

**Address by Mpumalanga Premier Thabang Makwetla at the Africa Day Celebrations
Nelspruit, 25 May 2005**

**Programme Director
Culture, Sports and Recreation MEC Nomsa Mtsweni
Officials from provincial and local government
Representatives of the private sector and community organisations,
Senior managers,
Members of the media,
Comrades and friends
Distinguished guests,**

FORTY two years ago on this day a group of visionary African leaders came together in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia to form a vehicle that was to work for the total liberation of our continent.

This gathering was prompted by the independence of Ghana in March 1957 under one of Africa's visionary leaders Kwame Nkrumah, followed by the liberation of Guinea Conakry in 1958. By 1960 more than two-thirds of African countries had attained their independence prompting British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to remark about the winds of change that were sweeping across the entire continent..

However Nkrumah and other African leaders were concerned that countries under Portuguese and apartheid South African rule were occupied by intransigent white minority regimes. The late President Nkrumah remarked that: "Ghana's independence is meaningless unless it is linked to the total liberation of Africa". In 1958, Nkrumah invited all liberation movements and independent African countries to discuss a strategy to fight colonialism and imperialism in Africa.

That is why on the 25th of May 1963, inspired by a common determination to promote understanding among African peoples and co-operation among its States, and in response to the aspirations of Africans for brotherhood and solidarity, the Organisation of African Unity, or the OAU, was formed.

Programme Director, these developments, however, refer to the contemporary spirit of the continent's leaders for self-determination and freedom.

Half a century earlier, at the turn of the 20th century, the spirit and consciousness for Africa's destiny in the long journey of humankind, was championed more vigorously nowhere-else than here on our own motherland, when our forefathers were the first to rise, establishing Africa's first liberation movement the ANC – then called the African Native National Congress.

In an article titled "The regeneration of Africa" which appeared in the "African Abroad", one of the publications of the time on the 5th April 1906, Pixley Ka Isaka Seme, one of the luminaries of the time, who went on to become the first Secretary-General of the ANC said, and I quote: "I would ask you not to compare Africa to Europe or to any other continent.

I make this request not from any fear that such comparison might bring humiliation upon Africa. The reason I have stated is that a common standard is impossible! Come with me to the ancient capital of Egypt, Thebes, the city of one hundred gates. The grandeur of its venerable ruins and the gigantic proportions of its architecture, reduced to insignificance monuments of other nations. The pyramids of Egypt are structures to which the world presents nothing comparable. The mighty monuments seem to look with disdain on any other work of human art and to vie with nature herself.

"All the glory of Egypt belongs to Africa and her people. These monuments are the indestructible memorials of their great and original genius. It is not through Egypt alone that Africa claims such unrivalled historic achievements. I could have spoken of the Pyramids of Ethiopia which, though inferior in size to those of Egypt, far surpass them in architectural beauty; their sepulchers which evince the highest purity of taste, and of many prehistoric ruins in other parts of Africa. In such ruins Africa is like the golden sun, that, having sunk beneath the western horizon, still plays upon the world which he sustained and enlightened in his career.

Justly the world now demands "wither is fed the visionary gleam, where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

Oh, for that historian who, with the open the open pen of truth, will bring to Africa's claim the strength of written proof. He will talk of a race whose forward tide was often swelled with tears, but in whose heart bondage has not

quenched the fire of former years. He will write that in these later days when earth's noble ones are named, she has a roll of honour too, of whom she is not ashamed. The giant is awakening! From the four corners of the earth Africa's sons, who have been proxed through fire and sword, are marching to the future's golden door bearing the records of deeds of valor done.

It shall be recalled that the OAU was formed at the height of the liberation struggle in our country, accompanied by intense resistance to apartheid rule. This repression culminated in the Sharpeville massacre on March 21 1960 when 69 unarmed demonstrators were killed by the apartheid police for protesting against the pass laws.

The African leadership in South Africa including Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Andrew Mlangeni, Wilton Mkwayi, Elias Motsoaledi, Dennis Goldberg and Raymond Mhlaba was arrested at Liliesfield in Rivonia and sentenced to life imprisonment. On the contrary, in other parts of Africa the winds of change were sweeping the continent. As the apartheid regime was suppressing resistance to its racist doctrine by incarcerating and maiming its leaders and followers, our brothers and sisters north of the Limpopo River were embracing us with open arms.

Programme Director, over four decades the OAU united the peoples of Africa transcending ethnic and national differences. Indeed the Charter of the OAU, as approved by the leaders, committed the Organisation to the peaceful settlement of disputes, economic and social development, respect for human rights, the protection of refugees and to fight colonialism and apartheid.

Ladies and Gentlemen, comrades and friends, it is imperative that we constantly tell this history of our people, of the struggle and how our brothers and sisters in many African countries supported us during very difficult times. Today we gather here in our thousands to salute and honour our leaders who had a vision of this unity and solidarity and a dream of peace, stability and development on our continent. Many others are gathering in similar fashion around the country, on the continent, in the Diaspora and indeed around the world. They do so pleased that for over four decades the OAU successfully waged the struggle against colonialism, minority rule and apartheid.

It is fitting that we celebrate these great minds as South Africa enters its second decade of democracy. We do so because we acknowledge that South Africa was liberated, in large measure, because the OAU stood side by side with the people of this country and together with us, waged a heroic struggle until we were liberated.

