



SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE
AMBASCIATA DEL SUDAFRICA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE

SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR GEORGE JOHANNES

SOUTH AFRICA FREEDOM DAY - 22 MAY 2019

Your Excellencies,

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Honorary South African Consuls,

Professors of various Universities,

Colleagues and Friends,

Honoured Guests

I thank you for your presence with us here today. I would like to extend warm to:

- Archbishop Pena Parra, Sostituto of the Secretariat of State;
- Monsignor Joseph Murphy, Chief of Protocol of the Holy See;
- Archbishop Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Cape Town and his Secretary, Fr. Michael Clement;
- Bishop Duncan of the Johannesburg Diocese and Fr. Patrick also from Johannesburg;
- We also welcome many of our South African Sisters and Priests studying in Rome. Some of them will be returning home after completing their studies and we wish them a safe journey back home.
- Last but not least, we welcome and greet many good friends and close associates from the Vatican Radio and media and we extend our greetings to all our well-wishers and friends present here today. We've had a number of apologies from colleagues and friends who couldn't be here with us.

I greet you all on behalf of the People and President of the Republic of South Africa and we are happy that you have joined us as we celebrate our National Day.

Twenty five years ago in 1994, the people of South Africa stood in long queues to cast their votes. It was a historic moment for the nation as all our people were given the opportunity to vote for the first time in free and fair elections.

The peaceful and dignified historical occasion culminated in the election of President Nelson Mandela as the first black President of a democratic South Africa. That moment signified that South Africa was finally free of apartheid, a system which had been declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations.

Today is also a special day for us as we celebrate South Africa Freedom Day. It is extra special as our country has just held its sixth democratic elections which took place on the 8th May 2019. The African Union and international monitors present in South Africa described the elections as free and fair and peaceful.

The manner in which all the political parties who participated in the elections conducted themselves has once more demonstrated how deep the roots of democracy in South Africa have grown.

Today, the 22nd May is the first sitting of the new Parliament in Cape Town which will commence with the swearing in of all the elected Members of Parliament, including the nomination of President Cyril Ramaphosa who will be sworn in as President on the 25th May when we celebrate Africa Day.

The theme of the President's inaugural speech is: "Together Celebrating Democracy: Renewal and Growth for a Better South Africa" and it reinforces the message that every citizen has a role to play in building a brighter future for all our people.

It emphasises that we must build on our achievements and intensify our efforts to tackle the triple challenges of poverty eradication, fighting inequality in all its manifestations and ending the scourge of unemployment, especially for the youth of our country.

Today, we are also celebrating another great anniversary. On 30th June 1994, twenty five years ago, President Nelson Mandela and Pope St John Paul 11 signed the historic Diplomatic Protocols which established formal diplomatic relations between South Africa and The Holy See. That remarkable historical event still resonates with our people as The Holy See had no formal contacts with the apartheid regime previously and had supported the struggle for freedom.

Since 1994, South African Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See were based in Berne in the Swiss Federation and I was fortunate that I was one of South Africa's Ambassadors to Switzerland from 2009 to 2015 and I presented my Letters of Accreditation to Pope Benedict XV1 in March 2009.

In 2016, I briefly spent some time as a member of a team of Peace Mediators between the Government of Mozambique and the Opposition Renamo Party.in Maputo and it was there that I was informed that I was going to be first Permanent Ambassador to The Holy See as the Government had decided to open a permanent Embassy to the Holy See.

At the beginning of May 2017, I arrived in Rome and on the 3rd June 2017, I presented my Credentials to Pope Francis.

I believe I'm probably the only Ambassador here present who presented Credentials to two successive Popes. South Africa's decision to have a permanent Embassy to The Holy See is a reflection of our Government's commitment to consolidate and elevate our relations with The Holy See into a powerful strategic partnership.

The newly established embassy is situated in Via Venti Settembre.

The Embassy is working towards deepening cooperation in all spheres with the institutions of The Holy See. We focus specifically on the fight against HIV and Aids, poverty eradication and peace mediation.

The Embassy will strengthen the work of the African Group of Ambassadors as part of our efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with The Holy See and Africa and to promote the African Agenda and raise the profile of the African Continent.

The Encyclical "Laudate Si" of Pope Francis resonates powerfully with our Government's social and peoples centered policies and outlook and we fully support Pope Francis's call to build bridges and to assist our human family wherever we can. Our aim is to build respect for each other, to respect and promote our common and integral humanity and to make a lasting contribution to the human family.

South Africa is committed to being part of humanity's efforts to save our planet from environmental disaster, our Government is determined to intensify our struggle against human trafficking and human slavery in our country and continent and we are determined as a nation to fight against children and women's abuse. We are committed to the care of the poor and the elderly and we will ensure that we intensify our efforts to make the world a better place for all of us to live in harmony and peace.

South Africa is proud to say that we are the only country to date which has voluntarily destroyed its nuclear and chemical weapons in 1995, nearly a quarter of a century ago.

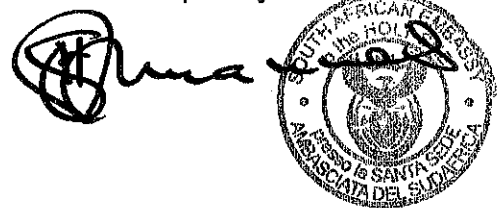
We inherited the weapons of mass destruction from the apartheid regime and we call on other countries to follow our example.

Finally, Your Excellencies, fellow South Africans and friends, enjoy this historical occasion with us and let's hold hands to consolidate and implement our common Integral Human Development as envisaged by Pope Francis.

Enjoy the opportunity to celebrate our democracy and freedom with us. South Africa welcomes you warmly as one family and as friends who share a common world outlook and destiny.

This is the Embassy's first public event in Rome and we promise you that you will hear more about us and from us as time goes on.

Thank you all for your attendance. God Bless and enjoy our humble hospitality!



The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Duma'. To the right of the signature is a circular official seal. The seal contains the text 'SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY' at the top, 'ROMA' in the center, and 'AMBASCIATA DEL SUDAFRICA' at the bottom. The seal also features the South African coat of arms in the center.