



Address by President Jacob Zuma on the occasion of the sod-turning ceremony for Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

27 March 2014

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to begin by thanking you for inviting us to participate in this ground breaking ceremony.

Your Majesty, King Letsie III;

Your Majesty, the Queen,

The Right Honourable Prime Minister Dr Thomas Thabane,

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

Honourable Members of Parliament

Principal Chief of Batlokwa

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project,

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to begin by thanking you for inviting us to participate in this ground breaking ceremony.

The construction of Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project is a memorable landmark in the growing bilateral cooperation between South Africa and Lesotho.

May I also, through His Majesty, express our sincere gratitude to the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho for the hospitality that has been extended to us since our arrival in this beautiful Kingdom.

Your Majesty, the warm welcome we have received reminds us of our history and the bonds of friendship between our two countries and peoples. We are bound together by a rich history and making our destinies inextricably linked. South Africa and Lesotho are not only neighbours. We are also members of the same family. We speak the same language. We share the same culture and tradition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The history we are talking about reminds us that not so long ago, this beautiful Kingdom and its people played host to many freedom fighters from South Africa and as a result many of our leaders were educated here.

The support that the people of this marvelous country gave us in the fight against apartheid shall never be forgotten considering that Lesotho suffered heavily as a consequence of her principled stand against the evil apartheid system.

We all remember quite vividly, the horrific Maseru massacres of 1982 and 1985 in which Basotho nationals and South African freedom fighters and their families were butchered in cold blood by the apartheid forces.

After the massacre, ANC President at the time OR Tambo pledged the commitment of the African National Congress to support the Kingdom of Lesotho in her struggle to consolidate her independence and defend her sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Allow me, therefore, to, once again, take this opportunity to thank the people of Lesotho for their solidarity and comradeship. The people of South Africa are eternally grateful for the support they received from the people of this great nation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Informed by this rich history and true to the commitment President OR Tambo pledged thirty-two years ago, the democratic South Africa has, over the years, sought to strengthen and deepen its bilateral relations with the Kingdom of Lesotho.

In this regard, South Africa and Lesotho signed in 2001 and renewed in 2012, an important Agreement establishing the Joint Bilateral Commission for Cooperation (JBCC) between the two sister countries.

Its main objective is to promote political, economic and social cooperation. Working together, we are, indeed, achieving this stated objective.

To this end, our two countries have over the years signed bilateral agreements in various fields. We are already working on various projects.

These include, but not limited to, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, the Geo-chemical Mapping Project, the Hydrological Project, the Sani Pass Project, and most recently, food security through the World Food Programme (WFP).

We trust that these projects will bring about economic development, create employment as well as investment opportunities for the people of Lesotho.

These projects also serve as a clear demonstration of the progress we have made in establishing a firm base for the further deepening of our bilateral relations, representative of the warm feelings of friendship that our peoples share.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Of particular significance is the need to implement the second Phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project now that our two countries have legally ratified it.

The Project represents a win-win mechanism as it provides needed water to South Africa and creates an opportunity for the required infrastructure development and energy generation in Lesotho.

On the one hand, the two Projects (Phases I and II) will provide Lesotho with a number of benefits. The country will obtain guaranteed royalties' revenue.

There has been benefits of infrastructure development during Phase I which has included 102 km of paved roads, 265 km of gravel roads, 1,133 km of roads rehabilitated to grade 1 standard, 11 bridges built including 3 bridges between Lesotho and South Africa in Maseru, Maputsoe and Caledonspoort.

The benefits also include 299km of power lines, staff housing for an estimated 300 workers as well as Hydro electricity generation estimated at 72 megawatts.

The building of the Metolong Dam to which South Africa contributed 50 million rand, also meet the water needs of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Lesotho has also gained a village and an Information Centre at Metolong.

On the other hand, benefits to the Republic of South Africa are also immense. The country gains high quality water transfers and job opportunities. There is improved infrastructure in Clarens, Fouriesburg, Ficksburg and Ladybrand in the form of new border crossings and improved amenities, community halls, clinics, houses and improved rail facilities such as in Ficksburg.

Your Majesty and Honourable Prime Minister,

It is because of the importance that we attach to this project that we have decided to avail ourselves for this ceremony despite our busy domestic schedule occasioned by our upcoming national elections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all aware of the importance of water, not only to the economic growth and development of our two countries, but also to our continued existence as human beings.

Ihlele metsi ke bophelo (Indeed, water is life).

We all have an obligation to meet the Millennium Development Goals of halving by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. At the same time, it is not just

because of the UN development goals. The delivery of water is a priority for both economic growth and for our people as a basic human need.

Your Majesty and Hon Prime Minister,

When we learnt some time in 2012 about the Emergency Food Crisis in Lesotho, our Government, in solidarity with the Government of the Kingdom and its people, did not hesitate to extend humanitarian support to the tune of 180 million rand.

Our Government, through the World Food Programme, is partnering with the Government of Lesotho to mitigate the impact of the food crisis in the Kingdom.

In this regard, the WFP with our support seeks to assist about 227 thousand children and mothers who are malnourished and food insecure. We are happy with the progress made thus far in the roll-out of this Project.

Your Majesty and Hon Prime Minister,

The Agreement on Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project between our two countries was signed in August 2011 and South Africa ratified it in 2012 while Lesotho finalized its ratification process in 2013.

Our two Governments must now ensure that this Project is implemented without any further delay. The implementation of the Project has to be done in accordance with the provisions of the legal instruments that our two countries signed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, we wish to take this opportunity to assure you of South Africa's total commitment to this Project considering its importance and significance to our respective countries.

We commit ourselves to doing everything possible to ensure the full realization of this important cross border Project that epitomizes the everlasting and enduring friendship between the wonderful peoples of the Kingdom of Lesotho and the peoples of the Republic of South Africa.

"Khotso, Pula, Nala".

I thank you.