

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, AMBASSADOR CHUPU MATHABATHA ON THE OCCASION OF THE BEATIFICATION OF BENEDICT DASWA AT TSHITANINI IN VHEMBE REGION.

13 SEPTEMBER 2015

Program Director;

His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Amato, Prefect of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints;

Archbishops and Bishops, Priests and Sisters present here;

Premiers and Ministers here present;

King Toni Mphephu Ramabulana;

Gole Musiiwa Mphaphuli and the Traditional leadership;

The Southern African Bishops Council members;

The Church leadership and the rest of the congregation;

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

I am greatly privileged, and truly honoured for being granted this opportunity to welcome all of you to the beautiful and most peaceful Province of Limpopo. On the 2nd of February 1990 two events of historical significance took place in our country; first being the much talked about release of our icon the late President Nelson Mandela from prison after 27 years of incarceration, the second was the brutal murder of Benedict Daswa. Both the late President Nelson Mandela and Benedict Daswa were relentless personalities when it came to the pursuit of justice, peace and fairness. Unfortunately, because of the twisted nature of our society, it was this pursuit of peace, justice and fairness that earned both Benedict Daswa and Nelson Mandela persecution in the hands of fellow human beings. The other common denominator about these two personalities was their outright rejection of violence as a way of solving disputes or societal differences.

Despite being a vivid opponent of witchcraft beliefs, Benedict Daswa refused to join a witch-hunt crusade that saw hundreds of people being killed on accusations of practicing witchcraft.

Nelson Mandela also resisted calls, particularly from angry Black youths for a revenge against their White counterparts, instead, he extended an olive branch to his jailers and encouraged the youth to focus on the reconstruction and development of what he called the Rainbow Nation.

Programme Director;

This province is a home to the church; it is the home of the Christian faith. Limpopo is a home to a chain of various Christian denominations. It is also a home of the internationally renowned Zion Christian Church with an estimated 6 million followers. The people of this province are highly spiritual; a significant majority of them are Christians belonging to the various denominations I have spoken about. It is perhaps because of the religious, in particular the Christian character of our citizens, that this province is ranked the most peaceful of all the nine provinces of this country. Even when the rest of the country was being shamed by the senseless attacks on foreign nationals earlier this year, we commended the people of this Province who continued to live peacefully side-by-side with our brothers and sisters from the rest of the African continent. We did not experience these barbaric attacks despite the fact that our province is the most cosmopolitan of all the provinces in the country. As you would know, our province is a true gateway to Africa; we border countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and

Swaziland. Because of the love and peace of our people and the grace of God, are able to live together as brothers and sisters as Lord Our God would prefer us to.

As a government, we have given and continue to give our full support for the expression of free religious activity.

Programme Director;

The ruling party itself, the African National Congress has a long history of association with the Church. Its founders were church men and women. As a matter of fact, the party was founded in a church. Our support for the church is premised not only on the constitutional imperatives, but also the understanding that our political objectives cannot be achieved without the support of the religious community.

As the late president Nelson Mandela had said:

"The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between religions and political bodies, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither political nor religious objectives can be achieved in isolation. They are held in a creative tension with common commitments. We are partners in the building of our society."

These sentiments were further echoed by another former president, Thabo Mbeki who also said that:

"The new South Africa, born out of a broken and battered society, disfigured by the evil and corrupt apartheid system, cries out for hard political and socio-economic transformation which must be achieved if our country is to save itself from destruction. But it cries out also for spiritual power and resources to heal, to reconcile, to rebuild, and to restore its humanity. South Africa is crying out for its soul."

Accordingly, it is our view that faith and politics are like sides of a coin. Solving the problems of poverty and greed, violence and corruption, is a deeply spiritual challenge.

If political and economic practices are to serve the nation, they must be based on justice not charity, honesty not deceit, transparency not corruption.

We are inspired by the teachings in the Book of Proverbs that:

"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee."

"Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he has done thee no harm. Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways."

It is indeed in our collective interest as human beings that we always act as each other's keeper, meaning that we should neither devise evil against each other nor refuse to offer aid when we have the power to do so.

Programme Director, in conclusion, I wish to say that South Africa is today a much different country than it was in 1990 was Benedict Daswa was murdered for his beliefs.

Today we have a very progressive constitution that is admired by many nations of the world.

Most importantly, our constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion. Our constitution goes further to provide that religious observations may be conducted at the state or state aided institutions. To materialize this important constitutional right, the government has since 1994 established supportive institutions and passed legislations, including the Suppression of Witchcraft Act to ensure that the sad episodes that led to the killing of Benedict Daswa are discouraged and are punishable under the law. We indeed can and must learn from both the life of Benedict Daswa and the activities that resulted in his death. We should know that the quest for justice and peace, honesty and truth, love and freedom is a pillar upon which our collective destiny is premised. All the bad influences in the world cannot defeat our collective pursuit for justice, peace and fairness.

I thank you.