

**Transcript of address by President Jacob Zuma on the occasion of the gathering of Traditional Leaders in honour of former President Nelson Mandela; Freedom Park, Pretoria**

5 November 2009

Thank you very much Director of the Programme

The Kings and all the Royal highnesses at different levels that are represented here, I would not attempt to name all of you because I will name others and not name others because I have not had the opportunity to know all those who are here today. I think it would be all protocol observed if I said;

Zinkosi zakowethu, Makhosi Akithi, Di Kgosi  
All of you who are here,  
The President of Contralesa,  
The Leadership of the National House of Traditional Leaders in SA,  
The Minister Sicelo Shiceka whose responsibility is to look after the affairs of traditional leaders,  
Mayor of Tshwane Ms Gwen Ramakgopa,  
All leaders in different categories.

Let me add my voice in apologizing that I am not in a position to be with you until the end. Initially I had thought I would be, but as you know there are always issues that challenge those in government. There is a SADC Summit in Maputo on the matter of Zimbabwe. And before SADC sits there is what is called a Troika which works on the details and I have been invited to participate and therefore I will leave immediately after speaking. It is not out of disrespect, it is just because duty calls.

I would also want to recognize Madiba for this day is about him. But allow me to appreciate the initiative that you have taken to honour a son of Africa, a great leader, this icon of our country, our continent and of the world.

It is a welcomed initiative by all of us. For you to come together and honour this hero is a welcomed gesture from our traditional leaders.

Traditional leaders in this continent have a history, a history that must not be forgotten. When the colonialists arrived particularly in this part they were in contact with the traditional leaders. When they campaigned to take everything from us, our land, our authority to govern, our dignity and our everything, our traditional leaders commanded their people, their regiments to fight in defence of all of those. Because people had such loyalty to traditional leaders, our enemies focused on them very specifically to single them out for punishment. They were arrested, imprisoned, killed, deposed, exiled and there is nothing that did not happen to them, but they never stood back. They always wanted to be in the forefront of the struggle which we normally refer to as the wars of

dispossession which were waged by our traditional leaders to defend ourselves as we were being robbed of what we were.

Our enemies then sought to divide us more by indeed engaging traditional leaders in different ways and wanting them to disunite so that they deal with them in isolation, because they feared that the unity of the traditional leaders in leading their people would be difficult to deal with. So as they conquered some parts they isolated others. I do not think we have the time and perhaps we should do so, because it is a painful history to deal with in an occasion like this.

But as one of the freedom fighter who had a lot to do with the understanding of our struggles before the modern organisations like the ANC, I think is important to underline my appreciation of your coming together today.

We need to use the expression that Madiba is fond of using; that “Let bygones be bygones”, let us unite today as the traditional leaders to ensure that indeed we contribute to the modern ways of governance from a traditional point of view and I think it is important since you are gathered here in big numbers to make the point that as u were distinguished by your actions, your leadership the time has come now for you to demonstrate this under the circumstances and come together.

You have always risen to the call when in this country after the Bhambatha wars, which were led by one of the Kings, Isilo uDinizulu, the last armed engagement with the enemy. You were part of the debate that sought to change the methods of the struggle and therefore said let us form an organisation of the people. That is why traditional leaders at all levels including Kings were part of the formation of the ANC in 1912.

Kingdoms from Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and up to the Ngunis in the eastern part of Zambia took part in that organisation. In other words traditional leaders said the time has come now that we mobilise our people differently that let us unite the oppressed people and they said; ‘mZulu, mXhosa, mSuthu hlanganani’.

That was an important call that was made. It is important also to note that one of the grandfathers of Madiba was there in Bloemfontein and contributed 100 cows for food for the conference to eat.

If today you come together as you did, we cannot better appreciate this and hope that a number of issues you are going to address because for the fact that you agreed to honour this man, whose roots are in the traditional leadership as one of the leading politicians and not just a politician, in simple terms, a freedom fighter and revolutionary, a leader who became the first President of a democratic South Africa.

I am stressing this because part of the other side of the history with regards to traditional leaders has been the abuse by those in power that we should not accept that today.

No one of us must believe if we are elected we are above you. They should be co-ordination, working together, particularly if we begin to bring together traditional leaders in the continent of Africa. We must be clear on what we are doing, because if you did things in a manner that indicates your weaknesses you might undermine your status.