As we celebrate Africa Day today we pay tribute to the achievements of the OAU and salute the sacrifices made to defend and promote the African dream of a free, united, peaceful and prosperous continent. Africa Day marks the resilience and ultimate triumph of the African continent. It is a day on which we celebrate freedom, equality, justice and dignity. This day also reinforces our link with the rest of the continent.

Today we gather to hail the sacrifices made to inculcate in Africans a spirit of finding our own homegrown and comprehensive development plan to address the many challenges faced by the continent. The transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, programme can be rightly ascribed to that meeting in Addis Ababa in 1963. NEPAD is a rallying call to all Africans for collective action for the fundamental renewal of our continent.

Today we can walk tall amongst the nations of the world proud of being African. We are proud of our culture, our heritage, our languages and an assured bright future. We are no longer ashamed of being from Africa.

Friends and Comrades, today as we celebrate Africa Day we are, as South Africans, and indeed as Africans, faced with challenges that can only be overcome through working together. These challenges include lack of habitable homes, a scarcity of water in some areas, famine, wars and under-development.

There are millions who cannot read or write, while many are unemployed or under-employed. Hundreds die from preventable diseases and many go to bed hungry.

But these and other challenges should not deter us from fulfilling the fundamental goal of turning ours into a caring society and improving the lives of all. We should also not be cowed by those who at every turn tell us how we will not succeed in creating a better life for all the peoples of Africa and eradicating all forms of oppression as we march towards equality for all on the continent.

We are of the view that we are well on the road of finding lasting solutions to most, in not all our challenges. In the past four decades we have gone a long way in addressing some of these challenges.

Just as we defeated colonialism and apartheid, so shall we banish from our lives the terrible life of poverty and underdevelopment. But to do this it is important to rely on partnerships. We must rely on the partnership between government and business, between our various governments in Africa, between ourselves and the international community - all as equal partners. It is only by pooling our resources and knowledge that we can make this a truly African Century. To this end the importance of the economic integration cannot be over-emphasised.

Our success is guaranteed. Africa's development is indeed upon us. We will succeed because we have an abiding faith in the ability of the masses of our people to effect change. The workers, women, youth, businesspeople, the intelligentsia, politicians, the artists, farm tenants – will ensure our success.

Africa day this year comes in the wake of conveying of the inaugural conference of UCLGA (United Cities and Local Governments of Africa) in Tshwane last week, an important milestone in the evolution and consolidation of Africa's unity.

We are on the threshold of prosperous and new beginnings. Everyday we open the pathways towards the possibility of peace, development and prosperity.

But we must continue to transform our region into an attractive proposition for both domestic and foreign investors as well as visitors. The region must no longer be an example of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment.

Surely we can transform this region into one of equitable and wide-ranging development opportunities for the citizens, where high levels of education, health, social security and the provision of social security and housing are attained. As a province we have pledged ourselves to reduce the level of unemployment, while using co-operatives in the EPWP to create work. At the same time, the programme of co-operatives will also be rolled out in line with the National Co-operatives Legislation.

Efforts to provide work opportunities for our people in the places where they live will be promoted through a more vigorous implementation of Local Economic Development. As Government we will ensure that municipalities are fully capacitated to fully carry out the important task of improving the lives of the people. In this regard, we will ensure that all Departments lend the necessary support for the success of Project Consolidate.

We will manage transport logistics, corridor development, freight, aviation and rail related matters, as part of a comprehensive response to transport infrastructure needs in our province. Government has started the process of implementing the remaining pillars of the Maputo Development Corridor.

By the end of the year we would have put in place a programme that would improve career guidance and bursary schemes for young people from rural areas. We will also provide rural incentives - and in particular housing - for all scarce skilled health personnel.

Through a viable partnership with our agricultural research institutions and the implementation of the national Agricultural Sector Plan, we will aim to improve agriculture's contribution to wealth creation in our province, and particularly our rural areas.

We will roll out an improved support programme for those who want to go back to the land. As a start, in this financial year, government will spend R15 million to support farming in our rural communities. The beneficiation of our products into intermediate and processed goods remains a challenge. Ladies and Gentlemen, comrades and friends, the challenges of an increasingly integrated world economy and new forms of global economic governance necessitate that we strengthen multilateral and bilateral relations, particularly in our part of the world.

Indeed, in this growingly interdependent world we cannot fool ourselves that we can face the many challenges of underdevelopment and structural disadvantages emanating from the years of colonialism and apartheid without the levels of co-operation and solidarity that were instrumental in our ability to attain freedom.

It gives me much joy to be able to re-affirm, on behalf of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, our commitment to realizing the goals and objectives of NEPAD, through the promotion of trade, investment and cultural ties in our region. International relations and regional development are firm on our agenda in this province.

Together, as partners in this region, we must examine our development strategies and programmes in light of the NEPAD framework and the opportunities provided for a coordinated and integrated approach. Enormous goodwill exists for our continent as a result of NEPAD. Therefore, it will be important that we are also true to its imperatives regarding how we approach issues of governance, democracy and the rule of law.

Ladies and Gentlemen, comrades and friends, we are confident that Africa, once the repository of ancient wisdom, knowledge of medicine, astronomy, science and technology, will make steady progress to reclaim the lofty place of excellence and expertise in these areas.

Today we must recommit ourselves to continue faster on the road that guarantees success as we do things together to achieve harmony and progress and transform the dream of African unity into reality. Certain of our triumph, we must march together, one step at a time, assured of victory because we have united as Africans.

A very Happy Africa Day to you all.

Thank you