

Speech by Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane on the occasion of the 40 years Anniversary of the Black Management Forum in Woodmead, Gauteng Province, 19 February 2016

Programme Director, BMF Ekurhuleni Branch Chairperson, Ms. Alma Moses, BMF President, Mr. Mncane Mthunzi, BMF Gauteng, Mr. Langaletu Manqele, Gauteng Deputy Chairperson, Mr. Gift Nyembe, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Media

Ladies and gentlemen

I am truly humbled to deliver a lecture on this important occasion of the Black Management Forum (BMF) 40th Anniversary Gauteng Provincial Lecture. The theme of this lecture is “Economic Transformation requires Patriotic Business Leadership”. This is indeed a timely theme which resonates with all of us as South Africans at a time when we are required to do everything necessary to contribute towards South Africa’s economic transformation.

This occasion comes just after a week following the presentation of the State of the Nation Address (SONA) by President Jacob Zuma on 11 February 2016. The President opened his address by saying the following:- “A resilient and fast growing economy is at the heart of our radical economic transformation agenda and our National Development Plan”.

The President utilised the opportunity of the SONA to remind us about the centrality of economic transformation in all government programmes. In this regard, the 40 years anniversary of BMF is not just a celebration of 40 years of its existence but also an opportunity to reflect on its continued relevance in our present day economic conditions.

Programme Director

BMF was established at a time when our country had been relegated into a pariah state due to among others, the implementation of policies which excluded majority of our people from meaningful participation in the economic activities of this beautiful land. This organisation was established in 1976 at a time when our struggle for democracy and justice was

heightened by youth resistance to apartheid education. The 1970s is generally considered as a decade which marked an important epoch in the history of this nation.

The visionary leadership which founded BMF recognised the importance of creating a platform which will contribute to an inclusive economy under difficult political conditions. They sought to create a non-racial organisation with a view to influence socio-economic transformation in South Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen

We have come a long way in building a South Africa which belongs to all who live in it. Organisations such as the BMF shall be commended for their role in this regard. We however need to ask ourselves as to whether South Africa has completed its transformation agenda to ensure inclusivity in all aspects of our lives, particularly on the economic front? The answer is of course uncontestably negative!!

The President has made proposals on behalf of government on how we should move forward as a country. While considering these proposals, it is up to you to further interrogate what business needs to do more towards transforming our economy. I call upon you, in this important milestone in the history of BMF to reflect and answer this important question. We are always open to suggestions because our role is to listen and provide leadership.

Allow me to further contextualise this so that we can easily locate the kind of patriotism this country requires. When we undertook to reconstruct and rebuild South Africa as the main priority of the first democratic government we were not narrow in our approach. We understood that reconstruction and development was required even at the level of the Southern African region and committed to play an active role beyond our borders in pursuit of Africa's renaissance.

Programme Director

Our assertion that South Africa's future is linked to that of the continent remains relevant as it was in 1994 and dates back to our struggle days. Similarly, economic transformation is not

just a national programme but it is an inherent programme for the Southern Africa region and the continent at large. Suffice to emphasise that we viewed and implemented the Reconstruction and Development Programme in the same spirit we seek to implement our Economic Transformation Agenda.

I am conscious of the fact that a lingering question would be what do we say about the global economic situation which we find ourselves in? I will briefly touch on that latter in my speech so as to ensure easy comprehension of what we make of the current globalised world.

We are indeed an African country which seeks to build a developmental state without negating its international responsibilities. In this regard, our National Development Plan (NDP)'s vision and trajectory are linked to regional and continental aspirations. As you may be aware, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)'s Industrial Policy Framework mirrors our collective Regional Economic transformation Agenda and it states that:- "SADC Member States acknowledge that Industrial development is central to diversification of their economies; development of productive capacity; and creation of employment in order to reduce poverty and set their economies on a more sustainable growth path".

Ladies and gentlemen

It is not my intention to indulge you on all regional economic mechanisms, however it is fitting that I lift at least one which will assist us to easily draw linkages between our domestic, regional and continental priorities in this globalised world.

Thus economic transformation is central to the rebirth of our continent. The African Union (AU)'s Agenda 2063 aspires to reverse the paradox of a Rich Continent with Poor Citizens, among others. As Patriotic African Business Leaders, your role in the pursuit of this continental development path is well enumerated in the Agenda 2063 document. Your active participation during the crafting of this developmental path should be further commended. It is therefore time to implement our collective commitments.

Allow me to remind you of the guiding vision of Agenda 2063 which is to achieve the following:- "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in international arenas".

Programme Director

I have no doubt that the BMF's Gauteng Africa Desk is well placed to contribute towards the realisation of the Africa We Want. I am confident that through your Patriotic Business Leadership, South African business people will collectively work with their counterparts on the continent to speed up the transformation of Africa's economic landscape.

This continent is part of the global South and as such we will continue to work towards entrenching the global South in the world economic and political activities. That is why our pursuit for a reformed world is not limited to political restructuring and realignment of decision making bodies, it includes the transformation of global economic architecture. The impact of the recent economic crisis to our economies thrust us to do more to transform the global economy.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our economic diplomacy, as an important component of foreign policy, is implemented with due regard to the issues I have raised. Economic diplomacy is therefore central to our endeavours to contribute towards the betterment of South Africans. The ruling party, the African National Congress, is committed to improving the lives of all South Africans irrespective of gender and/race.

Growing the South African economy requires all of us to collectively work together to increase Foreign Direct Investment into the country and leverage trade opportunities to benefit our people. I must hasten to indicate that our foreign policy enjoins us to be compassionate in doing business and therefore our resolve to promote a fair and equitable world trade system is based on our national values.

Ladies and gentlemen

South African businesses continue to increase their investments in the region, the continent and the globe due to the policy initiatives we have undertaken since the dawn of democracy.

We therefore made important policy choices in order to normalise, build and entrench relations with our neighbours and all like-minded partners in the world.

It is however important to impress upon our business people to comply with local laws in the countries within which we do business. In the same vein, while appreciating the fact that you need to be profitable, there is a need to contribute to the betterment of the people within countries with which we do business. It is our duty to plough back to these communities because our national interests takes into cognisance the needs and aspirations of others.

Government is committed to entrenching cooperative relations with all our partners in the North and the global South to ensure that conditions are conducive for South African businesses to do business. As you are aware, our relations with countries of the North continue to yield economic benefits despite the economic turbulences experienced by these countries. In this regard, Europe remains our key trading and investment partner.

Ladies and gentlemen

We have also built strong economic ties with strategic countries of the South and believe that business should leverage this. South Africa is an active member of formations such as BRICS which, despite challenges we all experiencing, is a forum that enables us to forge new economic cooperation partnerships.

In the same vein we participate in the AU cooperation partnerships to address our domestic challenges. These include the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Africa-India, Africa-Turkey and Africa-Europe partnerships as well as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) process led by Japan.

You will realise that our economic diplomacy strategies encompass both multilateral and bilateral trade relations. Immediately after the dawn of democracy, we deliberately increased South Africa's global footprint because of an understanding that missions are important in implementing our economic diplomacy strategies. We are represented by 126 missions in 108 countries abroad which are tasked to proactively promote investment into South Africa, and assist South Africans to invest in their host countries.

I am urging you to indeed take advantage of our global footprint. These missions are there to assist you!!

The President reminded us during the SONA that we should not despair as a result of the current global and domestic challenges when he said:- “The tough global and domestic conditions should propel us to redouble our efforts, working together as all sectors”.

Let me conclude by once again congratulating the BMF in their 40th anniversary and wish them many fruitful years to come.

I thank you!