

Eskom Chairman's Awards -1998
8 May 1998

I open today's Eskom Chairman's Awards by citing three African idiomatic expressions, which are as popular as they are profound:

"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" is Nguni for "a person finds genuine human expression by humanely relating to other people" or, "I am because you are, you are because we are."

"Rintiho rin 'we a ri nusi hove" is Shangaan for "One finger cannot pick up a grain."

"Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho" is Sepedi for "There can be no leader / king without followers, and vice versa."

I have a belief that life in general, and organisational life in particular, is inter-related. All humanity is part of one process. To the degree that I harm my colleague, to that extent I harm myself. To the degree that I enhance my colleague, to that extent I enhance myself.

A great deal of true and beneficial leadership is linked to the ability to see how humanity is related. Leaders must be able to align human forces to flow in one direction, in pursuit of a commonality of interests. This is the underlying, fundamental role of leadership: to find a way to encourage diverse people and elements to work together.

When you achieve this, you gain followers. When you gain followers, you become a leader. When you become a leader, you provide direction. When people follow that direction, you achieve results.

In this, Eskom's 75th year, we come together to congratulate the winners of the Eskom Chairman's Awards. The theme we have adopted in our annual report is "The Heroes of Eskom". There are, and will be, many heroes of Eskom. Some were in the early, pioneering years. Others have only recently joined the organisation and have yet to realise their potential.

Winners of Chairman's Awards are a special group of Eskom's heroes. Your adherence to business discipline, your diligence and dedication, are worthy of the utmost praise and commendation.

You, the award winners, are working at the rock-face where tomorrow is taking shape. You are at the frontier, serving as guides to things as they are and as they will be. Many people are passive products of their environment, lacking the will to change and develop their potential. You, by contrast, have mastered your circumstances. You have shaped and influenced your context, and for this you deserve praise.

Today, as we recognise your achievements, I have some thoughts I should like you and your colleagues to hear. In the shaping of the transformed Eskom, you can make a key contribution:

By replacing breakdowns with breakthroughs
By turning incompetence into excellence, contagious excellence
By replacing defeatist notions with victorious thought
By being true business leaders, not just maintainers of the status quo.

When you interact with your colleagues and subordinates:

Coach them as a role model would; don't drive them
Inspire enthusiasm, not fear
Set the pace rather than merely assign tasks
Make work a challenge, not a drudgery
Cultivate teamwork, not counter-productive individualism.

We currently have the privilege of having national leaders of international stature, who provide us with inspirational leadership:

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki has given us the vision of the African renaissance in which every one of us can play a role.

President Nelson Mandela has taught us many lessons on how to deal with complexity, how to forgive unconditionally and foster reconciliation, how to align diverse social forces and get a nation to pull in the same direction.

The words of the famous 19th century African-American former slave turned profound thinker and great leader, Frederick Douglass, continue to echo from generation to generation and may serve to inspire us today:

“Our destiny is largely in our hands. If we find, we shall have to seek. If we succeed in the race of life it must be by our own energies, and our own exertions. Others may clear the road, but we must go forward, or be left behind in the race of life. If we remain poor and dependent, the riches of other men will not avail us. If we are ignorant, the intelligence of other men will do but little for us. If we are foolish, the wisdom of other men will not guide us. If we are wasteful of time and money, the economy of other men will only make our destitution the more disgraceful and hurtful.”

May I conclude by sounding this note: the happiest and most successful people do not necessarily have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything! Let us make the most of our energies as Eskomites.

Let Eskom energise the African renaissance
Let Eskom illuminate this proverbially dark continent
Let Eskom herald enlightenment throughout Africa
Let Eskom ignite the flame of economic progress and prosperity.

May we all ensure that Afro-optimism totally replaces Afro-pessimism as we approach the dawn of the new millennium.