Let the Kings be Kings, the born Kings and I think it is important for us as politicians and government to recognise that drive to unite the traditional leaders. Let it not be diluted, So that you do not repeat the past, where magistrates in this country became senior than the Kings.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the man you are recognising today has been our leader and remains our leader, one of the outstanding leaders of this country far beyond his own organisation, far beyond the nation of this country and far beyond the African in Africa. A leader that has been recognised the world over.

Madiba has taught us many things. Yesterday at about six I was in Equatorial Guinea having my last meeting with the President there. In the press conference a journalist asked him a question; "Why did you release the mercenaries who endangered your country". The President said, "I am one of those who have been taught by Mandela that as Africans we must forgive".

That indicates the influence of Madiba and his lessons to all of us. A man after 27 years would emerge smiling and saying peace in my country and worked with those who had imprisoned him jointly to govern South Africa and preach reconciliation. When you talk about Madiba you are talking about a man who could fit any category, who did not see a contradiction between traditional systems and modern democratic systems.

Madiba epitomises a generation of leaders whose selfless sacrifices placed South Africa to the road to democracy. As the leader of the democratic revolution he sacrificed his freedom for the ideals of a democratic and free society in which all races could leave in harmony and with equal opportunities.

As the world's most famous prisoner his incarceration captured the world's imagination, rallying the global community to the fight against apartheid. As leader of the African National Congress he led his country on the path to peace and democracy. As Nobel peace Laureate he promoted human rights throughout his life in the struggle and worked to unite South Africans and the entire, he championed the cause of nation building and reconciliation.

He has done many things to identify himself with his ideals that he stands for. He has been us a father, a leader and everything since he joined the ANC including dreaming about what type of a country we needed after freedom. He has been everything, his leaving at the time were he has crossed the centuries from the 20th to the 21st.

Indeed a father of the nation, our leader Madiba. Some of us saw him in different times as well as in prison and some of us have listened to him in different circumstances. A leader

that you could hardly find fault in what he does. Very consistent in his views and behaviour, a real African who loved African people, but not to the exclusion of others, who wanted to embrace everyone, who wanted everyone to feel at home. He is a man to be honoured indeed as you are honouring him.

He has been honoured by many, countries and organisations internationally; I do not think that there is any category that has not honoured Madiba. You had not organised yourselves as you have done here today as traditional leaders to recognise the role of Madiba and therefore find a way to recognise the role of traditional leaders in the struggle for the liberation of our country. Some of them suffered, some of them were in Robben Island, some of them died and this offers us an opportunity to raise that element of our struggle. I am saying all of this because I appreciate what you are doing and I want to say my leaders you are starting something that may instil good.

You therefore need to clarify yourselves and ourselves what you mean by this. You cannot go back and be disunited, but you have to move forward in a manner that helps us to realise the dream of Madiba. To realise what he stood for, to realise what he distinguished himself for.

Let me say what Madiba said summarising what he stood for; and I am going to do this as the Bible does and the Koran. Because they always read Genesis and at times, Luke, Matthew and Jacob all the time and say what Madiba said at the right moment, a dream that we all need to fight for not to fight to divide ourselves but to work towards uniting all of us irrespective of where you come from. If I come from Nkandla, from Mahlabathini for that matter or KwaNongoma there should be no difference from you who comes from Pretoria or anywhere else.

All we need to do is to work to unite ourselves, to get rid of the differences between the urban and the rural, to change the quality of our lives for the better. This is what Madiba stood for we must therefore know that when we honour him, we in fact supporting fully his dream the ideals that he stood for.

I thought I should remind the traditional leaders and I am sure that they know it, but just as I said the Bible is always in the hands of the Pastors and he never says I have been reading this it is enough now he continues to do so because the word of God is important.

This is what Madiba said, a few lines which I want you to take home as you honour him today and I quote;

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

To us that is that is like a verse in the Bible, what we stand for and I hope in what we do we are doing it to help South Africa to help Africa to leave in harmony. There must be no domination, either of whites or blacks; there must be harmony we must leave together as brothers and sisters.

You honour Madiba you honour his ideals and you must therefore attempt to fight in our lifetime to achieve what he wanted to achieve. He took us to democracy, we must strengthen democracy. We must change the quality of the lives of our people.

Thank you very much for this honour, to our former President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

I would like to thank, all of us who have come all over the world to be part of this and I am happy, Nkos'uDilizintaba when you say this is going to be an annual event. Because if we cannot celebrate our own, and celebrate other who will celebrate our own who have made some much for us.