

South African minister addresses Commonwealth Broadcasters Association gala dinner

Address by the deputy minister of international relations and cooperation, Ms Sue Van Der Merwe, at the Commonwealth Broadcasters Association (CBA) gala dinner, at The Castle, Kayalami, Gauteng, 19 April 2010

President of the CBA [Commonwealth Broadcasters Association], Mr Abubaker Jijiwa, and Deputy President Clarke, Chairman of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Board, Ambassador Ben Ngubane, Secretary General, Ms Elizabeth Smith, Members of Parliament, Distinguished guests:

It is a great honour for South Africa to host such a distinguished gathering of broadcasters from throughout the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth family comprises the world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries and we are home to two billion citizens. Our membership spans six continents and oceans, from Africa with 19 member states to Asia, the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe and the South Pacific.

There are many things we share as a result of the history that connects us. One is of course cricket. Being an avid cricket watcher myself, it is my dream to follow our South African cricket team around the world to watch them play. This would not only allow me to watch cricket, but would take me to some of the most beautiful spots in the world, throughout the Caribbean, the sub-continent and the antipodes. The names of places and countries themselves conjure up images of warm and exotic places. This is our Commonwealth.

We have many things in common as I said as I have said, including one which is vaguely related to cricket and that is the fact that every hotel bar in any Commonwealth country makes an excellent gin and tonic! But on a more serious note beyond the ties of history, it is the associations' values which unite its members; democracy, freedom, peace and the rule of law and opportunity for all. These values were agreed and set down by all the Commonwealth heads of government in Singapore in 1971 and still hold true today.

Commonwealth countries work together in a spirit of cooperation, partnership and understanding. This openness and flexibility is integral to the Commonwealth's effectiveness. Emphasis on equality has helped it play leading roles in decolonisation, combating racism and advancing sustainable development in poor countries. The Commonwealth is part of the world that it serves, sharing the same interests as those of its citizens: democratic freedom and economic and social development.

Of course we also share a language, English. Although all of us also have other languages, we communicate in English with each other and indeed with the rest of the world. As broadcasters this is an important instrument that you

have to connect with the rest of the world in telling the stories that fascinate and intrigue, that shock or delight us. We would like you to experience and to tell, what we think is one terrific story, the first African 2010 FIFA World Cup.

We have great dreams for this tournament. Our dreams start with our determination to show the world that South Africa and Africa can host the greatest show on earth. To do this we have worked together with FIFA to realise this dream. It is of course a dream that started many years ago but was formally launched in 2004 with the announcement of our successful bid to play host to the tournament. Since then we have worked through each challenge and each hurdle to make this tournament come to life.

* We have built some iconic stadiums; we have fixed others to world class standards (10 in all).

* We have rejuvenated our airports, Cape Town International receiving the "best airport in Africa" award recently.

* We have invested in our country's transport system in road infrastructure, rail upgrades, inner-city mobility systems, airport to city systems, in passenger safety measures, a bus rapid transit system and the expansion of our aviation infrastructures.

* We have revolutionised the way we communicate to the world through world class information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure which you have no doubt seen some of at the International Broadcast Centre (IBC). We have invested R1 billion on the switch over from analogue to digital terrestrial television amongst others.

* We have worked on providing opportunities for our tourism industry to benefit from the fans we expect to visit us from all over Africa and the world.

* We have planned and are implementing safety measures so that all our fans and visitors feel safe and are safe in our host cities and indeed wherever they may travel in our beautiful country. We will have 41 000 police recruits specially deployed during the event.

* We have planned our opening and closing spectacles in African style.

* We have invited the world and now we are ready.

This has been a mammoth task for us as a government and as a people. We are, relatively speaking, a small economy, a developing country, with enormous internal development challenges where poverty is our greatest problem and our tax money must not only run our state but it must provide opportunities for growth and development and it must uplift our people and our society.

But our people have warmly embraced the idea of the soccer showcase and excitement is tangible and growing. Last Thursday when tickets went on sale

over the counter as part of the final stage of ticket sales, our people queued for hours to be in line to score. Some of you will remember how people queued in 1994 to vote in the first democratic elections. Queuing is maybe something we have inherited from the British! So we are ready! In fact we can't wait!

We are particularly delighted that this association has chosen South Africa to hold your 2010 conference and hope you have been able to see some of our achievements to date and our readiness to welcome the world and to feel the electricity that is gripping our nation.

We have just over 50 days to go. We are not unaware of the enormous responsibility we have, nor are we dull to the challenges we still face. But we have put everything into this and we firmly believe it will be a full colour event, the most different and perhaps the greatest 2010 FIFA World Cup ever!

We look forward to watching the legends play: Samuel Eto'o (from Ghana) Ronaldo, Messi, Torres, Didier Drogba (Cote d'Ivoire). And as the title of your conference is "Broadcasting Scores", I can only say that we have complete faith that Bafana-Bafana will!

Thank you.

19 April 2010

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