

Zuma welcomes teams, fans, hails legacy

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President Jacob Zuma put aside his family troubles for a while yesterday, Sunday, 6 June 2010, to have a joyful moment with local and international journalists, whom he addressed at his Pretoria presidential guesthouse on the upcoming 2010 FIFA World Cup.



"It is my great honour to welcome the teams, soccer fans, tourists and the entire football fraternity to our beautiful country, South Africa," he said nervously, wary of the media's readiness to ask him questions about his current domestic problems.

Before that, his spokesperson Zizi Kodwa, who was the facilitator for the day, had warned journalists not to ask questions that have no relation with the world cup, surely anticipating a barrage of questions about Nompumelelo Ntuli (the president's second wife)'s alleged infidelity.

Side by side

Zuma and FIFA president Sepp Blatter appeared on the stage side by side, walking in the red carpet amid the audience's standing ovation. "Let me sincerely thank my friend Blatter who, when Afro-pessimists and others expressed doubts at certain points along the way, he consistently expressed his confidence in our ability to host a successful event," said Zuma.

Blatter, whose organisation increased its income by 50% since Germany 2006 to SA 2010, will be bestowed SA's Order of the Companions of OR Tambo on Monday 7 June at the official welcome dinner hosted by government.

Zuma said soccer has changed, adding that SA and Africa will never be the same again after this world cup - probably referring to the legacy the competition will leave behind. "A most visible legacy of this world cup is the infrastructure. Our country is changing as we deliver magnificent stadiums, roads, airports and communication systems," he explained.

Number of development projects

"There are also a number of development projects throughout Africa, to make it a truly African world cup. Fifty-two football

pitches are being built in communities across SA and another 52 across the African continent," he said, as CAF president Issa Hayatou looked on.

"This will serve as hubs for sport and community development and take the promotion of football to another level. Forty-four stadiums have already been constructed in Africa, while another nine have been completed in SA."

Furthermore, Blatter said apart from the 1Goal project destined for education of African children, FIFA put aside more than 100-million to get the 'Win in Africa with Africa' initiative going, which he said is helping Africa's national associations and establish professional leagues.

"This is indeed a very special moment for SA and Africa," Zuma said, thanking former president Nelson Mandela for his visionary leadership and statesmanship. Surprisingly, he also thanked his former 'enemy', former president Thabo Mbeki, for his 'leadership' of the project during his term of office.

Urged media to meet SA people

Zuma, who returned with his second wife to SA on Saturday from a state visit to India and found himself right in the middle of a marital storm, urged the visiting media to travel around the country and meet SA people. "Tell us your stories. We have a lot to learn from each other. You are most welcome in our country," he said, adding that the world cup has already begun.

Zuma's ex-wife, minister of home affairs Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, minister of police Nathi Mthethwa, water and environmental affairs minister Buyelwa Patience Sonjica and LOC chairman Irvin Khoza also attended the briefing.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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