

**MAURITIUS Second National Assembly
FIRST SESSION
Debate No 27 of 1998
Sitting of Saturday 12 September 1998**

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Speaker, accompanied by His Excellency The President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson R. Mandela, and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, and preceded by the Serjeant-At-Arms, bearing the Mace, and the Clerk of the National Assembly, entered the Chamber of Assembly in procession.

Mr Speaker seated His Excellency to his right and the Prime Minister of Mauritius to his left on the dais and took the Chair.

The National Anthems of the Republic of South Africa and of the State of Mauritius were played.

ANNOUNCEMENT

H.E. THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, MR NELSON MANDELA –
PRESENCE – NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Mr Speaker: Hon Members, the National Assembly has been convened today to an extraordinary sitting to welcome a unique statesman in the person of His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson Mandela.

When all the parliaments in the world are eager to receive His Excellency, we are indeed honoured to have him in our House. Besides, His Excellency has kindly accepted to address us and we are impatient to benefit from his vast experience of human affairs.

It is also my great privilege, on your behalf and in my own name, to extend our warmest greetings to the First Lady of the Republic of South Africa who is honouring us with her gracious presence.

We wish His Excellency and Mrs Graya Machel a very pleasant stay in Mauritius.

Hon. Members, today is a historic day in the annals of our Assembly. Such a day comes but rarely, and it will be remembered by generations to come. We, who are here today, are fortunate, because we shall be able to tell the next generation <We were there>.

His Excellency Mr Mandela needs no introduction. Trusted leader of the great republic over which he presides with such uncommon distinction, he is also the father-figure to whom many a Government and many a leader, aware of his ever positive response, resort for precious advice and, at times, mediation. His Excellency's achievements, specially in the promotion of justice and liberty, against the evil forces of dictatorship, are exceptional. The opportunities he has created for one and all the world over are numberless. Today his political stature has reached such gigantic proportions as to make of him the symbol of forgiveness, reconciliation, liberty, peace and democracy. Your Excellency, you represent all these ideals of mankind, yet much more. Your nature is too full of the milk of human kindness, as would have said the English bard. We have a lot to learn from you.

Your Excellency, you have the Floor.

Address by His Excellency The President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Nelson R
Mandela

Mr Speaker Hon Members of the National Assembly of Mauritius, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and a privilege to have the opportunity to address the representatives of the Mauritius nation.

Yesterday, when we laid a wreath at Samadhi, it was deeply moving to see the symbols with which the Mauritian people have chosen to represent their nationhood. The bold affirmation of ties with the four main civilizations – Africa, Chinese, European and Indian – which form the core of a nation which nonetheless has its own distinct Mauritian identity, is an inspiration to all South Africans.

In a world in which new forms of discrimination and prejudice are emerging and generating violence and insecurity in many parts of the world, this proud celebration of unity in diversity is a beacon of hope. It is consistent with the solidarity of the Mauritian people with our struggle. With your help, and that of the international community as a whole, we have ended a system that used the diversity of South Africans to pit one against the other and deny the majority their basic rights.

As we build a new nation out of the rich tapestry of our cultures, we are committed to realizing those principles of tolerance and mutual respect and unity which your nation represents.

For us too, there is also great pride, as Africans, in the fact that with this rich heritage, and situated far from the coast of Africa, you became African not by virtue of geography, but by choice. That this is not some distant intellectual exercise, or a matter of mere convenience, is clear from the role of Mauritius in regional and continental affairs. We have noted before the role that Prime Minister Ramgoolam played as an African Leader when he championed the cause of the continent at the previous ACP/EU successor agreement summit.

Even though Mauritius, like South Africa, is amongst of the newest members of SADC, her active participation in the upliftment of our region is already evident Mauritius has become a key member in the strategic partnership for regional development and economic integration, and we look forward with pleasure to this first SADC annual summit to be hosted on your island.

In keeping with the broader symbolism of the monument at Samadhi, Mauritius is also playing a critical role in the establishment of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation. Today, with the end of the colonial era, new conditions allow us to reach out to our Indian Ocean neighbours and revive ancient links of trade and interaction for our mutual benefit.

It we lay stress on the multilateral organizations in which we work together, it is because our gage has become defined by an increasing interdependence of nations and regions. None of us on our own can solve the problems that face us. Instability or economic problems in one country can impact on its neighbours or even on distant countries across the world.

This then is the context which led our two countries to join the Southern African Development Community within a year of each other and to be active members of the international organizations whose reason for existence is to assert the interests of the developing countries in the world agenda. It is the same context which leads us to prize our common membership of associations which embrace both North and South, such as the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

We are led in these directions by our commitment to democracy, peace, stability, security, development and equity and by the recognition that the achievement of these goals by anyone of us depends on their being achieved by others. No nation, even the most powerful, can enjoy lasting security while those around are mired in poverty.

