

**Speech of Ms Teresa Cheng, SC
Secretary for Justice
South Africa National Day Reception
26 April 2018 (Thursday)**

Consul General [Mr Madoda Ntshinga], Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. I am delighted to be here tonight to share with you the joy of celebrating the Republic of South Africa's National Freedom Day. On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, may I extend to you, Consul General, and the people of South Africa, our warmest congratulations on your Freedom Day.

2. South Africa may sound a bit far away for people in Hong Kong. However, the geographical distance has not hindered our shared beliefs. As Consul General mentioned earlier, South Africa respects basic human rights and remains committed to the rule of law. These are exactly the same commitments Hong Kong shares with South Africa to promote a fair and just community. With the shared beliefs, it is not surprising that our relationship has been growing closer and closer.

3. On economic front, our bilateral trade in goods last year soared by 13 per cent over 2016, totaling US\$2.3 billion. The growth trend has been visible for some years now. Between 2013 and 2017, our bilateral trade grew, on average, 8.8 per cent a year.

4. Equally telling was the US\$2.6 billion worth of trade between South Africa and the Mainland routed through Hong Kong in 2017. That represented some 7 per cent of the total trade between South Africa and the Mainland last year.

5. Similar to the strategic location of South Africa as the gateway to the African continent, Hong Kong has an increasingly

important role as the business bridge between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

6. With the celebration of 20 years of formal diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and South Africa, China's visionary Belt and Road Initiative and its call on Hong Kong's support of the massive infrastructure-led schemes, Hong Kong's role is bound to further expand in the coming months and years.

7. Just two weeks ago, the Mainland's People's Bank of China Governor, Mr Yi Gang, speaking at a seminar in Beijing co-hosted by the International Monetary Fund, emphasised the need to diversify funding sources for the big-ticket projects of the Belt and Road Initiative. At the seminar, Mr Yi underlined Hong Kong's strengths as an international financial centre¹.

8. Apart from our reputation as an international financial centre, Hong Kong is also a leading centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in Asia Pacific, coupled with our other strengths such as our rule of law underpinned by an independent judiciary and diversified talent pool.

9. I know that South Africa takes an interest in the promising prospects of the Belt and Road Initiative, and is a prospective founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Hong Kong is the "deal maker and dispute resolver" that the South African enterprises could rely on when pursuing the Initiative.

10. The Belt and Road Initiative offers unprecedented opportunities for cooperation – in infrastructure, trade and investment, to be sure. But equally so in the development of people-to-people bonds.

11. The promising economy of South Africa will no doubt

¹ South China Morning Post, 12 April 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2141487/beijing-eyes-hong-kong-and-london-fresh-belt-and-road-funds>

provide impetus to the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Initiative will at the same time offer unprecedented opportunities for cooperation between Hong Kong and South Africa in infrastructure, trade and investment.

12. I am delighted to see that our people-to-people bonds also continue to grow. This memorable National Day marks South Africa's historic election, which was held 24 years ago tomorrow. That election brought Nelson Mandela to power as President of South Africa. This year is particularly special in that it celebrates the centenary of Mr Mandela's birth.

13. Last October, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in collaboration with the South African Consulate-General, organised a Mandela Exhibition as part of its International Festival² to show the life of the national Nobel Peace Prize laureate at different stages.

14. And in November, the World Cultures Festival, with the theme "Vibrant Africa", welcomed to Hong Kong the Cape Town Opera and the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra for "Mandela Trilogy," a folk opera tribute to the life and legacy of Mr Mandela³.

15. No doubt, there will be more celebrations of the great nation builder, and his centenary, in the coming months here in Hong Kong, as there will be in South Africa and around the world.

16. Furthermore, the people of Hong Kong and South Africa share a love for the great game of rugby. It was just last month that South Africa joined the rugby world here for the annual Hong Kong Rugby Sevens. The Blitzboks finished third overall, and still lead the World Rugby Sevens Series⁴.

² CUHK Communications and Public Relations Office, October 2018, http://www.cpr.cuhk.edu.hk/en/events_detail.php?1=1&id=14855&t=%E6%B0%91%E4%B8%BB%E4%B9%8B%E7%88%B6%E6%9B%BC%E5%BE%B7%E6%8B%89%E7%B3%BB%E5%88%97-%E5%9C%8B%E9%9A%9B%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E7%AF%802017

³ World Cultures Festival 2017, November 2017, <http://www.worldfestival.gov.hk/2017/en/closing.html>

⁴ eNCA.com, 8 April 2018, <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/blitzboks-keep-world-series-lead-with-hong-kong-bronze>

17. Beyond rugby, our people also find common ground in culture. Let me add that the Hong Kong Arts Festival, which ended just a month ago, showcased the Asian premiere of “A Man of Good Hope,” a stunning international theatre collaboration that included the Cape Town-based Isango Ensemble⁵⁶.

18. Ladies and Gentlemen, we sincerely look forward to more and more exchanges and cooperation between Hong Kong and South Africa. As you celebrate your Freedom Day, I would like to wish all the people of South Africa every prosperity and happiness, and also every success to your future endeavours.

19. May I now propose a toast “To the People of South Africa”.

⁵ Hong Kong Arts Festival, March 2018, <https://www.hk.artsfestival.org/en/programmes/isango-ensemble-a-man-of-good-hope/>

⁶ Isango Ensemble is a South African theatre company that draws its artists mainly from the townships surrounding Cape Town. Their stage productions and films have played to sold-out audiences across the world, and they have received numerous international awards. (<http://site.isangoensemble.org.za/>)