, is real. Through the Organization of African Unity, the Continent has been able to formulate and articulate its position in world affairs. Within the United Nations, Africa was able to be heard as a positive and active force in defence of peace, justice and economic development. We collectively opposed the Cold War and its attendant arms race and we supported non-alignment.

At the level of the Continent, the OAU has been able to maintain African unity against many and seemingly insurmountable odds. Neither the Cold War nor the negative colonial legacies succeeded in dividing the Continent.

It was that shared identity, that unity and common purpose fostered by the Organisation of African Unity, which

were instrumental in giving the Continent the collective force of fighting against racism and Apartheid. And we have effectively succeeded.

Even with the completion of the tasks of decolonization and the elimination of racism, Africa is still faced with an equally engaging challenge of economic development. Today, thirty years after political independence, the Continent is still caught in the doldrums of poverty. The many social gains which were made in the first two decades of independence especially in education, health care, sanitation and rural development, are threatened with reversal in the face of a myriad of economic woes, some of international origin, others of our own making.

Politically, Africa also continues to be afflicted by many problems. Politics of intolerance and exclusion, as well as political rigidities, and in some cases corruption, have bred conflicts in many of our countries. Those conflicts have had serious consequences to peace and stability as well as the cause of human rights in the Continent. The millions of refugees and displaced persons drifting around the Continent are a sad reminder of the results of bad politics in some of our countries.

I speak of the problems facing the Continent not in terms of showing just how badly we are doing but to illustrate the magnitude of the tasks which our countries, with the help of the OAU, are now resolved to have them addressed.

In the economic field, we now see collective determination in the Continent to right what has gone wrong. Economic reforms, unprecedented in the Continent, are now in full gear. These our countries have done, with and without international co-operation or assistance. Economic liberalization is now the key word in Africa. We see the private sector playing an increasingly important role in the economies of our countries. Central to all this, is the determination of our countries that, ultimately, they have to re-seize the initiative of genuine self-reliance, if the slide of the people into greater poverty is to be halted and reversed. Our Governments are more and more willing to take drastic measures, often at great social cost and political risk, aimed at bringing frugality and rationality to expenditure, as well as restoring efficiency, productivity and growth to the economies. I am sure you will have heard from the South African Business Community that, more and more of our countries are opening to foreign investment with attractive terms.

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Beyond the reforms which are being undertaken internally, our countries collectively, realize that individual action, will, in the long run, not suffice to conclusively address the Continent's economic problems. This realization has found concrete expression in the signature in Abuja - Nigeria, of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Africa, like the rest of the world, has awakened to the reality that in the days ahead, it is the more diversified, and integrated economic groupings, which will take advantage of economies of scale and of co-operation and be able to compete effectively at the market place. Africa, more than any other region, needs integration. We need to use our resources more rationally, to produce together and trade amongst ourselves.

At the OAU, we have begun with the initial stages of the establishment of the future Community. Work is in progress to finalize a number of protocols to the Treaty, particularly those areas we consider most integrative such as transport and communication, trade, money and finance, customs and above all, the thorny issue of movement of persons, goods and services. We are also in progress of working with the Regional Economic Groupings such as SADC, COMESA, ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Maghreb Union, to see how their programmes can be brought in alignment with the programmes of the OAU of



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building Pan-African Economic Community. Also, we are in the process of reviewing the future structure of the OAU General Secretariat to see the kind of adjustments and reforms which are necessary in order to enable it discharge the function of helping Member States in fostering greater integration in the Continent.

Of course, while the bulk of the effort at economic development must be African, we at the OAU believe that in the absence of additionality of resources, this task will be made slower and more difficult. That is why we continue to urge better terms of trade, greater flow of investment resources, greater access to concessionary credit by Africa and most importantly, definitive action on the central question of the Continent's external indebtedness.

Politically, the Continent is in great movement as countries are converting to political pluralism. Greater political openness based on popular participation is in ascendance on the Continent, as people want and are given more say on how they are governed by whom and for how long. This new openness is having positive results to the political life of our Continent. It has enabled a free and vibrant press to emerge. We see the growth in awareness and development of the



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civil society. New non-governmental organizations are springing up and advocacy for many causes, ranging from human rights, the environment, health and development is forcing Governments to respond positively with increasing frequency. In all these, the OAU has been happily associated. We are called to observe and supervise elections in many countries. The OAU African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is getting increasingly involved in monitoring the performance of governments in areas of human rights. And National Human Rights Commissions are being established in many countries.

Perhaps nowhere has the OAU involvement been more profound than in the Continent's search for solutions to the many conflicts which now afflict the Continent. In a radical departure from past restrictive practices and their views, the Member States now not only concede a role to the OAU in helping them resolve conflicts, they are more and more requiring the Organization to be involved actively. As a result of this new perspective on how Member States view the role of the OAU, we are now actively engaged in a number of countries. The OAU is in Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, to some extent in Mozambique, Somalia, Congo and in this country, lending its hand to the internal efforts aimed at resolving the conflict.

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Within the context of bringing greater political and operational consistency in the way Africa wants to deal with these conflicts, OAU leaders, at their last Summit Meeting in Cairo, Egypt in July 1993, established within the Organization, a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This Mechanism, which will operate with the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government as its political Organ will have the Secretary-General and the Secretariat as the Operational Arm as well as a Peace Fund, to provide resources for its operations. This Mechanism is already functioning and it has met several times at Ambassadorial level and once each at Ministerial and Summit level to consider the conflicts that now rage on in the Continent.

At the genesis of the decision to establish this Mechanism, was the determination by the Member States that time has now come for Africa to re-seize the initiative and provide leadership in its attempts at finding solutions to the Continent's conflicts. The founding of the Mechanism was historic, coming as it did, when Africa is mounting concerted efforts at economic development. Our Continent needs peace and stability, if the efforts at economic development and further democratization are to achieve their desired

objectives. We cannot serve the cause of unity, of economic integration or that of human rights, without finding durable solutions to the conflicts in the Continent. In empowering itself through this Mechanism, Africa is saying enough is enough, and that we are determined to grasp the Mettle and put our house in order - even if we shall continue to need International Solidarity and Support.

In a nutshell, Ladies and Gentlement, this is the OAU, which South Africa will be joining. Unlike what the detractors of Africa may want you to believe, Africa is not a continent condemned to economic backwardness, to conflicts and one without hope. On the contrary, it is a continent now ready to redefine its place in the world, to find a new strategic importance for itself - not one of an intermediary in Cold War, but one of a partner in global development. So far, all the spirited efforts at economic reform internally, of integration regionally, of further democratization as well as those of ending conflicts are all elements of a new agenda for our Organization. It is not an agenda of a resigned Continent. Rather it is an agenda of a hopeful, a confident and determined Africa. We want the new South Africa to bring hope and vigour to this new dynamism and determination of the Continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A South Africa reconciled with itself; a country liberated from the ignominy of racism and re-born to the glory of freedom, equity and justice. A South Africa which is democratic; united and at peace with itself and its neighbours. A South Africa, which is economically strong, dynamic and prosperous; a South Africa which is a valuable member of the African family of nations, joined in solidarity with the rest of this Continent, is the South Africa we fought for, it is the South Africa we look forward to.

We all have the obligation to ensure that we play our respective parts in the deliverance of that South Africa. The days ahead will be critical and I hope and pray that we shall defeat our fears, overcome the impediments on the way, in the confident hope that we shall soon live to see that new South Africa, taking its proud and rightful role in the Comity of Nations.

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