

**Words of Welcome delivered by Consul-General Tselane Mokuena
at a Cultural Event in Honour of Ambassador Miriam Makeba, 17
December 2008, München, Germany**

Meine sehr ver/ehr/ten Damen und Herren,

Bevor wir anfangen, möchte ich diese Gelegen/heit nutzen, mich bei Frau Volkhart, bei Frau Del Carlo und beim Bayerischen Hof zu bedanken, dass unser dieser wunderbare Ort heute kostenlos zur Verfügung gestellt wurde. Ich weiss, dass Mama Makeba hier vor einigen Jahren auf/ge/tre/ten ist, und somit ist es wirklich etwas Be/son/de/res heute abend hier sein zu dürfen. Vielen Dank für diese freundliche, gross/zügige Geste.

[Ladies and Gentlemen; before we begin I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms Volkhart, Ms Del Carlo and Bayerischer Hof for providing us with this fantastic venue at no cost. I know Mama Makeba performed here a few years ago, so to be here this evening is truly special and you kind gesture is greatly appreciated.]

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for joining us this evening as we pay tribute to somebody who moved us, somebody who inspired us, somebody who made fighting for what is right seem like the easiest thing in the world.

Today we're gathered to pay tribute to Mama Miriam Makeba.

We are here to pay tribute to Miriam Makeba, *the songstress*. Born in 1932, a daughter of Johannesburg, Miriam Makeba's life was filled with music from a young age. Her international career took off in the 1950s, after being spotted by Harry Belafonte. In 1966, she became the first South African to win a Grammy Award for her work with Harry Belafonte on the album "An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba". She would go on to release over 30 albums.

Yes, Mama Makeba's life was filled with song. But also with adversity.

Speaking of the evils of apartheid, Miriam Makeba, *the struggle icon*, once said: "I look at an ant and I see myself: a native South African, endowed by nature with a strength much greater than my size so I might cope with the weight of a racism that crushes my spirit." This sense of injustice took her to the United Nations in 1963, where she spoke out against apartheid in an address to the General Assembly. It was such actions that motivated the apartheid government to revoke her citizenship and force her into exile until 1991.

We are here to remember Miriam Makeba, *the mother*. We called her Mama Afrika. Ever humble, she told AFP in an interview in 2005: "At

first I said to myself: 'Why do they want to give me that responsibility, carrying a whole continent?' Then I understood that they did that affectionately. So I accepted. I am Mama Afrika." And she *was* our mother. She gave a voice to the voiceless. She somehow made us feel safe.

Besides being the mother of the entire continent, Mama Afrika also had a daughter, Bongi. Bongi Makeba sadly passed away in 1985, but left Mama Afrika with two grandchildren. We are pleased to have met some members of the Makeba family as they escorted Mama Afrika's remains home via Munich on her final journey to South Africa last month.

We are here to pay tribute to Mama Afrika, *the inspiration*. At a time when the apartheid government was doing everything in its power to suffocate us, she reminded us that you could be black and be beautiful. At times, when the suffering of women and children seemed inevitable, Mama Afrika spoke out, either as South Africa's Goodwill Ambassador, or as a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). At times, when our spirit thought it could take no more, we turned to her beautiful voice to lift us up.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on the 16th of December each year, South Africa celebrates a Day of Reconciliation. So yesterday, as we took time to heal the divisions caused by three hundred years of colonialism and apartheid, the question resurfaced: What is the South African identity? Who are we? What, exactly, makes a South African? How can we carve one identity out of all our differences? While we answer these questions, we know we can rely on role models like Mama Africa to guide us. We know that if we all try and do just *a little* of what she did in her wonderful life, our country will be as great as we know it can be. But we can also turn to the power of music. And that is where Miriam Makeba, *the unifier*, showed her strength.

When the opening notes of Mama Afrika's Pata Pata starts, South Africans of all races dance together. Mama Afrika's music united us. It showed us that we could move on from the hurt of the past – all we needed was a song.

I remember a few years ago, Mama Makeba was asked who the next Miriam Makeba would be, she replied: "No, nobody can replace me as I can't replace anyone else." She said that she wanted to leave a memory of, simply, a "very good old lady".

And now it is our time to celebrate the life of Miriam Makeba, the songstress, the struggle icon, the mother, the inspiration, the unifier and “a very good old lady”.

I thank you (?).