Statement of the South African High Commissioner to Namibia on the occasion marking the 19th Anniversary of South Africa’s Freedom Day on 27 April 2013

This year our country observes the 19th Anniversary of our Freedom and Independence Day – the twenty seventh of April, a day on which the first democratic and non racial elections were held. This April also marks the 20th anniversary of the loss we suffered through the passing-on of the longest serving President of the ANC, Oliver Tambo. It also marks the 20th anniversary of the brutal assassination of one of our leaders, Chris Hani, whose death pushed us to come up with 27 April as the day our elections will be held. (May their souls rest in peace and their spirit live long)

We observe Freedom Day under the theme “mobilising society towards consolidating democracy and freedom”.

The people of South Africa have indeed come a long way to achieve democracy and freedom. From the period of colonial occupation in 1652 various struggles were waged by our people in defence of their land and rights culminating in the formation of the African National Congress in 1912 which united our people for the struggle of national liberation and social emancipation. In marking Freedom Month we remember the strides we have made since 1994 as we head towards 20 years of freedom and democracy, acknowledging that South Africa is far a better society than it was before 1994.

We come from a history of a divided, unequal society based on hatred, discrimination, inhuman treatment, exploitation and total lack of basic freedoms, lack of democracy, institutionalised racism, and an economy that was bankrupt.

The freedom we are celebrating today came at the highest price. Many lives and limbs were lost. Our Constitution recognises the injustices of our past and honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land, and respect those who have worked to build and develop our country.

The Preamble of our constitution states that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.” It lays the foundation for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by the law and commits to human dignity, the advancement of human rights to the improvement of the quality of life of all citizens and to free the potential of each person and to build a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic and prosperous country able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the Family of Nations. It is founded on universal adult suffrage, a national common voter’s roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness.

The cornerstone of our constitution is the Bill of Rights which guarantees political, social economic and human rights to all our people.

Freedom Day represents peace, unity and restoration of human dignity of all South Africans. It is a reminder of the countless sacrifices made by many of our countrymen and women and gives us a chance to ensure that no one will ever take our hard won freedom for granted.

This year 2013 we are able to tell the world that South Africa is a much better place than it was before 27 April 1994. While we still battle with the consequences of the social and economic inequalities of the past, our society has indeed fundamentally been transformed in every sphere since 1994.
The recent census 2011 provides evidence to what has been achieved towards creating a better life for all citizens in extending human dignity and freedoms through delivery of basic services such as - housing, water, electricity, sanitation education, health, social security and employment.

To mention a few the report said that:

the number of households with access to electricity is now at 12.1 million, which translates to 85% of the population.
nine out of 10 households now have access to piped water.
the proportion of the population without any formal schooling has reduced two folds from 17,9% in 2001 to 8,6% in 2011.
the proportions of households that have flush toilets increased persistently to 57,0% in 2011 from 50% in 2001.

Undoing the damage of the evil apartheid system in a short space of time was never going to be easy, however government continues to deliver faster and smarter. Our education system continues its upward trend more learners are being enrolled and our matriculation results since 2009 have improved dramatically for example a total of 767 785 learners were enrolled in Grade R in 2012 and the national pass rate for the matriculation class of 2012 was 73,9%.

Interventions by the Department of Health to improve the quality of life are yielding results and the overall life expectancy of South Africans has improved significantly between 2009 and 2011 to 62 years. The tide is turning in the fight against HIV and AIDS. By March 2012, more than 20.2 million people had undergone testing since the HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign started in April 2010. We have recently (last month) launched a revolutionary one day a tablet for people living with HIV.

Our fight against unemployment and joblessness continues to show promise. About 3.5 million more people are working today than in 1994. Since the first quarter of 2011, employment has grown for seven consecutive quarters.

Over the next three years, R827 billion is planned to be spent by the fiscus and state-owned companies to build infrastructure. 18 strategic integrated projects are underway or in the pipeline, which will fast track infrastructure development to transform our economy, create a significant number of new jobs, promote skills and training, and to strengthen the delivery of basic services.

We have begun to turn the tide against crime, overall levels of serious crime are on the wane and will continue to work for a South Africa where all citizens are safe in their homes and communities. A renewed campaign to deal with the scourge of violence against women and children has been undertaken involving both men and women across the political spectrum. Our justice system, politicians and non-governmental organisations are grappling with ensuring that the perpetrators of this heinous crime are brought to book.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have drawn a number of lessons from our project of building democracy and extending human dignity and freedoms through delivery of basic services such as - housing, water, electricity, sanitation education, health, social security, and employment from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) adopted in 1994. We have now put in place the National Development Plan, which aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030, involving all citizens.