These commitments and this understanding also guide South Africa in its program of reconstruction and development. Our democracy will remain fragile, and our rights without concrete meaning, if they do not bring real improvements in the lives of the majority of our people who were left in poverty by apartheid.

Yesterday, I addressed another gathering and I pointed out there are many countries that speak of democracy almost everyday, but where the concept of democracy is a hollow share and I referred to another country which I did not mention the name and don't hope I am going to mention it here, where they have no parliamentary institutions whatsoever, where the citizens have no vote, where there is no Parliament, but from the point of view of addressing the living standards of these people, it is one of the most excellent examples of a Government that cares. They are a credited nation; they do not owe anybody a cent; they are tax free; they have one of the highest standards of living in the world; they have a free medical service; they have free education; they have one of the best subsidies for houses and one of the best subsidies for transport. I was travelling from the headquarters of the Government of the country to my guest house and we reached an area where the road was blocked by traffic and I asked: "Is there an international conference here?" And the Foreign Minister who was accompanying me said: "No, it is parents; they have come to fetch their school children." Each parent has got a car and a modern car, not something which we used to use, and which I am going to use also when I step down, an old car which stops several times on the road, but modern, decent cars because of the best subsidy for transport which that country has. We still insist that every country should have parliamentary institutions and the citizens must be able to determine their destiny and they cannot do so if there are no parliamentary institutions, but from the point of view of the comparison, which is more democratic, the countries that pay lip service to democracy where the muscles of the people are crushed by poverty, disease, illiteracy, lack of security, strength and hope, whereas you have a country which has made its people enjoy all that is wanted when you say; let us have parliamentary institutions. And if you compare those two, you will note the hypocrisy that is taking place in some of the western countries which boast of being democrats when the people enjoy nothing in that democracy, when they cannot put food in their mouth, when they cannot clothe their own children, when they cannot send them to the best schools in the country. This is what we mean by democracy, that people should live a decent life and at the end of it say; we passed through this world but once, but we enjoyed all the pleasures of living.

And to continue with the address which was prepared by some of my bosses here, we can report with pride to you, who helped us achieve our freedom and thereby the opportunity to address that legacy, that we are indeed making steady but sure progress in making a better life for all, especially the poor.

It will take many years before all the needs of all our people are met. But we can justly celebrate the fact that for literally millions of South Africans and most particularly those in rural areas, life is being changed by access to basic amenities which were only a dream in the recent past, such as clean water, electricity, telephones and primary health care.

These gains have been made possible also by the work of our nations elected representatives, who like yourselves are charged with devising the legislative and policy instruments of our respective country.

The path of transformation which South Africa has chosen is a profoundly legal one, and our Legislators are therefore in the forefront of the partnership of all sectors of our society that is building a better life for all.

In order to sustain the progress we have made and indeed to speed up implementation of our programs, we are required above all to achieve sustained growth, so that we can fulfill our central obligation of eradicating poverty.

Due to this spreading turmoil in the world financial system, no country, rich or poor, powerful or small, can today contemplate the imperatives of growth without being aware of how far their success in achieving them can be determined by developments beyond their control. But although none are immune, the burden falls disproportionately on the developing countries, setting back efforts to uplift themselves.

We can escape the worst by strengthening our own economies, as both of our countries have done and are doing, including through expanding co-operative and mutually beneficial relationships with each other.

South Africa is keen to expand its economic ties with Mauritius, within the framework of regional co-operation and development. Hon Members, though current developments highlight the economic challenges of development and the international context in which we must operate, the relations we seek to build are the all-round bonds of nations sharing their deepest aspirations.

That is why we took advantage of this visit to conclude agreements to cooperate not only in the economic sphere, but also in sports, culture and the arts. It has been an inspiration to visit a country which has distinguished itself not by military victories or the conquest of others, but for the tolerance it embodies and the stability it enjoys, as well as its successful pursuit of economic growth for development.

On my return to South Africa, I will be able to report to my people that in Mauritius we have a friend indeed and a partner for peace, prosperity and equity as we enter a new millennium.

Thank you. (Applause)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Parliament of Mauritius is, today, honoured to be hosting one of the leading lights of this century. Thank you, Mr President, for such inspiring words.

The breadth of your vision and the depth of your humanity are to us a source of strength and guidance. Like millions of others throughout the world, we also find solace and inspiration in the message of hope and deliverance from oppression. By both precept and example, you have demonstrated that through justice and reconciliation we can bridge any divide. There can be no greater lesson than this in a world plagued by ethnic and racial tensions, particularly in our own continent.

Mr President, let me on behalf of Mr Speaker, of all the Members of the National Assembly on both sides of the House and the Clerk of the National Assembly, thank you once again for gracing this Assembly with our presence and address.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned to the date that has already been fixed by the Assembly.