



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Keynote Address by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga at the Traditional Iftar (Fast-Breaking) Dinner held at Nizamiye Mosque Complex, Midrand – Johannesburg

20 March 2024

Programme Director,

Distinguished Ministers and Deputy Ministers,

Mr Mustafa Eroglu and esteemed religious leaders,

Honourable traditional and cultural leaders,

Valued South African businessmen and women,

Respected faculty members,

Dedicated civil society leaders,

Esteemed media practitioners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, and welcome to the traditional Iftar dinner here at the magnificent Nizamiye Mosque Complex, Midrand, during the blessed month of Ramadan.

Programme director, for the untutored, Iftar is the meal consumed by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. This meal marks the end of the daily fast, which begins at dawn.

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, holds immense significance for Muslims worldwide as a period of fasting, reflection, prayer, and community. It commemorates

the month the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, marking it as a time of spiritual renewal and purification.

Programme director, as part of a duty to enhance mutual understanding, and for the unlettered Qur'an, it is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (Allah). It is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature.

The Qur'an is divided into chapters called surahs, which are then divided into verses, or ayahs. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was verbally revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of approximately 23 years, beginning in 610 CE, when Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632 CE, the year of his death.

The Qur'an serves as a comprehensive guide for Muslims, covering aspects of worship, law, morality, and personal conduct. It is considered by Muslims to be the literal word of God as conveyed to Muhammad, making it the foundation of Islamic faith and practice. It also provides guidance on beliefs, history, and the universe and insights into how to lead a righteous life. Muslims are encouraged to read, recite, and memorise the Qur'an, with its recitation being a crucial part of daily prayers and Islamic rituals.

As I have said, ladies and gentlemen, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset during Ramadan, abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs. It's a time dedicated to inner reflection, devotion to worship, and reading the Qur'an. This practice is not only about abstaining from physical pleasures or the desires of the flesh but is also a journey towards spiritual growth and a deeper connection with Allah.

The Qur'an explicitly mentions the importance of Ramadan in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183-185), stating, "O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous - [Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew."

Therefore, this gathering is a celebration of spiritual purification, compassion, unity, peace, and the shared values that bind us as a nation, marking a special occasion in the Islamic calendar and our shared history as South Africans.

As we break our fast together this evening, we do so not just as individuals from diverse backgrounds but as a testament to the strength and beauty of our collective spirit. This year, 2024, marks 30 years of democracy in our beloved country—a milestone that reflects our journey from the darkness of apartheid to the light of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

Our celebration tonight is a reminder of that journey and the role that every South African has played in reaching this momentous occasion. It is a journey enriched by the contributions of individuals from all walks of life, including those from the Muslim community, whose leadership and sacrifice have been instrumental in our struggle for freedom.

Religious leaders and communities have always been at the forefront of our nation's struggle against apartheid. Their unwavering faith and commitment to justice and equality helped steer our country towards democracy.

Among these were key Muslim leaders within the African National Congress (ANC) and the broader anti-apartheid movement. Their sacrifices and contributions are a testament to the power of faith in action and the enduring spirit of our people.

Leaders such as Ahmed Kathrada, whose lifetime of dedication to the struggle against oppression stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, and Imam Abdullah Haron, who paid the ultimate price for his resistance against apartheid, remind us of the integral role the Muslim community has played in our nation's history.

The Imam was detained, and despite his comrades' best efforts to pressure his release, the notorious Security Branch—a key apparatus in the apartheid state's machinery—tortured and eventually murdered him on 27 September 1969. They claimed that the Imam had 'fallen down the staircase', a usual trope to cover up their murderous intent.

On 9 September 2019, the Stegman Road Mosque, where he served, and his gravesite were officially declared provincial heritage sites in honour of his memory and contribution to the struggle for freedom and democracy.

These leaders, among others, embodied the principles of courage, justice, and compassion that lie at the heart of Islam and our South African identity.

It is, therefore, an opportune moment to call upon all peace-loving Muslims across the diaspora to pray and actively lobby the Global North to stop condoning the genocide perpetrated by the Apartheid state of Israel.

We reiterate the call for an end to the genocide in occupied Gaza and the West Bank and the wanton killing of children, women and men throughout Palestine. As Madiba said, "Our freedom is incomplete unless the Palestinians enjoy peace and freedom in their own land and free sovereign state."

As a country and a people, we have a moral responsibility not only to raise our voices against injustice but also to act through all peaceful means, including petitioning the International Court of Justice to take action against Israel. We must never tire of appealing to the conscience of the American population to persuade and march against the American government's continued blanket support for the murderous Israel Defence Force.

