THE PRESIDENCY: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
Private Bag X1000, Pretoria, 0001

(Check against delivery)

SPEECH OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION, HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT TM MBEKI AT THE LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN UNION: ABSA STADIUM, DURBAN: JULY 9, 2002.

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations,
Your Excellencies Ministers, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,
Distinguished delegates and guests,
Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal,
Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Durban,
People of Africa:

We have gathered at this stadium in Durban to carry out a solemn and historic act, the launch of the African Union.

We are meeting here to celebrate and rejoice in a great achievement of the peoples of Africa, the formation of the African Union.

We have convened at this stadium in Durban, in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, to make a pledge to the peoples of Africa and the world that we will honour the commitments we made as we agreed to establish the African Union.

As a South African, I am proud that Africa is taking the giant step forward she is taking today in the land of King Shaka, whose name is known across the globe.

This is the land of King Cetywayo, whose armies defeated the seemingly invincible colonial armies of the British Empire at Isandlwana.

It is the land of Nkosi Bambata, who turned the Inkandla forest into a permanent monument to the courage and heroism of an African people in defence of their right to freedom and self-determination.

I am proud that Africa is taking the giant step forward she is taking today at the home of John Langalibalele Dube, the patriot and co-founder of the African National Congress.

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This, also, is the home of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the patriot and co-founder of the African National Congress.

I am proud that Africa is taking the giant step forward she is taking today at the home of Nkosi Albert Luthuli, the first African winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

A.J. Luthuli was President of the African National Congress of John Dube and Pixley Seme at the moment in time when, under his leadership, this parliament of the African people transformed itself into a fighting force, whose heroic actions opened the door to our emancipation.

I am proud that Africa is taking the giant step forward she is taking today at the temporary home of Mahatma Gandhi.

He taught us what we needed to do to achieve our liberation.

At this place, Mahatma Gandhi accumulated the skills that helped to free India from the yoke of British colonialism, the jewel in its crown, which precipitated the collapse of the colonial system in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

I am proud that Africa is taking the giant step forward she is taking today during the year and at the place where the African National Congress celebrated its 90th anniversary at the dawn of this year, in the presence of representatives of the peoples of our continent and the rest of the world.

This is a country in which Africa first fashioned the kind of fighting force that was pan-African from the beginning and which, with its fellow combatants throughout our continent, led our peoples to their liberation.

This is a country that gave birth to the melodic African prayer and anthem – Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika! God bless Africa! Raise high her glory! Hear our prayers and confer on us your blessings!

But this is also a country that owes its birth as a non-racial democracy to the great sacrifices that the peoples of Africa made to ensure that our continent is free of the blight of colonialism, white minority rule and apartheid. In this regard, we pay tribute to heroes such as Abdel Gamal Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Patrice Lamumba, Eduardo Mondlane, Ahmed Ben Bela. Julius Nyerere, Samora Machel and Modibo Keita.

The holding of the last Summit Meeting of the OAU and the first Summit Meeting of the African Union in this country, which proved to be the most stubborn remnant of colonial oppression, constitutes a special victory celebration for our continent as a whole.

This morning, the first summit of the African Union took place in this city. Gathered in this stadium today as we launch the African Union, are the representatives of the millions

of Africans who can truly say that through their sustained combined action, they ensured that the advancing wave of African liberation finally reaches the southernmost tip of Africa, 110 years after the European powers and the United States agreed in Berlin to share Africa among themselves.

Imperialism and colonialism had sought to own and control Africa permanently, from Cape to Cairo. African pride and courage ensured that Africans own and control Africa permanently, from Cape to Cairo.

39 years after the Organisation of African Unity was formed in Addis Ababa, in the ancient African state of Ethiopia, Africa has convened in Durban to decide what it should do about itself.

To answer this question Africans have adopted the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU) which defines clearly the common objectives we as Africans have committed ourselves to and the tasks that lie ahead of us. The Constitutive Act is the supreme law of the continent which has been approved by all our parliaments, the parliaments of the people of Africa to meet the challenges facing Africa today.

We are here in Durban, therefore to give effect to this Act of the African Union.

By forming the Union, the peoples of our continent have made the unequivocal statement that Africa must unite! We as Africans have a common and a shared destiny! Together, we must redefine this destiny for a better life for all the people of this continent.

The first task is to achieve unity, solidarity, cohesion, cooperation among peoples of Africa and African states. We must build all the institutions necessary to deepen political, economic and social integration of the African continent. We must deepen the culture of collective action in Africa and in our relations with the rest of the world.

Our second task is that of developing new forms of partnerships at all levels and segments of our societies, between segments of our societies and our governments and between our governments. We must mobilize all segments of civil society, including women, youth, labour and the private sector to act together to maximise our impact and change our continent for the better.

As Africans, we have come to understand that there can be no sustainable development without peace, without security and without stability. The Constitutive Act provides for mechanisms to address this change which stands between the people of Africa and their ability and capacity to defeat of poverty, disease and ignorance.

Together we must work for peace, security and stability for the people of this continent. We must end the senseless conflicts and wars on our continent which have caused so much pain and suffering to our people and turned many of them into refugees and displacees and forced others into exile.

We must accept that dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts are the only way to guarantee enduring peace and stability for our people. The Constitutive Act provides for such mechanisms.

Together we have made one statement against terrorism.
As Africans, we must put our resources together to defeat terrorism with all its manifestations in the interest of peace and stability for our people.

In the spirit of the Constitutive Act of the Union we must work for a continent characterized by democratic principles and institutions which guarantee popular participation and provide for good governance. Through our actions, let us proclaim to the world that this is a continent of democracy, a continent of democratic institutions and culture. Indeed, a continent of good governance, where the people participate and the rule of law is upheld.

Let us today, re-dedicate ourselves to those fundamental principles we have adopted of human and people's rights, of gender equality, of worker's rights and the rights of the child.

In doing so, we shall have reminded ourselves that realizing these would entail the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment, that the right to development is a human right, that to end hunger on our continent, food security and nurturing agriculture have to be central to our enterprise, that clean water, and sanitation are as crucial to the health of our people as are other ways of fighting communicable diseases such as malaria, TB and AIDS.

To end ignorance on our continent, we shall invest in education, in research in all fields and endeavour to develop our capacities in science and technology.

A key challenge we have set ourselves is to end the levels of unemployment that has been a characteristic of our societies. To do this, there is no alternative but to garner all our own resources both on the continent, and elsewhere, to invest in factories, mines, agriculture and infrastructure. No longer should Africa be simply an exporter of raw materials to the west. We aspire to produce and manufacture the highest quality products for our own use and for export. In order to do this we shall have to invest in training our own working people. If we are to sustain our development, then we shall have to increase trade among ourselves.

Time has come that Africa must take her rightful place in global affairs. Time has come to end the marginalisation of Africa. We call on the rest of the world to work with us as partners.

This is a moment of hope for our continent and its peoples. We shall act together to build a brighter future, working together with all of us, governments, parliamentarians, trade unions, private sector, civil society, religious communities, cultural workers, for a better future for the peoples of Africa.

We congratulate all the leaders gathered here for the work they have done to bring us where we are today.

Long live African Unity. Long live African Union.

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