

CLOSING REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE, MOSIUOA LEKOTA, AT THE
INAUGURAL CONFERENCE
16 DECEMBER 2008, BLOEMFONTEIN

Mayi khule iCongress of the People ma yi khule!
Forward with the Congress of the People forward!
Voorentoe met die Kongress van die mense voorentoe!
Ayi khule COPE ayi khule!
A e gole Congress of the People a e gole!

Fellow South Africans – my fellow country men and women,
Esteemed Guests,
Friends, and
Members of the Congress of the People,

The history of South Africa will never be the same again!

On behalf of the leadership of the Congress of the People (COPE), may I take this opportunity to extend our collective gratitude to you for bestowing in us such confidence as to entrust us with the responsibility to lead our new party - the Congress of the People!

I take this opportunity to congratulate members of the **National Committee** of COPE and to commit myself to working with you as a team to advance the objectives of our party.

May I also thank the people of the Free State for the opportunity they gave us in hosting this, our inaugural conference, in this historic city of Bloemfontein. You are gracious hosts. We thank you for your hospitality and the safe environment you provided to our conference. I thank, in particular, the management and staff of the university of the Free State for agreeing to host us and giving us the best professional service available. We will forever be indebted.

This city has secured a special place in the evolution of South Africa's political history. Today, it became the birth place to our country's first modern political party whose sole purpose is to strengthen a democratic culture and to build a

non-racial and prosperous South African nation. This is the Congress of the People launched on December 16, 2008 here in Bloemfontein.

December 16 is a historic day in our national calendar. It is a day of reconciliation, a day declared as such with the dawn of the new South Africa in 1994. This was an important day to cement national unity and social cohesion and send a clear message to ourselves and the world that our country would strive for unity and reconciliation and that our past conflicts would cease to be the thing that divides us as a people.

The Congress of the People, launched in Bloemfontein on December 16, 2008, is a party that identifies with South Africa's rich national value of social cohesion. This day was decided upon because it is a day that South Africans look back into their history, one characterized by centuries of conflict, and then say, never again shall our beautiful land subject any of its people to segregation, misogyny, conflict, or any form of political arrogance. We decided on this day to send a message that ours is a party that draws inspiration from the resilience and tenacity of our people to thrive against all odds. Ours shall be a truly non-racial political party which will provide a home and voice to all South Africans irrespective of race, class, and gender.

I noticed at this conference a South African spirit that really touched at the core of our national soul. I heard you speak and sing in all our official languages. I also heard you declare in no uncertain terms that this, your home, the Congress of the People, is a party that, in your opinion, South Africans can trust that it will serve them with humility always knowing that we only serve in positions of power at their mercy.

I hope that when history books are written, all of you gathered here today will be remembered for your bravery and foresight to act decisively the minute you felt that our country was sliding a downward path. You felt that a formation of a new party was a national call, and hence you declared as a theme for the conference: "COPE a new agenda for change and hope". With this you

inspired your country men and women that through change hope in the future of our country can be restored.

Fellow South Africans'

My dear friends,

Listening to deliberations of conference, I was struck by a question that all of you posed: What has brought about this national sense of despair among our people? Your answer was unequivocal. You said that our country is suffering from a crisis of leadership.

We said at this conference that this is so because when interacting with millions of our fellow citizens we hear about their concerns for the moral decay in our body politic. What remains clear however is that: our people believe in the supremacy of our constitution; that they have rights and these rights must be respected; and no leadership has any right to undermine that which they hold dear: the common ownership of our Constitution, strong believe in our constitutional values that all shall be equal before the law, and that a leadership can only claim its right to lead if it subjects itself to the will of the people.

When there is a systematic attack on the values that define us as a nation, the Congress of the People will always hold hands with all South Africans to defend the values that define us as a nation. We have taken this stand because we are the party of the future.

COPE is the party of the future!

COPE ke mokgatlo wa kamoso!

COPE i bandla la kusasa

COPE ndi dzangano la machera!

COPE is die partie van die toekoms!

We are concerned about future generations because as Vincent Harding says in Walter Rodney's How Europe underdeveloped Africa:

"... there is a world waiting for us ... the world of our children, not yet born, or just beginning, but wanting to live, to grow, to become their best possible selves. This will not happen unless ... the centre is transformed and fundamentally changed."

The Congress of the People will join hands with all South Africans to build a united, democratic and prosperous nation that is based on social solidarity, the rule of law, sound morality and human dignity.

In addressing this question of leadership, we have deliberated a great deal on the type of organization we want to build for our country. We said ours will be a party that is progressive, open, includes everyone regardless of color or creed. We place emphasis on inclusivity, openness, and respect for democratic values. We want a leadership that can reflect these fundamental values. We then took a decision that this will not be an elective conference, but that conference will find a way that it emerges with a consensus leadership. We needed to make sure that this leadership truly reflects the people of South Africa. This includes its demographic and class profile, urban and rural divides, ethical values, generational and sectoral divide. The principle of inclusivity was an overriding consideration for this consensus leadership approach.

