

South African High Commission

London, 02 July 2008

NOTES FOLLOWING SABC INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI ON CONCLUSION OF AFRICAN UNION SUMMIT, SHARM EL-SHEIKH, EGYPT TUESDAY 1 JULY 2008

Question:

Mr President, we now know that the African Union has called on President Mugabe and the Opposition to talk and move towards this government of unity. Was there any objection from President Mugabe on this matter?

Answer:

There was no objection. He said they were committed to that and that indeed, even as we were sitting at the meeting the Zimbabweans were interacting amongst themselves.

He was fully supportive of the co-operation and dialogue between the Zimbabwean political parties to find a solution to the challenges they face.

Question:

Mr President, we now know that the European Union has also released a statement saying they will not accept a unity government that is not headed by Morgan Tsvangirai. How would the President, as the Facilitator, respond to such a statement?

Answer:

Well, the mandate that we originally received from SADC to act as Facilitator in the Zimbabwean negotiations, which has now been confirmed by the African Union, required that we should facilitate discussions amongst Zimbabwean political parties, which is indeed what we have been doing now for quite a long time and as I said, SADC had asked us to continue that and the African Union has now said we should do that so, we go back to the Zimbabwean political parties to say that they need to engage one another and the result that must come out of that is not a result, that the Facilitation can dictate. The result that comes out of that process of dialogue must be a result that is agreed by the Zimbabweans.

Certainly SADC and certainly the African continent has not made any prescriptions about the outcome of what the Zimbabweans must negotiate amongst themselves and that surely must mean that when Zimbabweans say we have all met, discussed, negotiated – this is what we have agreed to take our country, Zimbabwe forward – I would imagine that both the region and the African continent would accept that.

Question:

Mr President, there has been heavy criticism also against the African Union leaders – people asking why you would accept what they call an illegitimate president back into the African Union?

Answer:

What the African Union focused upon was how Zimbabwe moves forward to emerge from its crisis. In the discussion, this is what everybody focused on. And that is why they came to the conclusion that the only way

out of this was to encourage the Zimbabweans to engage with each other and indeed to produce an inclusive government because everybody is convinced that it is only via the instrument of an inclusive government that includes all the Zimbabwean political parties within a framework that they themselves have agreed to, that this is the only way that you can take Zimbabwe forward.

You would notice that in the African Union resolution they make critical remarks about the violence that took place in Zimbabwe, they note the reports prepared by the SADC, the Pan African Parliament, the African Union observers which talk about the negative circumstances surrounding the run-off on 27 June and indeed, in the discussions, people spoke about these matters. There was no debate about this – that indeed this is what happened.

But as I said, the African Union, focused on what needs to be done to take Zimbabwe out of this crisis and that was the focus of discussions

Question:

On other matters, Mr President, the Union Government – what emerged?

Answer:

As you know, the January 2008 Summit of the African Union had set up the Committee of 12 Heads of State and Government to work on a programme of action on this matter of an all Africa government. South Africa is part of that Committee. We met in Arusha, Tanzania and agreed on various proposals which were accepted by the Summit and what was then decided was that, with regard to the matters we had agreed to as Committee of 12 and recommended, and which the Summit has now accepted that the Commission of the African Union would then report to the January 2009 Summit on the timeframes for the implementation of the programme that the Committee of 12 had recommended. So, that would be the next step. We then meet in January and it was said that we should devote a whole day to discussion of this matter before dealing with the normal business of the Summit.

Question:

Mr President, on the theme of the Summit – Water and Sanitation – what practically emerged from this in terms of concrete measures that the African Union is looking at?

Answer:

I think it is important that the African Union Summit had devoted attention to that matter of water and sanitation – these issues are so critical to life itself and good health, etc.

You would be aware of work that had been done before the Summit on these matters to identify specific actions that will be taken. Now, what will then happen with regard to this – many things are said about water, sanitation, proper utilisation of water, references to the matter which as a continent we are failing to utilise – there are huge volumes of water that come down the Congo River and just empty into the Atlantic and other negative problems like the shrinking and the drying up of Lake Chad, so there will be, within the context of saying we need better utilisation of the resources we have, we need better conservation, we need to better capture rain water, all of these sorts of questions and we need to attend to these sanitation issues also. Then the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) will then have to elaborate specific programmes with regard to that and NEPAD also would do the cross border programmes and projects and this is one of the matters that we will discuss with the G-8 when we need them in Japan next week on the basis of all these matters that have been agreed and to identify resources that will be required from both, within the continent and from our development partners.

Question:

The President touched on when the G-8 and the NEPAD Heads of State meet in few days time – your position in a few days time – will you push the G-8 a bit harder?

Answer:

Some of the principle decisions that were taken by NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee were that we need to get the G-8 to reaffirm the Africa Action Programme. That is the programme that had agreed with the G-8 when we met them in Canada in 2002. We must say that to them we must confirm this as the programme agreed to between themselves and ourselves and the reason for wanting to raise a matter like that is that what has been happening is that you move from one G-8 Summit to another, from one country to another. The host countries pick on certain matters that they like and so the rest of the programme gets forgotten so we want to say, here is a basic programme and any follow up must be about the whole Africa Action Programme and not particular items within the Action Programme that are chosen by the host G-8 countries and therefore, because of that we also want to ensure that also have an implementation mechanism of the G-8 and Africa – a joint mechanism so that we can follow up on the implementation of the G-8 of the Africa Action Plan. So these are two principle things. There are some other matters like I was saying, the water and sanitation matter. Previously, there had been resources committed by the G-8 to address these matters of water and sanitation but because the mechanism between the G-8 and Africa collapsed we have not been able to follow up on those.

There are other matters that have been raised – for instance, in countries whose debts were written off, there is a requirement that is then being imposed by these developed countries that “because we wrote of your debt, you are no longer allowed to borrow anything.” So when African countries want to borrow in a responsible manner, in a manner that would ensure they do not run into these unsustainable debts, they say you are not allowed to borrow because we forgave your debt. So countries cannot develop. So these are some of the matters that will arise at the G-8 including another important matter that the Summit paid a lot of attention to, quite correctly, which is the matter of high food prices. There was a long discussion, fortunately also joined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Food Programme, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, sitting together with the African Union saying what do we do about this very important challenge which is impacting negatively on poor people on our continent so again, that matter of programmes to increase agriculture production to deal with all of these problems in the developing countries, in agriculture which had bedevilled the World Trade Organisation negotiations, that those matters also arising from the discussions here at the AU Summit on food prices – these are some of the matters that will be on the agenda of the G-8

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