



Open letter from High Commissioner Skweyiya to South Africans in the United Kingdom:

Dear fellow South Africans,

On 11 June 2010 a seismic shift will take place in the young life of South Africa's democracy. For the next four weeks billions of people in offices, restaurants, bars and homes around the world will be glued to the nearest television screen as the greatest show on earth is staged in South Africa.

For South Africans across the globe this will be a time when we miss home the most. Seeing our country on the TV and in the news everyday will certainly bring a sense of pride and perhaps even make us a little envious of our compatriots celebrating at home. It is an opportune time for us all to acknowledge the success that has been achieved in reaching this point, a time for us all to talk about South Africa and what it means to us. We are all ambassadors for our country and should be very proud of our country.

The fact that South Africa held its first democratic election just 16 years ago and will now play host to the FIFA World Cup underlines the determination and passion of South Africans.

The journey that has brought South Africa to this momentous occasion has not been easy. From the very moment we won the right to host this magnificent tournament we have faced criticism both locally and abroad. Critics argued first that we could never do it, then that we would never be ready and that the stadiums would not be completed on time. Some even went so far as to say that crime will ruin the tournament. With 41 000 extra police that have been trained in time for the World Cup and beyond, we are confident that safety and security will not be an issue.

As I write this letter the English Football team has just touched down in the newly refurbished O.R Tambo International Airport, Africa's biggest airport, capable of handling more than 28 million passengers a year. I think about them as they pass through the brand new terminals and passport control points. I think about whether or not the soccer-crazy staff at the airport with their friendly smiles will be able to contain themselves as the superstars of world football arrive.

As the English team bus pulls away from the airport and journeys along our newly renovated and radically improved highway system taking them smoothly to their newly built 'state-of-the-art' training and hospitality facilities in the North West, I wonder if they will notice the hundreds of billboards and thousands of flags held high by fans, and fluttering from cars and buses showing their support for the World Cup and what it represents.

I wonder if the players realise that what they are experiencing is the beginning of a new journey for South Africa: that the airports, roads, hotels and world class stadiums they will use throughout the tournament all represent how South Africa is changing; that the 415 000 jobs that have been created have improved lives forever; and, that the roads, motorways and railways that have been developed are not just to transport teams and fans to and from the matches, but will also transport more and more South Africans to and from work. That the stadiums that have been built are not just for this tournament but for local teams and talent to utilise and develop further, for provinces to showcase themselves on the global stage.

This tournament will create an attitude amongst South Africans that anything is possible, that South Africa and its people are capable of achieving anything, no matter how big the task may initially appear. But the

most enduring benefactor of the World Cup will be the national psyche and the quest for a common national identity to transcend a deeply divided past

On Friday 11 June the High Commission, in partnership with the Greater London Authority, is hosting a live public screening on Trafalgar Square of the 2010 FIFA World Cup opening ceremony, followed by the opening match between South Africa and Mexico. I would like to take the opportunity to personally invite you to support our country, celebrating our culture as well as our freedom and achievements since democracy, by attending this exciting event with your family and friends.

11 July may signify the end of the tournament, but in reality for us, it's just the beginning.

Yours truly

Dr Zola Skweyiya

South African High Commissioner

*This letter originally appeared in the "South African" Newspaper on 8 June 2010