



Speech by Ambassador Smuts Ngonyama at the opening ceremony of the first international congress of Latin American Press organized by Uhuru Africa TV.

Africa Day, 25 May 2015

Programme Director;

Ambassador Ignacio Moreno Gonzalez: Secretary of State for Communications in the Spanish Presidency;

Mr. Javier Fernandez: President of International Press Club;

Mr. Abuy Nfubea: President of the Association for Pan-African Press in Spain;

Dr. Alejandro Perales: President of the Spanish Association of Media Communication Users;

Members of the Government as well Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Students;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me take this opportunity first to salute all present here this morning, in this important event. I have been informed by the organizers that it is an event to mark the ceremony of the First International Congress of Latin American press. In this context I have to congratulate Uhuru Africa TV for organizing this milestone occasion. Simultaneously I would want to wish you the most successful congress.

When I received your invitation I could not resist accepting it because of the following reason: As a former communication practitioner as I was the spokesperson of the African National Congress, the current governing party in South Africa I could easily be reminiscent over communication challenges that engulf different countries of the world. South Africa my country has also been grappling with such challenges ever since the birth of the democratic dispensation in 1994.

I am though optimistic that your deliberations in this two-day conference will come up with resolutions that will further assist our governments and societies to appreciate the importance of the media in strengthening democratic principles, which also lead to security and stability around the world thereby providing us with free speech and the ability to have a choice.

Program director:

Let me express further comments regarding the role of media in our society without preempting the conference discussions. In our democratic societies media has a responsibility which is deeply associated with advancing democratic principles and also associated with changing socio economic conditions. Media whether it's print, radio, audio visual, or web have to be more accountable to the general public. It should be monitored by the public that professional integrity

and ethical standards are not sacrificed for sensational practices. This means the public's attitudes towards media are a sort of watchdog role in itself.

When the ratings of the press decrease, it should fuel journalists to seek to continuously improve themselves and evolve to meet the public's standards. Just as journalists hold the government officials accountable it is the public who hold them accountable. Rachel Link says "journalistic ethics are all about accountability". Soumya Dutta of the University of Burdwan in India said "the freedom of press in the country is a blessing for the people. However, this blessing can go terribly wrong when manipulations set in. The self-regulatory mechanisms across media organizations need to be strong enough to stop anomalies whenever they occur".

Your event also takes place a few weeks after the celebration of the 22nd anniversary of World Press Freedom day on May 3rd. In this regard, at their 7th meeting of the European Commission and African Union Commission held in Brussels on 22 April 2015, the two Commissions, in affirming both Continents' commitment to media freedom, issued a joint statement reiterating that free flow of information and ideas and diverse media constitute one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, rule of law, peace and sustainable inclusive development.

Today being a special day for the African Continent, since the dismantling of colonial rule on the African Continent 52 years ago, most African countries are celebrating today because this provides us with an opportunity to pay tribute to our fore fathers such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Abdul Gamal Nasser of Egypt, Mohamed V of Morocco, Jomo Kenyata of Kenya, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Modimo Keita of mali, Sekou Toure of Guinea(Conakry), Patrice

Lumumba of Congo Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Agostinho Neto of Angola, Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, Eduardo Mondlane of Mozambique, and Albert Luthuli of South Africa who decided that Africans would not be self-sufficient unless they took charge of their future.

These leaders established OAU charter which expressed that the founding African governments were “desirous that all African states should henceforth unite so that the welfare and well-being of their people can be assured”. It went on to say that the OAU would “promote the unity and solidarity of the African states”. This charter called for freedom, equality, justice, and dignity for all Africans and stated that it was the responsibility of the nations of Africa to harness the natural and human resources of the continent for the benefit of the people. This charter enjoined all the African states to ensure that these objectives are obtained.

In the case of South Africa, this special day is being celebrated throughout the country under the theme: “*We are Africa – Opening the doors of learning and culture from Cape to Cairo*”. We have also designated May as an Africa Month where we have programmes aimed at popularizing among our communities a message that says, South Africa’s national interests are intrinsically linked to the entire continent’s stability, unity and prosperity.

(South Africa and the Continent)

Ladies and Gentlemen

Since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 the African Continent has a good story to tell, which confirms that indeed Africa is on the rise! Over the past fifty-two years, our continent

has witnessed the defeat of colonialism and the attainment of African unity as embodied in the African Union.

At the same time, Africa will be determining its destiny over the next fifty years through the African Agenda 2063 framework document which is our long-term road-map towards the social and economic development of our continent, building durable peace, consolidating democracy, and defining Africa's place and future in the world. The measures approved under the Agenda 2063 are aimed at learning from the lessons of the past, building on the progress now underway and strategically exploiting all possible opportunities available to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years. Africa is taking charge of writing its own narrative.