Eskom Chairman's Awards - 2004

22 April 2004

Eskom's Socio-economic delivery in a decade of democracy, looking ahead

Viewed from 1994, ten years later 2004 is a significant milestone, a historical conjuncture that poses potent challenges. The year 2004 provides a moment to review, an instant to preview. It behoves us to reflect and project; to introspect and prospect; to pause and listen to the resonance of the echo-chamber of a decade of socio-economic delivery; while we harken to the beckoning sound of a distant drum.

South Africa is abuzz with activities in celebration of the first decade of our democracy. At this important juncture in our country's history, we as a proudly South African state-owned enterprise, join the rest of the nation in taking stock of our own performance in the past decade. We do so with a great deal of pride, knowing that we have made an indelible mark with our colossal achievements and milestones.

Over the past ten years, we have excelled on the financial, technical, social and environmental fronts. Two days ago, we announced yet another excellent set of business results. The underlying messages from the latest set of Eskom numbers is that the company's financial health, as indicated by the debt to equity ratio, has strengthened to an all-time record, productivity has improved remarkably and profits are also showing a steady increase. Our technical record is that of a world-class power utility. Our financial performance is the envy of major multinationals. Our socio-economic programme and in particular our achievements on the electrification front are unparalleled, globally.

Our objectives over the past ten years, as expressed in our RDP commitments, have many parallels with those of government. You would recall that during the early days of our democracy, Eskom committed itself to the following:

Reducing the real price of electricity by 15%

Electrifying an additional 1 750 000 homes

Changing the staff profile so that 50% of management, professional and supervisory staff shall be Black South Africans

Educating, training and developing sufficient numbers of people to meet Eskom's future managerial, technical and other professional needs

Maintaining transparency and worker consultation in decision making

Contributing R50 million per year to the electrification of schools and clinics and to other community development activities

Enabling all our employees to own a home

Encouraging small and medium enterprise development

Protecting the environment.

As you may well know, we have met and surpassed all of these commitments. At the end of the first decade of our democracy, we can join the rest of the nation with a heightened

sense of patriotism knowing that we have successfully discharged our developmental mandate.

At the beginning of my tenure as Chairman in 1997, I challenged the organisation to commit to levels of achievement that are nothing short of exceptional - not to strive to be the biggest, the first, the most - but to strive to be the best.

The best in the development and use of technology
The best in understanding and meeting market needs
The best and most formidable competitor
The best financial risk in the eyes of the markets
The best contributor to our shareholder
The best corporate governance of any South African company
The best company. Full stop.

These were brave utterances. They committed us to levels of achievement that are nothing short of exceptional. But they were not wild or reckless - they were based on sound projections, which have been realised in a most gratifying manner.

Our sterling performance in the past decade has earned us a number of notable awards and accolades. In fact, we have received so many awards in so many of our spheres of endeavour that we could be forgiven for becoming blasé about them. I mention just some of these we received:

In the first year of operation, Kendal set a world record for a six-unit power station using hard coal, when its maximum hourly net power produced reached 4 056 MW on 22 September 1994.

Lethabo Power Station was the first Eskom power station to receive the prestigious NOSCAR award from the National Occupational Safety Association.

In 1997, we won the prestigious Corporate Governance Award.

In 1999, Eskom received a Laureate award from the Computerworld Smithsonian Institution for its innovative use of information technology in a business context.

In 2000, Eskom was awarded the Technology Top 100 award for its contribution to the development of technical skills and resources in South Africa. In that year we won a total of 23 awards in the fields of safety, environmental care, business effectiveness and several others.

In 2001, Eskom received 18 awards, including the most prestigious accolade of all - the London Financial Times' Global Energy award for Power Company of the Year. This, more than any other, firmly established us as a force to be reckoned with in the world of electricity supply.

In 2002, of the 19 awards we were honoured to receive, Eskom's Transmission Division had two women selected as honourees at the 50 Key Women in Energy awards.