As the people of South Africa, we owe our forebears, both at home and abroad, from all walks of life, a lifetime of gratitude for their sacrifices, which allow us today to meet and break a fast without any government agency looking over our shoulders.

As part of our moral obligation and shared humanity, we wish for the people of Palestine to enjoy simple freedoms such as a hot meal, a shower, and the ability to walk in the streets without the fear of 'dumb bombs' falling. The term 'dumb bombs' refers to unguided munitions that fall indiscriminately, causing destruction wherever they land. Or to be victims of bunker-buster bombs, like the BLU-109, generously supplied to Israel by its ally, the United States, for use in its operations in Gaza. These bombs are designed to penetrate hardened structures before detonating, killing everything in their wake.

Programme director, as we reflect on our 30 years of democracy, we recognise that our journey towards a truly unified and prosperous nation is ongoing. The vision of a rainbow nation, as envisaged by luminaries such as the late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, remains our guiding light.

In pursuing this vision, we are reminded of the responsibility that lies with each of us—individuals and institutions alike—to contribute to realising a peaceful coexistence and cement the dream-turned-reality of a democratic South Africa.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to this cause tonight as we share in the Iftar meal. Let's continue to work together across all divides to foster peace, mutual understanding, and respect. Our combined efforts can build the ideal rainbow nation that truly reflects our people's diversity, strength, and resilience.

In the spirit of unity and shared progress, as the representative of the South African Government and a citizen of our beloved South Africa, I implore each sector of our multifaceted society to extend their embrace further, bridging the divides that have historically separated us.

The holy month of Ramadan imparts crucial lessons in empathy, generosity, and community spirit—principles that should not be limited to a single month but integrated into our daily lives.

I urge every South African to actively engage in acts of kindness, volunteer their time and resources for community upliftment, and foster social cohesion.

Imagine the significant transformation we could realise if each individual made an effort to understand their neighbours, embracing the rich traditions that constitute our nation and recognising the shared values that unite us as human beings.

Clearly, such endeavours would not merely dismantle walls of misunderstanding but also build bridges of compassion and respect. This approach embodies the principle of Ubuntu, a philosophy that highlights our interdependence: "I am because you are." It acknowledges that my well-being and yours are interconnected and that our destinies are woven together in the collective journey towards a harmonious society.

To cultivate this atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, let us pledge to create environments where dialogue thrives, and differences are not just tolerated but celebrated. We must engage in open, candid conversations about our varied beliefs and customs, promoting an environment where learning from one another is prioritised over contesting differences. Through such dialogues, we can uncover that our diverse backgrounds provide unique perspectives and solutions to our nation's challenges.

This call to action is not merely a request but an invitation to embark on a journey together to forge a more robust social fabric capable of withstanding the tests of time and adversity. By dedicating ourselves to building bridges of understanding, we bolster the very foundation of our democracy and ensure that South Africa continues to shine as a beacon of diversity, unity, and peace on the global stage.

Let us perpetuate the spirit of Ramadan throughout the year, embracing our shared humanity and collectively striving towards a more inclusive and cohesive society.

In conclusion, allow me to express my profound respect for the holy month of Ramadan and its deep teachings. As we contemplate its importance, let us also envision a future where the values of compassion and unity are paramount virtues we practice in our daily lives.

Together, we can construct a more cohesive, peaceful, and vibrant South Africa, a better world, and a nation that genuinely mirrors the rich diversity and limitless potential of its people.

May the spirit of Ramadan inspire us to renew our commitment to one another, our nation's ideals, and the universal values that bind us all, including the children of Palestine?

Thank you for the privilege of sharing this Iftar with you. May the remainder of Ramadan be a period of blessing, reflection, and peace for everyone, at home and abroad, and may our efforts to promote unity and understanding flourish in the days and years to come.

Ramadan Mubarak to all our Muslim brothers and sisters, and May peace and prosperity grace our beautiful South Africa.

In this moment of shared humanity, let us also extend our appreciation to the organisers of this Fast-Breaking dinner for bringing us together in the spirit of friendship and unity.

This event, and others like it, play a crucial role in weaving the fabric of our society tighter, promoting social cohesion and celebrating the rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and backgrounds that make up our nation.

As we move forward, let us carry the lessons of Ramadan and the principles of Ubuntu with us, nurturing the bonds that unite us and working tirelessly towards the dream-turned-reality of a peaceful, prosperous South Africa for all, indeed A Better Africa in a Better and Just World, all in our lifetime.

Let freedom reign!!!

I thank you.