

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MS. TOKOZILE XASA AT THE RECEPTION ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF SWITZERLAND, 31 JULY 2012, SWISS RESIDENCE, PRETORIA

Your Excellency Ambassador Christian Meuwly
Your Excellency Dean of the Diplomatic Corps Dr Bene-Mpoko
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Guests
Friends
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa, it is my sincere pleasure and great honour to congratulate you, Mr Ambassador, on the occasion of the Anniversary of the National Day of the Swiss Confederation.

We are very pleased to be part of these celebrations with you today, to commemorate both the sovereignty of the people of Switzerland and their success.

Ambassador,

Switzerland is a peaceful, prosperous, and stable modern market economy with comparatively low unemployment, a highly skilled labour force, and a per capita GDP that is larger than that of the big European economies, which in this climate especially is a continuing success story.

Present day relations with South Africa are extremely good and very cordial. Following South Africa's democratic transformation and in view of the commonality of shared interests in the international system and on the African continent in particular, both countries enjoy a privileged status on each other's foreign policy agenda. Indeed, these relations span a variety of sectors, including government, business, education and non-government.

High level reciprocal diplomatic representation (dating back since 1952), open free access to government and private sector institutions, as well as the ever improving trade relations, have provided the basis for today's excellent bilateral relations and economic ties between our two countries.

I would like to express gratitude for the tangible benefits deriving from our bilateral cooperation and its positive impact on South Africa's key national priorities, especially the creation of employment, skills development and vocational training. In this regard I should mention the sterling work done for the youth of South Africa in the area of skills and vocational training by the Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative or SSACI,

which is a public-private partnership between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Swiss companies trading in South Africa.

To date this organisation has trained more than 6000 youths, and several projects are currently underway. One such project is the Workplace Based Experience (WBE) for Further Education and Training (FET) college students which arranges short placements for college students in real workplaces during the course of their studies. This not only develops the students' practical competence and work-readiness, but also promotes alignment of the college curricula with the needs of industry and fosters college-industry partnerships.

I understand that to date 43 colleges have received training to implement the WBE, 1075 college lecturers and managers were trained as well as over 2500 students placed in industry with over 150 participating companies. These positive developments lend impetus to Switzerland's role in realising South Africa's national development priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to also broach the subject of the South African-Swiss High Level Consultations (HLC), the structured bilateral mechanism that guides the relationship between our two countries. In October, my colleague, Mr Marius Fransman, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation will receive his Swiss counterpart, Foreign Affairs State Secretary Mr Yves Rossier for the HLC. As the South African Government we look forward to the successful Consultations, and the further consolidation of our bilateral relations.

Ambassador you may recall that on 21 June 2012, South Africa's Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies paid a visit to your beautiful country to co-chair the South African-Swiss Joint Economic Committee (JEC). Economic development cooperation between South Africa and Switzerland through the JEC has paved ways for gainful, collaborative, mutual effort for both countries.

Swiss companies such as Nestlé, which have been in SA for decades, are ready to boost their investment in South Africa and have already opened a new factory. It is also important to note that since 2003, Swiss businesses have invested more than R17 billion in the South African economy.

Trade between South Africa and Switzerland has been increasing over the years. South Africa has thus been enjoying balance of trade surplus with Switzerland since 2001.

It would be unfair to omit the important role Switzerland plays in the international family of nations. It is the host to numerous important UN organisations – not least, the Human Rights Commission. It is against this background that Switzerland sees itself a “natural ally” of South Africa in that both countries believe in multilateralism and respect for the International Rule of Law. It is against this background also that Switzerland stays true to its national ideals, based on democracy, inclusivity and humanitarianism.

May I close by stating that South Africa is proud of our relations with Switzerland and it is clear that this relationship is active and growing. I would like to thank the Swiss Government, its people and Ambassador Meuwly for your engagement and loyal support to our young democracy, to our efforts to alleviate poverty in South Africa, and to establishing peace and stability on the African continent.

May our relations grow from strength to strength.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses and join me in a toast to His Excellency Ambassador Meuwly and the Government and people of Switzerland, and to the excellent relationship between our two countries.

I thank you.