The pattern continued in 2003 when, among the annual awards we received, we were honoured with the Community Development Programme of the Year award at the Global Energy Awards in New York. The Annual Markinor Brand awarded Eskom third place, one position up from 2002, as the "most admired and respected brands in South Africa". For two consecutive years, Eskom has been ranked as having "the most hands-on approach to corporate social investment" by being fully engaged with projects that had received development grants. Eskom has also been among the top five since 1994. As in 2002, Eskom was again perceived by responding corporate grant makers and non-profit organisations to be "making the strongest contribution to development" in the state-owned enterprises sector.

I shall not weary you with the full list of awards. I am sure that, by this time, you can be in no doubt that this is an exceptional company, one that excels in virtually every field of endeavour. These are strategic awards, which point to lasting contributions to the growth and well-being of South Africans.

One of our major priorities over the past 10 years has been to enhance our presence on our continent - to enlarge Eskom's footprint in Africa. As the leading powerhouse of Africa, we have always been acutely aware of the need to contribute to the development and, ultimately, the reawakening of the African continent.

Since its inception in 1999, Eskom Enterprises has extended a hand of partnership across the boundaries of Africa and has given unmistakable expression to our stated intent of being an African power utility of global stature. We have made significant progress with venturing into and consolidating our presence in 33 African countries.

Lest I give you an impression that all of these accomplishments and awards are a matter of effortless routine, allow me to inform you that they represent hours, months and years of painstaking effort and concentration. We operate in a sector of the world economy that is characterised by high risk and unrelenting controversy. Highly respected organisations have fallen prey to the vicissitudes of our business and been found wanting.

I refer, for example, to Enron, at one time regarded as a benchmark power supplier and now gone, disappeared, destroyed by inadequate governance. Think of the spate of major blackouts that hit the bastions of wealth and privilege in the north-eastern United States, London, Scandinavia and Italy, not to mention the rising star of Malaysia. In these unfortunate developments that rocked the world lie lessons for us in Eskom. We are highly decorated. We are regarded with pride and envy by many of our peers, but we dare not become in the slightest degree complacent -we must not rest on our laurels.

Even as we ride the wave of excellence and accomplishment, we must never take our eyes off the target for even the briefest instant, lest we stumble. There are those who look at our successes with chagrin, wishing we would fail and fall. It is up to us to ensure that we never give them any opportunity to rejoice at our misfortune.

Having spent some time looking at what has transpired over the past decade, let us now

cast our gaze forward to the prospects for the next ten years. There are many challenges lying ahead of us. Electricity is an instrument of development. It creates growth and development - it is not the result of development and growth. Electrification and electricity consumption are lead economic indices, not lagging indices. We are now in the process of revising our business model with a view to leveraging our strengths, while managing uncertainties. This, I submit, is the only way to go if we are to remain at the cutting edge.

Let us not forget the qualities that have brought us where we are today. Among these I include engineering excellence and cost performance. These are home-grown virtues at the centre of our function. Little needs to be said about them save that as we address new challenges; let us not let our standards slip in terms of cost performance and engineering excellence.

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters. Today I have spoken about complacency and challenges: how we must avoid complacency and rise to the challenges. As we rise to the inevitable challenges of the next decade, let us heed Aristotle's advice on excellence:

"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit."

Let us take encouragement from our achievements of the past ten years. We have done extremely well, and this should give us hope for the future as we honour a special group of Eskom heroes and heroines who have made it their business to make ours the best company. Their dedication, diligence, professional excellence and adherence to prudent business practices will no doubt continue to serve as an inspiration to many, encouraging others to strive for excellence, just as we do. Let contemporary Africa as well as posterity know us for our great wakeful dreaming, our meticulous planning and our masterly application.

As Henry Ford II advises:

"Nobody can really guarantee the future. The best we can do is size up the chances, calculate the risks involved, estimate our ability to deal with them and then make our plans with confidence".

May I conclude by reminding you that we face a formidable task. As Africans, we have a long way to go before we are able to match the developed economies of the world. But we have come so far, so fast, that success simply must be ours.