

A long-lasting friendship

By HE DR ZOLA SKWEIYA

HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE COURT OF ST JAMES'S



DR ZOLA SKWEIYA joined the ANC in 1956 and, with the support of the movement, studied law at the University of Leipzig in Germany, where he received his doctorate in 1978. He subsequently worked for the ANC in various capacities, travelling extensively throughout the world. Since his return from exile in 1990, Dr Skweyiya has directed the Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs and has served as a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC). He was elected to Parliament in 1994 and held several Cabinet positions under Presidents Mandela and Mbeki before assuming his current role in September 2009.

His Excellency President Jacob Zuma's State Visit to the UK is the third such visit by a South African President since South Africa became a democracy in 1994, and provides another memorable opportunity for our country to convey our deep appreciation to Her Majesty, The Queen, and the leadership and people of the UK for the special UK-South Africa relationship.

Our ties of friendship with the UK have its deep roots in history and most especially the great support shown to us by the British public during our generations' long struggle against the evils of apartheid.

It has now been 15 years since South Africa achieved its long awaited, hard-fought for democracy. The race-based laws that so cruelly divided us have gone and we have a democratically-elected government at national and local levels with a finely-wrought constitution that defines, upholds and protects our human rights. We have proudly taken our place as a partner with the other countries of Africa and the world and enjoy meaningful and positive interaction with the global community through our membership of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and the African Union.

Building on the solid base of the last decade and a half of democracy, President Jacob Zuma, with the overwhelming support of South Africans, pledged in his inaugural speech on 9th May that this was a moment of renewal for the country to continue to forge a nation that is at peace with itself and the world. He also rededicated the nation to building a better life for all.

The State Visit will convey the message that South Africa, and its democracy, is as vibrant as ever – and that as a country we all remain committed to working together to build a united, stable, prosperous and non-sexist society where all feel included, black and white. Growing our economy, and creating new jobs, remain the South African government's critical goals essential to poverty eradication and undoing the skewed socio-economic legacy of apartheid.

Despite the global economic downturn South Africa's economy is still in a secure position generally. We are fortunate that South Africa remains one of the most sophisticated and promising emerging markets, offering a unique combination of highly developed first world economic infrastructure together with a vibrant emerging market economy.

Investing in South Africa continues to make good

business sense because you have the growth and dynamism of an emerging market coupled with the stability and transparency of the developed world and significantly lower unit labour costs than those of many other emerging markets. Our economic growth expectation for 2010 is 2.3 per cent, rising to 3.6 per cent by 2012 – and with the largest economy on the African continent South Africa still accounts for approximately 25 per cent of the continent's GDP.

With regards our infrastructure investment and development plans, over the next three years, South Africa aims to spend R846 billion on our infrastructure programme. Increasing capacity at our power plants make up about a third of the total and upgrading our transport infrastructure and water supply capacity makes up much of the balance.

As the UK remains South Africa's largest trading partner in Europe the State Visit will highlight the important economic relations that exist between South Africa and the UK. As part of the State Visit the UK Department of Trade & Investment, in partnership with the City of London Corporation and the South African Department of Trade and Industry, will host a key business interaction event for UK companies to meet the 200 plus South African businesses accompanying President Zuma, the largest South African business delegation to Europe ever.

Although we have made immense strides in providing housing and the basic services previously denied to most South Africans under apartheid, our challenge is to fully redress the socio-economic disparities resulting from the past. As part of the State Visit President Zuma will personally thank the many UK NGOs and charities that work tirelessly on behalf of various South African upliftment projects. Many of these NGOs previously assisted oppressed South Africans during the apartheid years and have continued to assist our country into this new era of peace and democracy.

The State Visit is also the opportunity for President Zuma to launch the 100 days countdown to the FIFA World Cup. South Africa will soon have the eyes of the world upon it as it hosts this year's biggest sporting spectacular – an event SA is fully prepared for and has invested millions of rands worth of infrastructure in that will continue to benefit the people of South Africa for generations to come. We hope that all Britons will celebrate with us and marvel at how far we have come as a nation since the end of the long struggle that lead to our liberation and democracy. **F**