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Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND
SANITATION**

HON. D M MAHLOBO, M.P.

**ON OCCASION OF THE ETHIOPIAN NEW YEAR
CELEBRATIONS**

HILTON HOTEL, SANDTON

13 SEPTEMBER 2019

Ambassador Shiferaw Teklemariam Menbacho

Excellencies

Government Officials

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to begin this address with these words, I quote “I dream of the realization of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent. I dream of our vast deserts, of our forests, of all our great wildernesses” close quote. These words are not only appropriate as former President Nelson Mandela advocated for a united Africa, but the fact that tonight we are celebrating with Ethiopia – a country that gave him military training and contributed immensely to him becoming one of the greatest leaders he was, thereby contributing to the freedom of the people of South Africa. For that, I thank you.

His Excellency, Comrade President Cyril Ramaphosa wishes to convey a message of condolence, on behalf of all South Africans, to the people of Zimbabwe and the continent of Africa for the loss of former President Robert Mugabe

We are meeting during a dark period in our country’s history as we have recently experienced incidences of violence that do not inspire confidence in our people. It is imperative for all of us to jointly enjoy the freedom that we attained, for the good of everyone. This refers to the improper attacks on those perceived to be foreign nationals who could be in the country for nefarious reasons.

Yes, those who are undocumented or here illegally must be attended to by the law enforcement agencies according to the Constitution and laws of the country.

None of us has the right to take the law into our own hands; notwithstanding how aggrieved we might feel.

I am encouraged, and would like all of us to be encouraged by the stance of government against this scourge.

It is an honour and a privilege to have been invited to be with you this evening in celebration of the Ethiopian New Year.

At the outset I would very much like to thank Ambassador Shiferaw Teklemariam Menbacho for the very kind invitation to address the important gathering assembled here to mark the occasion of the Ethiopian New Year.

I would also like to thank the CEO of the incredibly successful Ethiopian national carrier, Ethiopian Airlines – an airline that has grown phenomenally, and has been awarded many global accolades, not only in passenger transport, but also in cargo transport. It is also a crucial role player in the stupendous growth in the number of tourists that visit Ethiopia annually. The airline is a veritable success story that all Africans can be most proud of.

As some may know, Ethiopia follows the Coptic calendar which is slightly different to the Gregorian calendar in that the two are separated by seven years. The distinct advantage for those of us that are stuck with the Gregorian calendar, is that when one is Ethiopia and one completes the check-in form at one of the very fine hotels in Addis Ababa, one can experience this warm feeling of being, and feeling mind you, seven years younger! This ‘Ethiopian Effect’ so to speak, may also account for the phenomenal increase in global tourism to Ethiopia.

Excellencies, indeed Ethiopia has much to celebrate. As is quite well known – South Africa sets great store by the empowerment of women and gender parity. In this regard,

Ethiopia, as one of its first reforms in 2018 reduced its cabinet members and at the same time created gender parity. This at the time could not have been an easy decision to make and more so, to implement. There have been many laudable reforms that occurred at this time, too innumerable to list. However, the following are most worthy of noting: the lifting of the State of Emergency, the important step of welcoming back of political parties and those in exile, some of whom today occupy very important positions, such as the current Head of the Ethiopian Electoral Commission. The appointment of President Sahle-Work as Ethiopia's first woman President serves as a shining example for African countries, and might I add, something that South Africa needs to explore.

From a regional perspective, it has been a little over a year that Ethiopia and Eritrea mended their fences, so to speak, with both Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Isaias Afwerki assuming the role of regional statesmen in deepening and expanding the relations between the two countries that had for so long had the moniker "No War – No Peace." This brave rapprochement by the two leaders has had a significant and positive impact on the entire Horn of Africa region, as well as in a number of instances, in the East African region. So much so, that should all the reforms currently being considered and implemented in the Horn of Africa and in parts of the East African region come to fruition the possibility of a real regional renaissance may very well be in the offing.

This renaissance could result in the peace, security and stability that the African Union strives for and could contribute to the important AU goal, namely, "the silencing of the guns".

As for the bilateral relations between Ethiopian and South Africa, these are growing from strength to strength and we look forward to travelling to Addis Ababa for the Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) and to warmly welcoming Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to pay an Official Visit to South Africa after the JMC. These are important structural milestones in advancing our bilateral relations.

Just as South Africa has welcomed and congratulated the leaders of Ethiopia for the many bold political reforms that have taken place, so too has South Africa and many

countries on the Continent congratulated Ethiopia on its commitment to the economic reforms that could see Ethiopia attain even greater prosperity. Ethiopian economic growth in the last decade has been phenomenal and continues in this fashion. No doubt the economic reforms and Gross Domestic Product growth will attract investment from foreign companies. Certainly, there are a number of large and medium size South African companies that have expressed their interest in investing in Ethiopia. Naturally, the government of South Africa welcomes such interest, endeavours and investment.

Trade between South Africa and Ethiopia is very good, but there is much potential for improved two-way trade.

In closing may I take this opportunity to wish the Government and People of Ethiopia joyous celebrations and propose a toast to the good health of our two peoples and our respective Heads of State, H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa and H.E Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Thank you.