The NDP seeks to address the implementation of policies adopted by government and to build and mobilise for partnerships with various stakeholders in our society in addressing the following challenges: unemployment, improve the quality of education, infrastructure development and its
maintenance, racial spatial divides, unsustainable economy growth, sustain public health, improvement in the public service to deliver services, corruption and to build an equal society doing away with centuries of discrimination and inequalities.

Particular attention is paid to our young people who deserve better education, skills and economic opportunities. There is also a specific focus to deal with gender inequality in all its facets which impact negatively on women and the girl-child. A lot has been achieved in promoting women in political leadership roles, but a lot still needs to be done in the business and economic world and in the empowerment of women.

A lot still remains to be done. Our RDP document of 1994 states that:” No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remain in poverty. Without land, without tangible prospects for a better life. Attacking poverty and deprivation must therefore be the first priority of a democratic government”. In this centenary of the formalization of land dispossession, which happened with the Apartheid Land Acts of 1913 this issue has been prioritized.

This years’ Freedom Day falls on the eve of the 20th Anniversary of our first democratic elections. In life 21 years signifies the age of maturity. Indeed as we approach this our democracy is maturing.

The 27th of April gives a chance to meet again and reflect on our important task of strengthening friendship ties between the people of South Africa and Namibia.

We meet to reflect on our key foreign policy goals of a better Africa and a better world. Addressing the Head of Missions Conference recently held in Pretoria, H.E. President Jacob Zuma reminded us of our national hero and pioneer of our foreign relations perspective and strategy - former ANC President Oliver Tambo who stated “we seek to live in peace with our neighbours and the peoples of the world in conditions of equality, mutual respect and equal advantage”. This is the vision that drives our foreign policy premised on the philosophy of Ubuntu. This the vision that informs our bilateral relations with Namibia, which are now structured into a Bi-national Commission signed last year in November to meet annually at the level of Heads of States. The first Bi-national Commission will thus meet here in Namibia this year.

Internationally South Africa, having risen from the ashes of apartheid and colonialism, which was declared an inhuman and unjust system, today stands proud on the world stage, our voice and presence is heard and felt at institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union, BRICS, and the Commonwealth and many other multilateral forums.

We continue to play an important role in promoting peace, security and development in the African continent is seen in our missions to countries such as Burundi, the DRC, Cote d’Ivore, Comoros, and Sudan. We are in the process of completing a very difficult process in mediation in Zimbabwe which we were tasked by SADC.

We have successfully hosted for the first time a World Football tournament on the African continent. We also hosted world rugby and cricket tournaments and the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) football tournament now twice. This has brought positive energy to our continent – now regarded as one of the regions with the fastest growth and much opportunity.

The challenge of course remains to translate this growth into improving the quality of the type of our people – as we learn that high economic growth does not automatically translate into higher poverty reduction.
Government cannot achieve these tasks alone. All our people need to come to the party and unite around this common program THE NDP and work for economic growth of the country and continent which will benefit the people in this way we shall begin to realise the theme of this Year’s Freedom Day of “Mobilising society towards consolidating our democracy and freedom”.

Lastly I would like to thank South African Companies and academics who are making a tremendous contribution to the African Agenda and in promoting economic relations between South Africa and Namibia. Indeed, the South African companies and business community here in Namibia are making a substantial contribution to Namibia’s economic growth and development through their investments and social responsibilities. For example, SABMiller a South African owned global drinks company recently announced a N$360m investment in a local brewery after having imported beer into Namibia for over 20 years. This investment, which includes 40% local partnerships, will make a meaningful contribution to the Namibian economy and it symbolises the current optimism in the country.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, follow country men and women let me take this opportunity to heartily thanks to those companies that made the celebration of this day possible:

To The Windhoek Country Club and Resort, in particular its management led by Tony Boucher who provided and laid out this beautiful venue and offered us a great service.

To Castle Brewing Namibia and its management led by Cobus Bruwer for their donation of the beer and some of the refreshments that you are enjoying.

To Distell Namibia and its management led by Leon Fouche for their donation of the JC le Roux welcome drinks, the Place in the Sun Wines, and the Amarula.

Lastly to ABSA Namibia Management led by Marius Alberts whose generous assistance allowed us to have the Jazz band and our National flowers here.

Please give our supporters a big round of applause.

I THANK YOU

Presented by Mavivi Yvette Lillian Myakayaka-Manzini
On 29 April Country Club Hotel Windhoek