Peace is central to a better Africa. Peace and Security is, indeed, important to the African Agenda. Without peace and security there can be no sustainable development, and without sustainable development there can be no peace and security. As a member of the AU Peace and Security Council, South Africa plays an important role in the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, which is a critical element in providing the AU with the necessary capacity to respond to our challenges of peace and security. The establishment of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises is an interim mechanism to respond to emerging security situations, while the African Standby Force is being established.

South Africa remains actively engaged together with other African countries in resolving political challenges facing various African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan, among others, because we recognize that we are first an African country and that we should support all efforts aimed at the attainment of prosperity in Africa. Our active involvement in the creation of such continental institutions as NEPAD and African Peer Review Mechanism is premised on the objectives of the OAU

charter, which emphasized on the principle of self-reliance and finding African solutions to African problems.

In our vision to attain a continent-wide free trade area, South Africa is among the countries actively engaged in pushing ahead with the negotiations currently underway to establish an African Tripartite Free Trade Area for East, Southern and Central Africa, creating a US\$1 trillion common market that includes 600 million people living in 26 countries. More importantly, this will pave the way for an Africa-wide Free Trade Area, which could create a single market of US\$2.6 trillion.

We believe as changes sweep across the globe and touch the lives of people in even the most remote of habitats, as Africans, we cannot be mere spectators. Our people, our history and our diplomacy demand more of us. We need to continue to engage in cooperation with a sense of purpose, to effect change rather than to just be affected by it. In this time of rapid and constant change, interdependence amongst nations is self-evident. It is also evident that mutually beneficial co-operation is a necessity.

It is with this in mind that we are so concerned about many African people who attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of survival, running out of poverty and violence. This is a serious indictment against the vision of our founding fathers and against our leadership. However we are happy that AU leadership is seized with this matter as they try to find solutions. At the same time we expect a positive response from our European counterparts because it is when we join hands that we can be able to resolve these challenges.

Friends,

Many years ago, the young Nelson Mandela and others had a vision of a united and prosperous South Africa that would be non-racial and united in its diversity. In the new Constitution of the free and democratic

South Africa, we made a promise to ourselves and to the world that we would remain committed to the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms; non-racialism; non-sexism and the rule of law.

At the same time, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2014 to 2016, South Africa continues to take the lead in ensuring that the Council implements the commitments of the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which was hosted by South Africa in 2001.

Therefore, allow me to say, with a deep sense of pain and regret, that nothing can justify the recent sad criminal attacks committed in my country against some members of our community where seven (7) African nationals, including South Africans, lost their lives as a consequence of these irrational acts. These senseless attacks do not represent the character of present South Africa, especially that after 1994, when we established a democratic country, we took a firm decision not to create refugee camps, but to allow foreign nationals (if having legal status to be in South Africa) to integrate with South Africans.

With regard to latest incidents, it should be emphasized that all is now under control and that the South African Government, under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma is determined to ensure that these senseless attacks never happen again. As such our Government, in collaboration with various formations in the country such as organized community based structures, political, student, youth and non-government organizations and religious leaders are now engaged in programmes that seek to further enhance the message that says, "We all have a responsibility to ensure peaceful co-existence in our communities". These programmes will also assist in disseminating to our communities the core values of UBUNTU (I am because you are), an

African philosophy that champions the principles of sharing and caring for one another.

Allow me to underscore that South Africa remains unyielding in its commitment of ensuring that these unfortunate and despicable actions against foreign nationals never happen again in our country. We will not let the criminal actions of a small minority to be used to wrongfully label and stereotype more than 50 million peace-loving South Africans.

(1st International Congress of Latin American Press)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

In conclusion, my hope is that the 1st international congress of Latin American Press will contribute towards open engagement and become an ideal platform that will facilitate the existing engagements among the African Diaspora community.

Allow me to highlight that, in May 2012, South Africa, successfully hosted the Global African Diaspora Summit, an event of historic significance in forging relations between Africa and its Diaspora. The outcome of that Summit was to create a sustainable partnership between the African Diaspora and the African Continent and Pan-African Solidarity. The Summit called for initiatives which call for the recognition of the contribution of afro-descendants towards the common cultural heritage of humanity.

At a time which when the euro-centric paradigm continues to dominate the fields of social and human relations, it is good that initiatives exist, such as this Congress, which continue to highlight that the peoples of African descent have and are making a decisive contribution towards the common cultural heritage of humanity, whether these peoples are located in Africa, America or Europe.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you successful deliberations in the next two days.

Lulama Smuts Ngonyama

South African Ambassador to the Kingdom of Spain and Andorra