

**Speech Deputy Minister of Public Works on the
occasion of the National Day of the State of Qatar**

Date: 18 December 2007

Time: 12h30 – 14h30

Venue: Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria

**Your Excellency Dr Basheer Al-Shirawi, Ambassador of
the State of Qatar in Pretoria**

Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel honoured to represent the Government and the people of South Africa on this important occasion as we join you to celebrate the National Day of the State of Qatar. It is the first time that we celebrate Qatar's National Day on this date, marking the day when His Highness Shaikh Jassim bin Mohammad bin Thani, the founder of the modern state of Qatar, acceded to power in 1878. Allow me, therefore, to convey to you our congratulations and the sincere wish that the celebration of your nation's National Day will be another milestone in the development and modernisation of your country.

I would also like to use this opportunity to congratulate Dr Al-Shirawi on his appointment as Qatar's new Ambassador to South Africa and the presentation of his credentials to President Thabo Mbeki on 6 December 2007. Ambassador, we welcome you in our country and look forward to co-operating with you in order to ensure that relations between our two countries are elevated to a higher level during your term of duty.

The celebration of a country's National Day is always an important occasion, because it provides an opportunity to take stock of a nation's achievements to date, but also to look towards the future. In this regard, we need to extend to you our congratulations, because Qatar has been an example to many countries, including our own, in terms of the political, economic and social advances it has made under the wise leadership of His Highness Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

African history is intertwined with the history of the Arabian Gulf, of which modern day Qatar is an integral part. Three hundred years ago, Africans came as pearl divers and workers who staffed the boats that brought merchandise across the borders of the Arabian Gulf to and from East Africa, Ethiopia, India and other parts of that region. Those who settled in the Gulf brought their languages, culture and music, such as pearl diving songs, into the region which created colourful societies.

Contact with South Africa has been more limited and more recent due to our geographic position and subsequently also the Apartheid policies of the previous Government. However, we are proud of what we have achieved since diplomatic relations were first established in 1994. Qatar was one of the first Arab countries to establish diplomatic relations with a democratic South Africa and today it is an important partner for us. Political relations have been consolidated through high-level visits, including that by the Amir of Qatar to South Africa in 2002 and Presidents Mandela and Mbeki to Qatar. Several ministerial visits have also been exchanged. We have also found that South Africa and Qatar hold common positions on many international and regional issues and co-operate well within multilateral fora, particularly in the UN Security Council where both of us have been members over the past year.

Qatar is also becoming an increasingly important market for our exports and we are hoping to increase the level of investment from Qatar in South Africa. We are pleased also that many of our companies had been able to participate in major infrastructure and other projects in Qatar. These projects, such as the Shaikh Khalifa stadium in Doha, which was constructed by one of our companies using South African steel and SASOL's joint venture gas-to-liquid project with Qatar Petroleum, are good advertisements for our expertise and capabilities. Furthermore, we are seeing an increase in the number of Qatari nationals who choose South Africa as a holiday destination and we believe this figure will increase further as Qatar Airways augment its flights to our country to seven per week.

Excellencies

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and people of South Africa, to convey best wishes to the Government and the people of the State of Qatar on this historic occasion.

I thank you.