



SPEECH

BY

THE PRESIDENT, HIS EXCELLENCY

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ON THE OCCASION OF NATIONAL UNITY DAY COMMEMORATION

22 DECEMBER 2021

Fellow Zimbabweans,

This day, some 34 years ago, the founding fathers of our Nation, late Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nyongolo Nkomo and Cde Robert Gabriel Mugabe, appended their signatures to the iconic Document we know as the Unity Accord. This momentous event of 22nd December, 1987, extinguished fires of conflict which threatened our Nation, thus laying a strong foundation for the durable peace and unity we enjoy to this day. It was a fine moment in the nation- building project, one whose priceless bequest has endured since, creating circumstances for stability, peace and national development.

On this day we thus stand back and reflect on the development which turned the fortunes of our Nation, indeed which spared our Nation the hurtful misunderstandings interposed, threatening peace and stability in those delicate, early years of our Independence. We celebrate that reason eventually prevailed; giving us the glorious day we commemorate and celebrate today.

The key lesson from this preceding era of internal conflict should never be lost to us. Whatever differences and contradictions we face, or are likely to face in the future; these should always find resolution through peaceful dialogue in the interest of peace and national unity. Nothing beats sitting down as one people to iron out any differences that exist or might arise. Peace in our Nation remains the foremost prize for which no price is too big to pay, no cause or ego too big to bend. We

are one, indivisible People, circumscribed by this our one Nation, built on this the only geo-political space we can ever have as Zimbabweans.

As I address you, efforts continue to be deployed to build on that precious legacy of peace and national unity which the Unity Accord bequeathed us. I have made it a personal mission to engage our citizens and our communities in the conflict zones of that unfortunate time of early Independence. We have to boldly confront and tackle the aftermath of that era; heal wounds it left in its wake, and where possible, assuage persistent difficulties and challenges traceable to it. This, I am resolved to do until we remove whatever bitter memories may still exist, and are likely to linger. We are the generation that must resolve issues of early Independence conflict, so we release our children to move forward and ahead as a united people.

On countless occasions, I have met and interacted with interest groups, community and traditional leaders from Matabeleland and parts of Midlands, all with a view to establishing what needs to be done so the after-effects of this regrettable era are put behind us. Our traditional leaders, led by our Chiefs, have a great role to play in this regard. They preside over communities affected by the conflict; those hurt by the conflict are their subjects. They know the hurts; hear all the cries from the era and have suggestions on what needs to be done.

As we give space to our traditional leaders to lead processes of reconciliation and repair, we should guard against those negative elements which aim to re-ignite frozen differences in order to throw us back into renewed conflict. As always there are sinister forces which seek to profit from a divided and divisive past. They must not succeed.

We have built national institutions for conflict prevention, management and resolution. We have introduced in our daily workings, mechanisms to prevent conflicts, however minor or localised. Above all, we continue to monitor and find answers to new, emerging situations of potential conflict so these are obviated before they occur. It is from such mechanisms, through such vigilance, that peace is forged and won, and that Nations get durably built.

A key area requiring and receiving serious attention is that of balanced, inclusive development which leaves no one and no community behind. Oftentimes, feelings of marginalisation or persistent inequities breed resentment and eventual conflict. Examples abound on our continent, examples from which we must draw key lessons. Our cardinal policy on decentralised and devolved development is the answer. That policy cedes decision-making and resources to communities who are empowered to draw up and implement plans for their own development and transformation. That policy ensures broad-based, even development which ensures no person or community is left behind. Through it, we address imbalances of history: both colonial and post-

independent. Through it we return Agency for development to individuals and communities. Indeed through that far-reaching policy, we spread the benefits of growth and development evenly, thus avoiding the bane of a predatory State at the centre, vastly removed from the aspirations of individuals and communities.

We have started witnessing the benefits of Devolution. Across the length and breadth of our Nation, there is hardly any community in which some development activity is not taking place. Roads are being built; dams are being constructed and, lately, signature projects for rural industrialisation and development are being rolled out.

Fellow countrymen and women, we are well on the road to putting content to the Unity Accord whose interpretation must now go beyond conflict resolution, to encompass peace-building through even development. The Unity Accord of 1987, today stands out as an Accord enabling spatially balanced, inclusive, community-driven development. It is never an Accord or concept frozen in time or history. Rather, it is a dynamic which interacts with time and circumstances as our Nation evolves along its chosen trajectory.

Even though the signatories to the Unity Accord were two Sister Liberation movements, the threat and menace which that Accord cured and resolved was a national one. Equally, the benefits accruing from it remain national in character. Those two considerations alone, make the

Unity Accord larger than the two signatories, catapulting it into the coveted status of a National Gain, Resource and Heritage. This, in effect, means the Unity Accord is our asset together as Zimbabweans. There should never be barriers of politics, colour, creed, language, region or tribe standing between us and its collective ownership. Illustratively, all political formations in the country confirm it, one way or the other, through their structures and leadership choices. That makes the Unity Accord a common possession, indeed a timeless guiding ethos. Our Nation stands by it, or perishes for want of it.

Lately, we have witnessed an upsurge in gun-related crimes. There is a clear upsurge in abuse of firearms, including violent armed robberies. Government now treats this as a grave threat to personal and National Security. Decisive measures have now become necessary to put an end to this growing menace which threatens our otherwise peaceful, law-abiding Nation and citizenry. Those who dabble in arms, will soon fall by the sword. Let them be warned.

As we celebrate this milestone Unity Accord, I want to remind us all that we still face the threat of the global Covid-19 pandemic. We must act responsibly, always bearing in mind we are each other's keeper. Only when we all heed those precautions - getting vaccinated; masking up; observing social distance; adhering to hygienic standards and getting tested regularly, and treated when affected - do we then ensure

our collective safety as a Nation. This is especially important as we break for the festive period.

As I conclude, I once again pay tribute to the two great men and two Liberation Movements which gave us peace and national unity. We all must validate these historic efforts by working for same, indeed working to ensure National Unity is forever at the core of our National Ethos.

I wish you a pleasant Christmas break, and a happy and promising New Year ahead. Above all, I urge you to enjoy yourselves responsibly; and to exercise due care as you drive to and from your rural homes and holidays.

Happy Unity Day, Dear Zimbabweans!

God Bless our Nation, Zimbabwe, and all your Families.

I thank you.