

Address by President Nelson Mandela at the  
Organisation for African Unity (OAU) meeting  
of Heads of State and Government, Tunis -  
Lybia

Nelson Mandela

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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Heads of Delegations, Your Excellencies, Ministers, Ambassadors and High Commissioner, Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen.

In the distant days of antiquity, a Roman sentenced this African city to death : "Carthage must be destroyed (Carthago delenda est)".

And Carthage was destroyed. Today we wander among its ruins, only our imagination and historical records enable us to experience its magnificence. Only our African being makes it possible for us to hear the piteous cries of the victims of the vengeance of the Roman Empire.

And yet we can say this, that all human civilisation rests on foundations such as the ruins of the African

city of Carthage. These architectural remains, like the pyramids of Egypt, the sculptures of the ancients kingdoms of Ghana and Mali and Benin, like the temples of Ethiopia, the Zimbabwe ruins and the rock paintings of the Kgalagadi and Namib deserts, all speak of Africa's contribution to the formation of the condition of civilisation.

But in the end, Carthage was destroyed. During the long interregnum, the children of Africa were carted away as slaves. Our lands became the property of other nations, our resources a source of enrichment for other peoples and our kings and queens mere servants of foreign powers.

In the end, we were held out as the outstanding example of the beneficia-

ries of charity, because we became the permanent victims of famine, of destructive conflicts and of the pestilence of the natural world. On our knees because history, society and nature had defeated us, we could be nothing but beggars. What the Romans had sought with the destruction of Carthage, had been achieved.

But the ancient pride of the peoples of our continent asserted itself and gave us hope in the form of giants such as Queen Regent Labotsibeni of Swaziland, Mohammed V of Morocco, Abdul Gamal Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria, Patrice Lumumba of Zaire, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau, Aghostino Neto of Angola, Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel of Mozambique, Setsetse Khama of Botswana, WEB Du Bois and Martin Luther king of America, Marcus Garvey of Jamaica, Albert Luthuli and Oliver Thambo of South Africa.

By their deeds, by the struggles they led, these and many other patriots said to us that neither Carthage nor Africa had been destroyed. They conveyed the message that the long interregnum of humiliation was over. It is in their honour that we stand here today. It is a tribute to their heroism that, today, we are able to address this august gathering.

The titanic effort that has brought liberation to South Africa,

and ensured the total liberation of Africa, constitutes an act of redemption for the black people of the world. It is a gift of emancipation also to those who, because they were white, imposed on themselves the heavy burden of assuming the mantle of rulers of all humanity. It says to all who will listen and understand that, by ending the apartheid barbarity that was the offspring of European colonisation, Africa has, once more, contributed to the advance of human civilisation and further expanded the frontiers of liberty everywhere.

We are here today not to thank you, dear brothers and sisters, because such thanks would be misplaced among fellow-combatants - we are here to salute and congratulate you for a most magnificent and historical victory over an inhuman system whose very name was tyranny, injustice and bigotry.

When the history of our struggle is written, it will tell a glorious tale of African solidarity, of African's adherence to principles. It will tell a moving story of the sacrifices that the peoples of our continent made, to ensure that that intolerable insult to human dignity, the apartheid crime against humanity, became a thing of the past. It will speak of the contributions of freedom - whose value is as measureless as the gold beneath the soil of our country - the contribution which all of Africa made, from

the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in the north, to the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans in the north.

Africa shed her blood and surrendered the lives of her children so that all her children could be free. She gave of her limited wealth and resources so that all of Africa should be liberated. She opened heart of hospitality and her head so full of wise counsel, so that we should emerge victorious. A million times, she put her hand to the plough that has now dug up the encrusted burden of oppression accumulated for centuries.

The total liberation of Africa from foreign and white minority rule has now been achieved. Our colleagues who have served with distinction on the OAU liberation committee have already carried out the historical task of winding up this institution, which we shall always remember as a front-line fighter for the emancipation of the people of our continent.

Finally, at this summit meeting in Tunis, we shall remove from our agenda the consideration of the question of Apartheid South Africa.

Where South Africa appears on the agenda again, let it be because we want to discuss what its contribution shall be to the making of the new African renaissance. Let it be because we want to discuss what materials it will supply for the rebuilding of the African city of Carthage.

One epoch with its historic tasks has come to an end. Surely, another must commence with its own challenges. Africa cries out for a new birth, Carthage awaits the restoration of its glory.

If freedom was the crown which the fighters of liberation sought to place on the head of mother Africa, let the upliftment, the happiness, prosperity and comfort of her children be the jewel of the crown.

There can be no dispute among us that we must bend every effort to rebuild the African economies. You, your excellencies, have discussed this matter many times and elaborated the ideas whose implementation would lead us to success.

The fundamentals of what needs to be done are known to all of us. Not least among these are the need to address the reality that Africa continues to be a net exporter of capital and suffers from deteriorating terms of trade. Our capacity to be self-reliant, to find the internal resources to generate sustained development, remains very limited.

