

Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of the National Day of Reconciliation, Cape Town



16 December 2020 - 12:00am

My Fellow South Africans,

Molweni. Goeie Dag. Sanibonani. Dumelang. Avuxeni. Thobela.

This year marks 25 years since we began observing the National Day of Reconciliation in democratic South Africa.

It is a day on which we recall the injustices of our history.

It is also a day when we affirm our collective responsibility to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society.

For much of our history, this day in our national calendar has been a symbol of division and conflict.

Now, we observe this day as one nation,.

This should be a time when we commit ourselves to build bridges and celebrate the splendour of our diversity as displayed in our languages, our cultures, our faiths, and our histories.

The year 2020 is one of the most challenging our young democracy has faced.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought great hardship and untold suffering to millions of our people.

All South Africans, black and white, have come together to confront this grave threat.

The support, the encouragement and the solidarity extended to those in need has been a great inspiration.

Perhaps not since the advent of democracy in 1994 have we stood together as a united nation, bound by empathy, compassion and our common humanity.

As much as the pandemic exposed the great economic divisions that exist between us, it has shown once again that we are not the society that the apartheid system intended us to become.

We are not a people who care and extend help only to a section of our nation.

We are not a people who care only for some of our people and are content to leave others to suffer.

During this time it was you, the people of our beautiful country South Africa, who donated to the Solidarity Fund.

It was you who volunteered to help others who are in need.

It was you who assisted with food parcels for the hungry.

It was you who came together to help our learners continue their studies by volunteering as tutors.

It was you, the South African people, who encouraged each other to keep safe, to wear masks in public, and to observe the public health regulations.

It is because of you that we have so far been able to withstand the worst of this pandemic.

All these wonderful acts of solidarity and compassion were a display of a true original Thuma Mina moment in practice.

In the days, weeks and months ahead, as we repair and rebuild our country, let us continue to draw on our deep reserves of kindness, empathy, compassion and solidarity.

Fellow South Africans,

For the past 26 years we have made much headway in overcoming the divisions brought upon us by our history.

We see it every day in our communities, workplaces, schools and on our television screens.

Much as we continue to actively work to overcome the divisions in our society, deep and persistent challenges remain.

We have seen racial tensions flare up in several parts of our country, polarising communities and opening old wounds.

What we have seen in Senekal in the Free State, in Eldorado Park in Gauteng and in Brackenfell in Cape Town shows that the state of race relations in our country remains fragile.

We may have come a long way from the days of institutionalised racism, but we are alive to the reality that for many, reconciliation is something they have yet to experience.

This is not a situation that is unique to our country.

During the course of this year, millions of people around the world stood up to confront the racism that still infects many societies.

Under the banner of 'Black Lives Matter', they spoke out, they marched, they demonstrated and they wrote about the many ways in which black people continue to be discriminated against and victimised.

It is our hope and determination that this groundswell of activism will forever change the attitudes and practices that have sustained racism across the world.

As South Africans we have come out in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, having experienced one of the world's most brutal forms of institutionalised racism, and fully aware that racism continues in our country in various different forms.

As we work to bridge the racial divisions between the people of South Africa, we hope that our path to a non-racial society may serve as an example to others.

True reconciliation will not be possible unless we address the many ills in our society.

We cannot build a truly caring society so long as the country's majority live in conditions of poverty, inequality and deprivation, while a minority exists in comfort and privilege.

We cannot move forward with the process of meaningful reconciliation if policies around economic transformation, affirmative action and land reform are resisted.

We cannot build a society that enables the individual to better their life and realise their potential when resources meant for the benefit of the people are stolen by those who claim to be public servants.

So long as we do not overcome the poverty, inequality and underdevelopment that affects this country's majority, reconciliation will forever remain out of our reach.

The social conditions under which many people live is the single biggest obstacle to achieving a society rooted in equality and committed to social justice.

So on this day it is not enough to merely commit to advancing social cohesion and nation-building.

We must also ask ourselves what we can each do to advance social cohesion and nation building.

We must ask ourselves what we can do and indeed what we must do as individuals, as leaders and as a people to advance social justice, solidarity and human rights – in our homes, communities, workplaces, where we study, where we worship and in all facets of life.

Just as government alone cannot bring about reconciliation, social and economic transformation is a responsibility with which we have all been charged.

It is up to all social partners to drive the change we need and want to see in this country.

In order for us to address poverty and inequality, businesses must support policies of redress.

Our businesses must reflect their support for transformation through hiring practices, in capacitating and skilling staff, and in investing in the communities in which they operate.

They must make more opportunities available for young people, women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

Labour must continue with its important mandate to protect and advance the rights of workers, and work towards improving the industrial relations landscape.

Farming organisations and landowners must support government's efforts towards land reform, which is a fundamental part of reconciliation.

Those of us who have been elected by the people to represent them and their interests – as councillors, Mayors, MECs, Premiers, Ministers and as Presidents – must rededicate ourselves to the service of our people.

Let us be accountable to the people, respect public resources and hold ourselves to the highest standards of ethics and morality.

Fellow South Africans,

We cannot achieve reconciliation for as long as the women of our country – who constitute half of our population – live in fear of gender-based violence.

We must stand firm in our rejection of all forms of violence against women and children.

We must all play our part in supporting survivors of gender-based violence and respect the rights of women and children in our families and in our communities.

We must reject all forms of sexism, chauvinism and patriarchy.

As men we must be integrally involved in this struggle, because it is men who are the perpetrators.

We should be ashamed that women and children are afraid of being in the company of unfamiliar men; of being followed home by men; and of being beaten up, harassed, abused, raped or killed by men.

It is not women and girls who must change their behaviour. It is men who must change.

We have just concluded the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children.

Let us sustain our activism throughout the year.

I call on all the men of South Africa to support the Golekane Campaign of the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, which seeks to promote positive masculinity and behavioural change.

Fellow South Africans,

It was the great South African freedom fighter Neville Alexander who used the metaphor of the Gariep – or Orange – River to describe national identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Like this great river that flows for over 2,000 kilometres from the Drakensberg to the Atlantic Ocean, he wrote of how South African society can be described as the flow of many streams.

The tributaries of this river carry the many identities that make up our people, be it by race, class, ethnicity, gender or religion.

Although these tributaries flow at different strengths, and are of different sizes, they all eventually merge, flowing into the mainstream of the Gariep River.

Just as the Gariep River brings sustenance to the arid regions through which it flows, we must see our nation's unity as the water that nourishes our nation.

Regardless of how we identify – whether on the basis of race, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, region or class – we are all an integral part of the beautiful tapestry that makes up this great country.

We may be Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaner, Khoisan or Sotho. We may be black, white, Indian or coloured. We may be Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or atheist. We may be heterosexual or homosexual, gender-conforming or gender non-conforming.

We may be able bodied or persons with disabilities. We may be men or women. We may be young or old. We may be rural dwellers or live in cities.

But we are all South Africans.

We have come from a bitter past. But we must not let the divisions of the past define us.

National pride is important, but it must be complemented by social justice.

Without justice there can be no lasting peace. And unless all are able to lead lives of dignity, there can be no reconciliation and progress.

We cannot diminish our past, nor can we forget it.

But we look to the future with optimism and hope, for it is the future that matters most.

Let us move forward together, for South Africa as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

I wish you well on this day.

May God bless South Africa and protect her people.

I thank you.

Source: <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za>