

**Restoring the soul of the nation:  
A challenge to African men  
30 October 1997**

**Opening address: Men of Africa Meeting, Eskom College, Midrand**

We are gathered here for serious introspection. We are here to level with ourselves, to delve deep into our souls as men of Africa, to establish where things have gone wrong with us. In a sense we are here to strip our souls bare, to focus a searchlight on our inner selves, to search every nook and cranny with a view to purging ourselves of the tendency and propensity to do evil and ignominious things. We are here to seek ways to replace this self-destructive tendency with a set of values that will hopefully guide and lift us on to a wholesome plain as men of Africa who will be dedicated to building our nations, to unconditionally loving and respecting our womenfolk, to diligently and affectionately nurturing our children. We are gathered here to acknowledge to ourselves our need to eradicate the dehumanising, humiliating image of the current South African condition.

Today we take the first tentative steps to celebrate our manhood. To many it may seem like an occasion to lament: an occasion to lament our shortcomings, our depravity, our self-denigration, our nihilism.

There is neither purpose nor profit in that. I call it a celebration of our manhood because at any time, any place, when a group of men, whatever their lamentable circumstance, face up to their situation and accept the responsibility to do something about it, then it is an occasion for celebration.

It is a celebration because it goes to the core of what our definition of manhood should be. Our manhood is not described by our physical attributes, it is not defined by our ability to physically impose our will on others or to father children. Manhood, being a man, in the most fundamental sense, is defined by acceptance of responsibility :

Responsibility for our actions

Responsibility to fulfil effectively an acceptable defined role in society

Responsibility to be moral beings

Responsibility to create, to build, to nurture, to protect

Responsibility to be a father, a husband, a brother.

If we do nothing else as a result of coming together today, we would nonetheless have achieved the ground-breaking victory of accepting that we have a responsibility to be men.

We are here to hold a mirror to ourselves as men of Africa. As we look in this national mirror what do we see?

We observe men of Africa who seek and expect hand-outs, donations and alms at every opportunity

We observe men of Africa who seek survival and prosperity by stealing, looting and hijacking

We observe men of Africa with abysmally low standards of morality

We observe men of Africa who expect to be taught rather than to learn

We observe men of Africa who will rape their children, mothers and potential spouses rather than raise families in honour

We observe men of Africa who fracture rather than nurture and build families

We observe men of Africa who render the streets of our beloved country painfully unsafe, not guardians and custodians of our society

We observe men of Africa who would rather be employees than job creators

We observe men of Africa who insist on a rest that is not preceded by hard work

We observe men of Africa who have perfected the art of blame.

The men we see in the mirror blame colonialism, they blame imperialism, they blame apartheid, they blame capitalism, they blame the government, they blame nature, they blame God. The men of Africa we see in the national mirror in front of us evidence a victim mentality that is as acute as it is chronic.

We are gathered here, dedicated to emerging with a sense of efficacy; the belief that one is master of one's own destiny, as an individual or as a people. A lack of sense efficacy in a people means that as a people, as men of Africa, we consider ourselves subject to the elements; subject to our environment; subject to fate; subject to the will of others.

We are challenged to emerge from this gathering with the sense and firm belief that as men of Africa and as South Africans, we are masters of our destiny.

In one real sense we are called upon to rise to the challenge posed by then Executive Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in his now famous "I am an African" address to the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996. Thabo Mbeki concluded as follows:

'Whoever we may be, whatever our immediate interest, however much we carry baggage from our past, however much we have been caught by the fashion of cynicism and the loss of faith in the capacity of the people, let us err today and say - nothing can stop us now.'

The unstoppable African that Thabo Mbeki talks about, the unstoppable men of Africa, who I believe are assembled here today for in-depth introspection and dedication to shaping and crafting a positive and magnificent future, each one of us must emerge as:

an African who is master of his destiny  
an African who has a vision  
an African who is known for what he stands for  
an African who is a profoundly moral being  
an African who has integrity  
an African who is able and competent  
an African who leads a renaissance  
an African who takes responsibility for his actions  
an African who builds the future  
an African who when he looks in the mirror, sees the hand of God.

Allow me to conclude by saying :

This we believe

And pledge to achieve!

I am convinced that with this set of values, with this faith, we shall transform the current breakdowns in our society into breakthroughs; we shall replace :

Defeatist notions with victorious thought  
Can't-do attitudes with confident attitudes  
Love for other cultures first with love for our culture first  
Consciousness of oppression with consciousness of victory  
Harassment of our women and children with a superabundance of affection and care  
Self-effacement with self-assertion  
Pervasive incompetence with an unshakeable sense of efficacy.

From this day on, let us strive to dispel failure and shame from our lives and commit ourselves to success and even greater success in all walks of life for us as men of Africa and for our beloved nation.