

“CELEBRATIONS OF CULTURES”

Address to the Chicago chapter of the Fulbright Association

Consul General PN Magaqa

- 13 March 2009

Good Evening! It is a great privilege for me to be here tonight and share my thoughts about the role that culture plays in our society with such a select audience. Let me thank Margo McFarland, President of the Chicago Chapter of the Fulbright Association and her board of directors and the Durban Committee of Chicago Sister Cities for putting together such an important event.

As we gather tonight and assess the meaningful role of culture in our lives let us commend the men and women of the world, the youth, the students, professionals, religious communities, the sporting fraternity and all other organized formations in every level of our society for being agents of cultural promotion and helping to maintain the various beliefs and practices that shape our value system.

Culture plays an essential role in any society. It ensures the survival of the human race by providing significance and greater understanding of the role of the people within society. Culture is also the means by which humans adapt to an ever-changing world, it

provides a mechanism through which we can understand the environment in which we live and thrive.

South Africa is home to a great diversity of cultures, most of which were suppressed during the apartheid years when day-to-day practice of traditional and contemporary cultures was ignored, trivialized or destroyed.

One of the most exciting aspects of a democratic South Africa is that the country is in the process of reinventing itself. Government has focused more on the influence of the various cultures on our democracy and how we can encourage our youth to develop their talent in the area of Education, Arts, Culture and Sports. South Africa is home to a multicultural society that has managed to heal itself from a bitter past of division and mistrust and learnt to co-exist peacefully whilst observing the diverse traditions that define us as a people.

If we intend to fully realize the significance of culture in our lives we need to acknowledge that culture and education are intertwined. Education is a tool that can be used to attain knowledge and in the process create awareness. As more members of the society become educated they become

aware of the influence of culture in their lives and begin to recognize that we can maintain our value system through cultural means.

Through education an entire nation can become emancipated and be able to determine its destiny. This is evidenced by the work of organizations like the Fulbright Association who worked and strived to improve the standard of education for disadvantaged children in South Africa. We have thousands of South African students who had the bitter experience of studying in under resourced universities and schools as the system dictated at that time, but who were fortunate to receive Fulbright scholarships to study abroad, particularly in the United States. These students have since returned to South Africa and contributed to the building of a new and democratic country that promises a better life for all. I wish to salute the efforts of the Fulbright Association in working tirelessly to liberate the minds of young South Africans. This organization helped to create a pool of leaders who were effective in paving the country's road to democracy and still continues to help equip our young people with the much needed skills to build our economy and achieve the objectives that have been set by our government.

Let me also reference to a cultural phenomenon that has the world excited in anticipation of a showcase of global excellence and African culture and hospitality.

South Africa is the first African country to host the prestigious FIFA World Cup in 2010. We are excited about the positive spin-offs the tournament will bring for our country and Africa. Investments and programmes from the World Cup will accelerate delivery and the achievement of the development goals and the targeted economic growth rate in the continent.

As we celebrate (fifteen) 15 years of democracy in South Africa we pride ourselves of our major achievements and we also acknowledge the challenges that face us.

My country has succeeded in enhancing the ties between culture and education, and this success has helped build a foundation on which we hope to achieve the rest of our objectives.

Thank You

