

Speech by **Andrew De Blocq MP**

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Heritage Day is an opportunity for South Africans to celebrate. To celebrate what brings us together as South Africans, to celebrate what makes us South African, to celebrate what we share with one another as South Africans, but also to celebrate our differences. Because, in celebrating our differences, we can learn to love the beauty of our diversity.

Diversity is at the heart of our shared South African heritage. Our national motto translates as “diverse people unite”. This sentiment underpins the vision of the Government of National Unity for a non-racial, non-sexist country; a country where we come together to celebrate our differences constructively, rather than use those differences as a destructive wedge to drive people apart.

Heritage Day is also an opportunity for reflection.

Our heritage is inherited from our ancestors and previous generations. By virtue of this, our heritage is also our history. All South Africans are products of our shared inheritance. We are sons of Shaka and daughters of Sarah Baartman, nieces of Queen Modjadji and nephews of van Riebeeck. We are formed by our collective history. The most painful parts of our shared story are those when we pointed fingers at our differences as South Africans rather than celebrating our diversity. We must choose to have strength in diversity, not division. We must celebrate each other, not denigrate each other. For it is only together that we can move this country forwards and bring freedom and prosperity to all South Africans.

Let me draw on our vast and extremely diverse natural heritage to demonstrate this.

We are sitting right now in the most biodiverse city in the world. From the steps of this very chamber, one can marvel at one of the world’s seven natural wonders, Table Mountain. Table Mountain alone is home to more plant species than the entire United Kingdom, numbering over 2000 species with over 90 of them found nowhere else on planet earth.

This biodiversity hotspot is characterised by fynbos. Home to our national flower, the King Protea, fynbos is as apt a symbol for the South African people as you could find. Both megadiverse and entirely unique to South Africa. Fynbos is hardy and adaptable – it thrives on even the most nutrient-poor soils, can withstand droughts and floods, and can be found

growing from the coast, where it is lashed by the tempestuous storms, to the peaks of the Cape Fold Mountains where it is baked by the African sun in summer and smothered in frost and snow in winter.

Fynbos has found a way to overcome adversity, and even to thrive in the most difficult environments. It is the epitome of resilience. The ability of such diverse species to overcome the most overwhelming odds is a trait that has come to define generations of South Africans throughout our turbulent history.

Perhaps the most telling part of this metaphor is fynbos's relationship with fire.

Fire is a natural part of our African ecosystems, having shaped our landscapes even before the first humans sprung forth from the Cradle of Humankind to conquer the world. Fires frequently rip through the fynbos, scorching the earth and leaving a blackened hellscape behind.

South Africa has been burning. We have been suffocating in the smoke plumes of crime, poverty, and unemployment. We have been burning in the flames of neo-racial politics stoked by persistent inequality and lack of basic freedoms. Our homes and institutions have been tarnished and charred by the soot of corruption and failed service delivery.

But the secret to fynbos is that every thirty years, it needs to burn. The smoke and heat are the cues for dormant seeds to germinate and sprout the next generation of proteas. The old and moribund must make way for the new growth. From the ash, green shoots will soon be seen, a symbol of hope, new beginnings, and a new chapter.

Earlier this year, South Africa was perilously close to a point of no return. The scorched earth lay dormant, uncertain, seemingly holding its breath in trepidation of what would happen next. So many countries have been here before us and have made choices that have run them to ruin, choosing violence, division and blame.

But not South Africa.

We have been here before. Thirty years ago, the world marveled at how South Africa pulled itself back from the brink, not by force but with love. A nation reborn.

Thirty years on, the world is again marveling at the miracle of South Africa. How we once again can overcome the overwhelming odds, how we pull together as a nation rather than pull apart, using our strength in diversity rather than tearing ourselves apart at the seams of our rich tapestry of heritage. Like the proverbial fynbos phoenix, we are rising once again after 30 years of struggle, because shared diversity will always beat adversity.

In 2024, we were truly at a crossroads. Do we cave in to adversity, embrace ethnocentric politics and populism, and follow the well-trodden road to ruin? Or do we make the difficult choice to once again find each other in a shared love for our beautiful country and write a new chapter for the people of South Africa? The choice was clear: either we adopt a Government of National Unity or a Government of Notorious Impunity.

We have chosen once again to hold hands together under our shared values of nonracialism, the rule of law, and the primacy of our constitution, guided by the African principle of Ubuntu: umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu.

A diverse people have again united.

My fellow South Africans, I can see those green shoots starting to show.

I thank you.