The Congress of the People presents to the nation a leadership that is inclusive and represents the broadest section of South African society. To the people of South Africa, we say this leadership is ready to serve you, and will do so with humility, the decency and dignity you so deserve.

To young South Africans we offer an opportunity for you to respond to the urgent question: what kind of a country do you want to live in? We say we will be your partner to build a future you all desire and deserve.

Conference also deliberated a great deal about how we give hope to millions of South Africans who have lost confidence in political leadership. This loss in confidence has to do with a sense of hopelessness among our people that a

leadership crisis can only lead to a worsening sense of despair and an inability to deal with issues of unemployment, poverty, crime, and HIV and Aids. Conference accordingly said we needed to address these as a matter of urgency to give hope to our people that we can be trusted to deal decisively with these issues.

Over the past fourteen years, our country has made major progress. Our Constitution is counted among the best in the world. Our contribution to peace and stability on the African continent is a source of national pride. Our role in global affairs has inspired many. But the ongoing fight against poverty, crime and unemployment, must never be compromised by a leadership crisis.

Beyond our commitment to defending our constitutional values; we spoke quite passionately that poverty, crime, unemployment and HIV-Aids remain the greatest challenges facing our people today. We are painfully aware that the world is experiencing an economic downturn, which will have an impact on how we deal decisively with these issues.

We hold the view that growing our economy is fundamental to getting South Africans back to work. We are well aware that any human being without a job loses a sense of self-worth. The economic growth that we have experienced has created less than sufficient jobs. Therefore, we will continue to grow our economy with a particular focus on expanding our manufacturing capacity. We have also decided to make specific interventions in the areas of agriculture and rural economic development. The health of the agricultural sector is central to ensuring the food security for our nation. We urgently need to stop job losses and grow our economy. Our approach therefore is stability and growth.

As we conclude this conference, we must categorically state what we decided will be our focus. We have decided to:

- defend our country and the constitution;
- provide a credible leadership that will serve and unify the people of South Africa;
- offer sound economic stewardship and ensure long term sustainability of our economy;
- focus on agricultural and rural development to address food insecurity;
- to put women and gender issues at the centre of all our politics and development work

- accelerate research in science and technology to ensure a globally competitive economy;
- eradicate poverty and create decent jobs;
- deal decisively with crime and corruption;
- increase the life expectancy of our people through an efficient public health system, nutrition, and overall social development
- invest in education with particular focus of maths and science; and to provide quality teaching and training to our children for a better South Africa
- overhaul our criminal justice system to make it efficient and effective
- work with the institutions to advance rural development and improve the moral health of our nation
- professionalise the public service and discontinue the political deployment system
- **preserve and protect our environment for sustainable development, and more importantly**
- **advance citizen participation in all spheres of public endeavour including sports, arts and culture.**

The issue of affirmative action and economic empowerment is very important. The Congress of the People is guided by the constitution in this regard. The constitution is unequivocal about its rejection of discrimination on any ground. We intend to sustain the economic empowerment and affirmative action. This will not be done on the basis of race; and I repeat, this will not be done on the race.

Over and above the policy matters we raise, the Congress of the People firmly believes that there are urgent political issues that require the nation's attention. These include the matter relating to the suspended head of the National Prosecutions Authority, Advocate Vusi Pikoli. As you know, this matter will come before in parliament in early January. We hope that members of parliament will exercise their independence and oversight role as guaranteed by the constitution in dealing with this matter.

As I conclude, I am pleased to announce that the Congress of the People will be launching its elections manifesto in mid January next year. The manifesto will highlight actual steps we will be taking to address all of the issues we deliberated at the conference. These issues relate to ensuring that our people do not live in poverty, disease, crime, and hopelessness.

We also bring the issue of elections campaign because, for the first time since the 1994 elections that brought in a new order, many here and abroad are concerned about the recent tone of political campaigns among the political leadership of our country. We call on all political parties to make a declaration to the nation that they will respect the constitutional right of every South African to engage in free political activity. We call for tolerance of each others views and that the political rhetoric during elections campaign should in no way introduce intolerance for political diversity. We also urge the international world to keep a close watch in this regard so as to make a determination regarding international observation of our campaign and elections.

Lastly, we would like to thank the people of the Western Cape for putting trust in our candidates who ran the recent by-elections as independents. We also remind them that these councillors are there to serve them.

With the widespread support already shown by South Africans, I am quite confident that the Congress of the People will emerge as a force to reckon with.

We must never rest on our laurels. We must work hard and prove to our people that we will provide the change and hope that we talked about so much the past three days.

Every COPE member must act as an election activist who makes neighbours, communities, and society understand why they should vote for COPE.

We have now come to the conclusion of our successful inaugural conference. We are; united and ready to serve the people of our country.

Fellow South Africans,

I would like to thank you very much for the good will and support that you have already shown to the party that will secure the future of your children, the country and the nation. I wish all of you a good festive season and a happy new year.

I thank you!