

## President Nelson Mandela Speech at 1996 Post-AFCON Banquet

1 March 1996



*Nelson Mandela and Bafana Bafana Captain Neil Tovey celebrate Bafana Bafana's 1996 AFCON Victory  
Photo: Courtesy The Guardian*

Master of Ceremonies;  
Guests of Honour;  
Ladies and gentlemen.

South Africa had dared to expect much of the African Cup of Nations. We felt we would acquit ourselves well.

We believed our administrators would do a good job. We anticipated that the display of sporting skill by leading players from all over Africa would enthuse the fans and win new supporters for soccer. And we expected that our national team would give of its best and make a respectable mark in its first continental challenge.

But as the tournament unfolded we experienced something beyond our wildest expectations. The final was breath-taking in its excitement, and it unleashed an outpouring of national pride and joyful unity.

And so we are gathered here tonight to celebrate one of South Africa's most resounding sporting successes. Our National Football Team have made South Africa's dreams come true against all odds.

We pay tribute to you for the determination with which you rose to the challenge and drew on hidden strengths to beat much higher-rated teams. You did our country proud! And you consolidated the place of soccer as South Africa's most popular sport.

Your conduct on and off the sports field and the team building spirit have been inspiring. Like our rugby players and cricketers you have helped bring our people together as never before.

I also want to pay tribute to Orlando Pirates Football Club, for being the first team from Southern Africa to win the prestigious Africa Champions Cup. Your victory was a forerunner of what was to come!

Our sportspeople are truly amongst the pioneers of the new South Africa, nation builders and promoters of reconciliation par excellence. Our footballers have demonstrated once more that these are not the exclusive responsibility of Government and political organisations. Sport has the power to overcome old divisions and create the bond of common aspirations.

I would like to thank my colleague Minister Tshwete and his Department of Sport and Recreation for their sterling work in support of the African Cup of Nations tournament and, before that, the Rugby World Cup. Their financial and organisational assistance was critical to the success of these events.

Praise must also go to the President of the Confederation of African Football, Mr. Issa Hayatou, for his tireless efforts to ensure South Africa's admission to international football; to Mr. Solomon Morewa for bringing the African Cup of Nations tournament to South Africa; to Clive Baker for instilling confidence into the squad; and to all South Africans for their marvellous support.

The world class performances by both teams present tonight have put South African football on the world map. They have also turned the players into exemplary ambassadors for our country.

With the national and international status of our sportspeople come greater responsibilities. Literally thousands of our young people are flocking to the stadiums and many more are being drawn by you to become football supporters. They see you as role models, and I am confident that in you they will continue to have worthy examples: both as players and as administrators of this popular sporting discipline.

We look forward eagerly to future contests in which South Africa vies with nations of the world for excellence in football and other sports. We know beyond doubt that whatever the final score, our teams will do our nation proud.

We are grateful for your contribution to the New Patriotism that is bearing our country towards its goal of being a truly non-racial democracy.

Let all of us dedicate ourselves to make sport truly accessible to all our people, inspired by your achievements and by the warmth with which all the people of South Africa have taken you into their hearts.

May I once more humbly say:

Congratulations to Africa's Champions!

Congratulations to South Africa!

I thank you.

**Issued by: Office of the President**