

South Africa national day

A better place than 20 years ago

Mohau Phoko
AMBASSADOR OF SOUTH AFRICA

2014 is a landmark year as South Africa celebrates 20 years of freedom and democracy. It is a unique moment in our history that enables us to reflect on a journey taken by so many to achieve the freedom and democracy we enjoy today. We celebrate the freedom that brought black and white people together. We celebrate our diversity, colorfulness and vibrancy.



At the heart of our democratic society is our strong constitution, considered one of the most progressive in the world and admired by many who are fighting for democratic freedom. It underpins the soul of South Africa's democracy, a nonracial, nonsexist, and prosperous society. Our passion for human rights is based on justice, equality, the rule of law and defending the inalienable human rights of all. It explains our obligations as citizens to each other, to the country and to the international community.

Today we can say without equivocation that South Africa is a better place than it was 20 years ago. It has come a long way in addressing injustice, inequality and poverty and become a beacon of democracy and hope for millions of people across the world. The injustices of Apartheid, when people were judged according to their race, gender and class, are being firmly cast off and a new and proud national identity is emerging, built on mutual respect and a shared love for country.

This year marks 104 years of relations with Japan. The relationship between South Africa and Japan has been elevated to a strategic partnership and is becoming more ambitious. South Africa is Japan's largest trading partner in Africa and Japan is South Africa's 3rd largest trading partner. Our trade relations are developing more diverse links, focusing on science and technology and particularly collaborating in the area of new innovations and natural resource beneficiation in the platinum group metals.

Not only is South Africa an important emerging economy, it is a gateway to other African markets. The country plays a significant role in supplying energy, relief aid, transport, communications and investment on the continent. Its well-developed road and

rail links provide the platform and infrastructure for ground transportation deep into Africa. Home to 6 percent of the continent's population, South Africa produces 23 percent of Africa's GDP, boasts 45 percent of its mineral production and 50 percent of its buying power. South Africa is still rated the most attractive country in Africa for investors. With a world-class progressive legal framework, South African legislation governing commerce, labor and maritime issues is strong. Laws on competition policy, copyright, patents, trademarks and disputes conform to international norms and standards. The country's modern infrastructure supports the efficient distribution of goods throughout Africa. One of the most important elements of our New Growth Plan is growing our green economy and the potential to create a lower-carbon economy. The green economy is a job generator as well as a new sector for innovation.

South Africa believes in the rise of the African continent. South Africa is the single largest investor in Africa by number of FDI projects. It is at the forefront of growth in intra-African trade through the expansion of its multinational corporations across the continent. It has been playing a strategic role, particularly in the diversification of investment sectors. The longer-term story is the contribution South Africa is making to grow the service sector across Africa. This is helping to reduce Africa's dependency on natural resources.

One of South Africa's greatest assets is the combination of its rich biological diversity and its wealth of indigenous knowledge. Our country is the world's third most biologically diverse country and is home to almost 10 percent of the world's known plant species and 15 percent of all known coastal marine species — including a newly identified lobster that has been named after Madiba (municipality of Mandelata).

This capital will be used to the country's advantage in the current economy through multidisciplinary approaches, including providing raw materials for the natural product sector, bio-prospecting with the aim of developing pharmaceutical, cosmetic and industrial applications, using indigenous plants and animals as sources.

South Africa holds 88 percent of global platinum resources and 77 percent of

global manganese worth an estimated \$2.5 trillion, making South Africa the wealthiest mining jurisdiction in the world. The Platinum Valley Initiative aims to benefit platinum group metals in South Africa. The focus is on downstream opportunities in platinum, using it for cleaner technologies in manufacturing and catalytic converters in the automotive sector. Hydrogen South Africa has already advanced its research to produce fuel cells for local use and mining giant Anglo-American in South Africa has unveiled the first platinum fuel cell-powered mine locomotive.

This creates a huge opportunity for enhanced science, technology and innovation cooperation between South Africa and Japan. South Africa's centers of excellence promote biotechnology, health innovation, space science and technology and new and renewable energy as strategic areas where South Africa sees potential for synergies with Japan.

We celebrate our friendship with Japan — a friendship strengthened by the Crown Prince attending the funeral of former President Nelson Mandela in December 2013. Although our beloved Madiba cannot celebrate this 20th anniversary of freedom with us, we stand on a solid foundation and legacy that continues to inspire and guide our nation. We recall him saying, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." His example has transformed us into a nation that takes seriously its role as a global citizen.

South Africa's foreign policy has come of age in the past twenty years. We have been warmly received into the international community and are now one of its respected global players.

Our two countries share fun-

damental values as members of the international community. We are both members of the G20 and play leading roles in global economic governance and we are nations that shoulder international burdens in peacekeeping. We are like-minded in achieving the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, many of which South Africa has achieved.

We voluntarily abandoned and dismantled South Africa's nuclear weapons program during the nation's successful democratic transition. It was natural for South Africa to assume a key role during the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). On this occasion South Africa earned its newfound status as a bridge builder in the multilateral arena by brokering a deal that extended the lifespan of the treaty.

In these 20 years we are the only African member of the G20, hosting the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1998, the Commonwealth Heads of government in 1999, the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001. The first Summit of the African Union was hosted in South Africa in 2002. In 2010 we hosted the FIFA Soccer World Cup, the first on African soil and the most successful. Conscious of the changing environment, South Africa hosted the 17th U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change; better known as COP17, in 2011. We infused new life into the climate change discourse and negotiations, which placed the world on an unassailable course through the adoption of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, which continues to be the basis of future climate changes responses.

South Africa joined the ranks of Brazil, Russia, India



(Above) Located near the town of Carnarvon in South Africa's Northern Cape Province, the seven-dish KAT-7 telescope is the precursor engineering test bed for the MeerKAT telescope and the first radio telescope array consisting of composite antenna structures. (Right) Toyota South Africa assembly plant in Durban, which has continued to contribute to the local economy since it was built in 1997. MIKE HUTCHINGS/REUTERS, TOYOTA SOUTH AFRICA



and China in 2010 to become a BRICS country and it hosted the first BRICS Summit on African soil in March 2013.

Our participation in institutions of global governance, notably the United Nations, is driven by the belief that these institutions must be representative of the diversity of humanity, and be governed in a transparent manner to the benefit of all nations, big or small. South Africa in this regard continues to be an active advocate for the reform of the U.N. Security Council. Our second term on the U.N. Security Council ended in December 2012 and South Africa left this body more convinced of the

urgency of the long-outstanding issue of reform. We challenge the U.N. members not to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the formation of the U.N. in 2015 with an unreformed security council.

The African Agenda is our key foreign policy objective. Our continent, Africa, is on the rise. We have sought to strengthen our continental organization, notably the 15 member Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU), as vehicles for the regeneration of Africa to build a continent free of conflict and increasing trade between African countries.

Through SADC we have worked with the people of Zimbabwe and Madagascar to achieve political stability in those two countries and we remain actively engaged in the Democratic Republic Congo and South Sudan. This month, our country assumes its two-year membership of the AU Peace and Security Council.

We share, with Japan, a

strong belief in the regeneration and development of our continent. Our celebrations today come in the wake of the 20th anniversary of the inception of the Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD V).

South Africa is a reliable, principled and consistent friend and partner for the 21st century.

Congratulations
on the 20th Anniversary
of the Freedom Day
of the Republic of South Africa



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