Quite correctly, we have also spent time discussing the equally complex questions that bear on the nature and quality of governance. These, too, are central to our capacity to produce the better life which our people demand and deserve. In this regard, we surely must face the matter squarely that where there is some-

thing wrong in the manner in which we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our starts, but in ourselves that we are ill-governed.

Tribute is due to the great thinkers of our continent who have been and are trying to move all of us to understand the intimate inter-connection between the great issues of our day of peace, stability, democracy, human rights, co-operation and development.

Even as we speak, Rwanda stands out as a stern and severe rebuke to all of us for having failed to address these interrelated matters. As a result of that, a terrible slaughter of the innocent is taking place in front of our very eyes.

Thus do we give reason to the peoples of the world to say of Africa that she will never know stability and peace, that she will never experience development and growth, that her children will forever be condemned to poverty and dehumanisation and that we shall for ever be knocking on somebody's door pleading for a slice of bread.

We know it is a matter of fact that we have it in ourselves as Africans to change all this. We must, in action, assert our will to do so. We must, in action, say that there is no obstacle big enough to stop us from bringing about a new African renaissance.

We are happy, Mr Chairman, to commit South Africa to the achieve-

ment of these goals. We have entered this eminent African organisation and rejoined the African community of nations inspired by the desire to join hands with all the countries of our continent as equal partners.

It will never happen again that our country should seek to dominate another through force of arms, economic might or subversion. We are determined to remain true to the vision which you held out for South Africa as you joined the offensive to destroy the system of apartheid.

The vision you shared with us was one of a non-racial society, whose very being would assert the ancient African values of respect for every person and commitment to the elevation of human dignity, regardless of colour or race.

What we all aimed for was a South Africa which would succeed in banishing the ethnic and national conflicts which continue to plague our continent. What we, together, hoped to see, was a new South Africa freed of conflict among its people and the violence that has taken such a heavy toll, freed of the threat of the civil strife that has turned millions of people into refugees both inside and outside our countries.

We all prayed and sacrificed to bring about a South Africa that we could hold out as a true example of the democracy, equality and justice for all, which the apartheid system

was constructed and intended to deny.

The vision you shared with us was one in which we would use the resources of our country to create a society in which all our people would be emancipated from the scourges of poverty, disease, ignorance and backwardness.

The objectives we will pursue was the creation of a South Africa that would be a good neighbour and an equal partner with all the countries of our continent, one which would use its abilities and potentialities to help advance the common struggle to secure Africa's rightful place within the world economic and political system.

Thus must we build on the common victory of the total emancipation of Africa to obtain new successes for our continent as a whole.

Mr Chairman :

We are ready to contribute what we can to help end the genocide that is taking place in Rwanda and bring peace to that troubled sister country.

We also join the distinguished Heads of State and Government and Leaders of Delegations in urging a speedy implementation of the OAU and UN decisions aimed at resolving the question of Western Sahara.

We extend our best wishes to the leaders and people of Angola in the fervent hope that the process of negotiations in which they are engaged

will, as a matter of urgency, bring about the permanent and just peace which the people of that country so richly deserve.

Equally, we would like to express our deep-felt wish that the necessary measures will be taken by all concerned to guarantee the success of the peace processes in Mozambique and Liberia, to end the war in the Sudan and protect democracy and stability in Lesotho.

We also appeal to the world community to respond in a sensitive and generous manner to the famine that threatens the peoples of East Africa.

Mr Chairman, our delegation is also happy to announce that we have had the honour to pay the subscription that the OAU has levied for South Africa. In addition, and as a token of the commitment of the people of our country to support Africa's peace efforts, we are glad to inform the Assembly that we have also made an additional contribution of R1 million to the OAU fund for peace.

We congratulate you, Mr Chairman, on your election as the current chairman of the OAU and thank you, your government and people for the extraordinary welcome you have extended to us. We are indeed glad to be here because Tunisia was among the first countries on our continent to respond to our appeal for help, when we were obliged to take up arms to fight for our liberation.

We thank our brother, President Hosni Mubarak, for the outstanding work he did during his chairpersonship, including the direction of the efforts of the OAU as it helped us to deal with political violence in our country and ensure the holding of free and fair elections.

We salute too, our Secretary-General, HE Salim Ahmed Salim, the OAU Secretariat, the OAU Head of Mission to South Africa, Ambassador Joe Legwaila, the Heads of State and Government and the people of our continent who helped us successfully to walk our last mile of the difficult road to freedom.

To you all, we would like to say

that your sacrifices and your efforts have not been in vain. Freedom for Africa is your reward. Your actions entitled you to be saluted as the heroes and heroines of our time. On your shoulders rests the responsibility to restore to our continent its dignity.

We are certain that you will prevail over the currents that originate from the past, and ensure that the interregnum of humiliation symbolised by, among others, the destruction of Charthage, is indeed consigned to the past, never to return.

God bless Africa.

Thank you.

Source : South African Government Information Website