

Remarks by President Mbeki at the opening of the South Africa - Qatar Business Forum

Doha, Qatar, 7 May 2008

Director of Ceremonies,

Thank you very much indeed to everybody who is here, to the members of the Qatar Business Community and the visiting South African Business Delegation.

I am very glad indeed that we have an opportunity to interact in the manner in which we are interacting. Yesterday when we were discussing with His Highness, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Amir of Qatar, one of the observations that we made, was that Qatar and South Africa enjoy very good relations.

We tried with the Amir to find areas of difference in which we were fighting, and we could not find them. Indeed I must say that the two governments enjoy very good relations. It became clear during our discussions that, even with matters that goes beyond the bilateral relations between the two countries – matters affecting the regional matters, indeed we found that even with those, there was largely a coincidence of views.

I think you are familiar with the fact that, we are working together with Qatar as members of the United Nation Security Council, and again in that capacity both of us, continue to play a critical role with maximum cooperation between our ambassadors in our countries.

In this context, our governments agrees to the challenge that economic relations between Qatar and South Africa don't quite measure-up, to the level of political relations between our countries. This is a matter that both governments agree and believe that it can be addressed. Because indeed there are no obstacles - there is nothing that stands in the way of rapidly improving the economic partnership between Qatar and South Africa.

Our Minister of Trade and Industry, Mandisi Mpahlwa, has identified some of the areas in which we should stimulate cooperation between our two countries. South Africa is indeed interested to acquire from Qatar, Liquefied Natural Gas. We believe that given our friendship and partnership we can take advantage of that, to meet this demand.

The last time I was in Doha, was in the year 2000. Currently the City has changed and it continues to change. It is very inspiring here in Doha, seeing massive development of roads and buildings, despite challenges around high traffic volumes and so on.

I am very glad that some of the South African companies have been taking advantages themselves, to invest here in Qatar, and they are now part of the growth and development of this city [Doha] and country [Qatar].

We do believe the Qatar business community can play an important role with regards to growth and development task that our Minister of Trade and Industry mentioned.

We would as governments of South Africa and Qatar, be interested to see what is it, we could do, to facilitate the contact and the partnership between our business communities. To see what we could do as governments, to remove any constraints that might discourage the development of such business partnership.

Indeed in this regard, we would rely on what you, as business people say; to indicate the problems you might have experienced that might stand on your involvement in this business activity, so that we could try and establish a conducive business environment for all.

There is an important matter which our Minister [of Trade and Industry] has referred to, that was also discussed with the Amir yesterday. Clearly, we share the view as governments, that our partnership has a relevance that goes beyond our countries. Certainly from the point of view of the African continent, it is quite clear, that it would facilitate business between Qatar and a good part of the African continent.

Essentially, as governments of Qatar and South Africa, we are very keen to see a sound and developed business partnership as the drivers, with regard to meeting the challenges of economic growth and development of our countries.

We depend on you - and because we depend on you - we must say therefore that, we are ready as government to ensure that you succeed in what you do. It is important for us as governments, because where there are hungry people - where there are people who are unemployed - where there are people who are not properly housed - they turn to government to find out what is it that government does to change their lives for the better.

But then, to change the lives of the people for the better, we need you, to generate the wealth - to generate the resources, without which it would not be possible to meet those demands of the people.

Again let me say thank you very much indeed, for coming to this seminar this morning, and join the Minister in saying, I do hope that, at the end of this Business Forum, we would have moved yet another step closer, to securing and strengthening this partnership we need to succeed.

I thank you very much.