



**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF COP17/CMP 7, INKOSI
ALBERT LUTHULI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, DURBAN**

28 November 2011

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Chad and Chairperson of the Economic Community of Central African States,

Excellencies Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa and Vice-President of the Republic of Angola,

Honourable Ministers,

Executive Secretary of SADC,

Honourable Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Province,

Distinguished delegates of states parties,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to South Africa and to the city of Durban in the beautiful Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

You are meeting in a part of South Africa known for its rich history of bravery and military conquest, displayed in the early years of our history, under the reign of the legendary King Shaka, after whom the airport you landed at, is named.

The KZN province is also known for its scenic beauty, warm and friendly people, diverse and colourful culture as well as a stretch of golden beaches.

We are welcoming you to a province which was home to some of the greatest leaders, our country's first Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Chief Albert Luthuli and also at some point, the legendary Mahatma Gandhi.

Both were distinguished fighters for freedom, justice and human rights for all.

This is also the city and province in which the founding President of a free and democratic South Africa, our icon, President Nelson Mandela, cast his vote for the first time on 27 April 1994, launching a new era of freedom and democracy in our country.

We are therefore truly honoured to host in this province and country, the 17th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, known commonly as COP 17, and the 7th Conference of Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, known as CMP7.

We thank the United Nations for showing confidence in Africa's ability to host this meeting again, after COP 12 which was successfully hosted in Nairobi, Kenya in 2006.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I have mentioned some of the outstanding leaders who taught us the power of reaching out to people who think differently from ourselves, in order to find solutions to complex political problems.

That is the spirit that should prevail in COP 17/CMP7.

With sound leadership, nothing is impossible here in Durban over the next two weeks.

Excellencies,

Esteemed delegates,

This meeting is taking place because climate change poses serious risks for humanity, especially in the developing world.

Climate change can no longer be treated as just an environmental challenge. It is a holistic sustainable development challenge.

Various regions of the world have different views on the issue, simply because they are affected differently by climate change.

However, for most people in the developing world and Africa, climate change is a matter of life and death. We are always reminded by the leaders of small island states that climate change threatens their very existence.

As the sea level rises, it threatens to wipe them off the face of the earth.

Recently the island nation of Kiribati became the first country to declare that global warming is rendering its territory uninhabitable. They have asked for help to evacuate the population.

Africa's vulnerability does not only stem from climate change impacts such as the rise in the sea level, severe droughts and floods.

Africa is more vulnerable because of poverty which limits the ability of most African nations to cope with the impact of climate change.

Agricultural output in many African countries is expected to decrease by as much as 50% by the year 2050, which will cause serious food shortages.

In some practical examples of impact, scarce grazing land is causing conflict in the Sudan, amongst peoples that have previously lived in peace for centuries.

Severe drought in Somalia is exacerbating an already volatile region causing displacement of populations and increasing refugee communities in Kenya.

In the Americas, we have also witnessed the frequency of intense hurricanes on the Gulf Coast from which the communities of New Orleans have yet to fully recover, five years after Hurricane Katrina.

In our own country, we have experienced unusual and severe flooding in coastal areas in recent times, impacting on people directly as they lose their homes, jobs and livelihoods.

Given the urgency, states parties should strive to find solutions here in Durban.

Negotiators will be building on the good work done in Cancun, Mexico at COP 16/CMP6. The message we wish to emphasise to negotiators is simple.

The expectation is that you must work towards an outcome that is balanced, fair and credible.

You have before you the responsibility to re-affirm the multilateral rules-based system anchored by the Kyoto Protocol and to provide the funding needed to address impacts of climate change through activating the Green Climate Fund.

Another key issue on the table is the second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol and reaching agreement on the legal nature of a future climate change system.

As this Conference of the Parties is taking place in Africa, adaptation is a key priority, particularly for small island states, least developed countries and Africa.

We also feel strongly that as an African Conference of the Parties, the COP 17 outcome must recognise that solving the climate problem cannot be separated from the struggle to eradicate poverty.

Informed by this view, as a responsible global citizen, South Africa is contributing its fair share to the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

At COP 15 in Copenhagen, we announced our commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 34% in 2020 and by 42% in 2025, with support from developed countries with regards to finance, technology and capacity-building.

We have gone some way towards implementing this undertaking.

Our New Growth Path framework includes comprehensive green economy interventions including an ambitious focus on renewable energy and the promotion of green industries.

Early this month we concluded a landmark Green Economy Social Accord, signed by government, the trade union movement and the business community, committing all of us to achieve 300 000 green jobs by 2020.

The Accord showcases one of the greatest South African strengths, which is social dialogue and partnerships.

The green economy will create new opportunities for enterprise development, job creation and the renewal of commercial and residential environments the world over.

There are also significant opportunities for the development of a green economy in Southern Africa and which could also be extended to other parts of the Continent.

In this regard, the Republic of South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo recently signed an Agreement with respect to the Grand Inga Hydro Electricity Project for the construction of a dam that will provide electricity to more than half of Africa's population.

The plant is estimated to generate about 40 000 megawatts, which is over one third of the total electricity produced in Africa today.

We are also working to generate hydro and wind energy sources from cooperation with the Kingdom of Lesotho through Phase 2 of the Lesotho Highland Water Project, and are working on other renewable energy projects with Mozambique.

Change and solutions are always possible.

In these talks, States parties will need to look beyond their national interests to find a global solution for the common good and benefit of all humanity.

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

We have come a long way since Copenhagen and Cancun. Durban must take us many steps forward towards a solution that saves tomorrow today.

Let me once again extend a warm welcome on behalf of the government and people of the Republic of South Africa.

It is my honour and privilege to declare COP 17 and the seventh meeting of parties to the Kyoto Protocol open.

I look forward to meeting with you again on the 6th of December, when we open the high level segment.

I wish you well with your deliberations.

I thank you.