**Remarks on the occasion of Freedom Day, April 27, 2012 at the South African Consulate General in Chicago**

Alderman Joe Davis, Honorary Consul for South Africa and our Master of Ceremonies for this evening,

Deputy Governor Cristal Thomas, from the Office of the Governor of the State of Illinois,

State Representatives here tonight,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Professor William Kgositsile, the renowned South African Poet Laureate,

Members of the Midwest ANC Coordinating committee

Colleagues, Consulate Staff, South Africans and Friends of South Africa,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you, and welcome to this Freedom Day celebration at our Consulate General in Chicago. Today we commemorate 18 years since the first democratic elections were held in South Africa on 27 April 1994. We celebrate this day annually to memorialize the struggle for a free and just South Africa and to honor all the heroes and heroines who have lost their lives fighting for democracy. 18 years on since 1994 our country is standing tall in the global family of nations as we continue to advance and defend our interests globally.

This Freedom day comes at very significant time in the history of our country as it marks the 100 year anniversary of the oldest liberation movement in Africa, and the world - the African National Congress (ANC). It is for this reason that these celebrations provide all of us across Africa and the world an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the liberation movements not only in South Africa but on the entire continent over the past 100 years.

At the hands of inspirational leaders like Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, and many others, South Africa was re-born in 1994 as a democratic miracle. As we gather to celebrate this Freedom, we must assert that freedom was hard-won, lest we forget and squander it easily. Our path to freedom was an act of strength and sacrifice, and proved that compromise, pragmatism and dialogue are great tools for success.

South Africa, however, was not alone in its struggle for Freedom. Around the world, but particularly in the USA, and here in Chicago, activists organized to call attention to the issues of human rights in our country. They did so, so that we could be here today to celebrate our Freedom together.

A lot of progress has been registered towards ensuring that democratic institutions and good governance prevail in South Africa, and that provision of security, health, education, jobs and housing remain key priorities; and yet still so much has to be done to improve the conditions and livelihoods of our people.

*It is important that as we tell the story of our liberation struggle, we not embellish it with delusions of perfection.*

We must remind ourselves, that only 18 years ago the majority of our people had no clean water, decent sanitation, electricity, and access to education, health and social services. We have made significant progress over this time, and are aware that we need to re-double our efforts to ensure inclusion of every single South African as a true member of the democratic community.

Working together we can build a society based on non-racialism, non-sexism and unity to nurture cohesion and nation-building. Freedom Day provides an opportunity for all South Africans to re-affirm who we are as a nation and what we stand for. We must play our part in ensuring that the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution become a lived reality in the development of fully functioning communities. Freedom Day calls us to embrace and to live up to the highest aspirations of the liberation struggle.

I want to use this Freedom Day Celebration to thank all of you for the wonderful partnerships that you continue to forge with South Africa; our partners in business, investors and potential investors for choosing South Africa as their preferred investment destination. Also let me take this opportunity to thank the office of the Governor of the State of Illinois as well other states this mission is accredited to; the City of Chicago, for the wonderful partnerships we have enjoyed over time.

I would be amiss if I did not recognize and thank all the members of the Midwest ANC centenary Co-ordinating Committee for the excellent job that that they continue to do in highlighting and giving relevance to our struggles through their various sub committees – Thank you Professor Harold Rogers and your team.

As I exit the stage, I express a sincere sense of gratitude to all the officials and staff at the consulate for your selfless contributions to the work we do. I urge you to continue highlighting South Africa and her cause to the people of the Midwest and beyond.

Once again thank you all for joining us this evening, and please enjoy yourselves.

Thank you.