

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SOUTH AFRICA, MR.  
ALFRED NZO,  
TO  
FIRST MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE INDIAN OCEAN RIM  
ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION,  
MAURITIUS, 6 MARCH 1997**

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND DELEGATES,

Our initiative was originally seen by many as an idealistic vision. But the visionaries have now taken the brave step to ensure that our regional association might become a reality - a very real opportunity to investigate and discover the potential of bridging the vast distances of our ocean and recognising strength even in our diversity.

It is clear that, for whatever different reasons of the past, we have neglected our identity as a region. This has not been to our advantage. This signing today of a charter for a closer association, is thus in fact a rediscovery of both our common interests and the potential benefits to be derived from greater inter-regional trade and cooperation.

South Africa remains persuaded that we should continue discovering our way forward in a cautious and evolutionary manner. This does not detract from our enthusiasm, or even our curiosity.

It merely suggests that by keeping our eyes on the ground, we might avoid many unnecessary obstacles.

What is of fundamental importance is to aim for tangible and positive results for our endeavours, even if we remain somewhat modest in our initial approach. We must look to benefit the entire region in an equal, sharing and caring manner. We in South Africa like to hope that the economic foundation of our joint venture will in due course derive a far wider social dimension, beneficial to the people – the business people, environmentalists, researchers, the workers - actually living in the rim. The economic and developmental upliftment of the entire rim (... and those in the middle ...) rather than political zeal and grandiose ideas, will be our regard.

We are aware of our strengths. We are looking to potentially one- third of the world population. We are looking to benefit an enormous region, but also to serve existing bilateral and other relations. This is why South Africa, as an African country, was so pleased to be involved with this initiative from the outset.

We look forward to making a substantive contribution, not least through the high-level involvement - unique to inter- governmental arrangements of business and academia. We want to urge this association not to forget that facilitation of their linkage was a prime motivation, and will largely determine the success of this association.

What kind of contribution do we hope to make? Guided by certain criteria already identified at the first meeting of our countries in March 1995, South Africa believes that it remains important to endeavour for a noncontroversial, economic-minded and inclusive association aiming at a phased extension of regional links and closer cooperation, to the benefit of a balanced development of the region as a whole.

On our part, South Africa is ready to participate in, and in some cases coordinate, various projects identified and to be identified under the work programme, for example the South African business component is co-ordinating the projects on standards and accreditation, ports, transport and insurance, and technology enhancement. We are ready to share our expertise in areas where we feel ourselves competent. We are particularly willing to explore joint undertakings and a sharing of resources with our rim neighbours. We will give due consideration for our existing bilateral and other relationships and obligations, which remain of importance to us.

South Africa's economic future holds much new promise. For the first time in many years we can boast a real economic growth, and a substantially lowered inflation rate. The adoption of a macro-economic growth strategy ("gear" as it is called) was a decisive shift in policy. After a comprehensive analysis of the South African economy had been undertaken, tough and specific goals were set.

The fact that this guiding economic framework is broadly and well supported by all sectors of the South African population augurs well for its successful implementation.

We have also set ourselves the goal of creating an investor-friendly environment, and the next step would be to look for joint ventures, and for strategic partners for supplies. Restructuring state assets and creating a productive work force, and providing favourable incentives for investors are fundamental steps along the road we have embarked on.

These goals have been reached within the broader context of building a solid democratic foundation, the commitment to the pursuance of peace and an unwavering respect for human rights and adopting a constitution which provides for a genuine protection of public freedoms and ensures a sound underpinning for the desire to provide a life of dignity and worth for our people.

A country cannot consider itself moving forward unless the aspirations of the people have been met. The main determination of South Africa is that economic growth must be allied to social development.

There is a realisation that there is greater capacity if we act collectively. Projects which provide human resource development enhance entrepreneurship and capacity building, should be pursued with zeal, and people-to-people contacts should be encouraged.

A partnership has begun inside South Africa and in our southern African region, a partnership that we are now ready to explore beyond our boundaries.

Mr. Chairman, South Africa remains optimistic and open minded about the future and agenda of our new association. At the same time we feel it appropriate not to be in undue haste to entrench ourselves in a position of artificial or contrived benefit. We believe this to be a healthy approach best serving the advancement of this association. If it becomes a liability, we should shed it. If it becomes a competition we should not term it cooperation. We are convinced that there is much score for the latter.

Thank you.