

**Remarks by H. E. Sibongiseni Dlamini-Mntambo at a welcome reception for
Prof. Shireen Hassim, Canada 150 Research Chair in Gender and African Politics,
Carleton University, held in Ottawa on 6 March 2018**

Our honoured guest, Professor Shireen Hassim
Vice-President, Research and International, Rafik Goubran,
Associate Vice Presidents, Karen Schwartz and David Hornsby –
Director of the Institute of African Studies, Professor Pius Adesanmi
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Special guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply humbled to have been asked to join the welcoming of Professor Shireen Hassim to Canada. Professor, during your seven years in Ottawa you will undoubtedly hear a lot about the cold weather here in Ottawa, but I can assure you that you will find the Canadians' warmth to be a wonderful counterbalance to the icy temperatures outside, which sometimes drop to below -30 °C.

Indeed, Ladies and Gentlemen, the warmth and friendship between South Africa and Canada continues to inspire us at the High Commission and we see the Professor's presence here today as the embodiment of this friendship.

Ladies and gentlemen, 2019 is an important year for South Africa. It marks 25 years since all eligible South Africans regardless of race went to the polls to cast their vote for the first time and elected the country's first democratic parliament. Colonialism and apartheid had been around for over 300 years. Looking back, this is a milestone we definitely want to celebrate as a nation and with our friends in the international community who played a major role in ensuring that human rights abuses come to an end and ensured that South Africa achieves its democracy.

South Africa is today in a better place than the monstrosity it was before those first elections in 1994. It has been a long and difficult journey, albeit unevenly, the country has made some positive gains towards transforming the lives of its people. Yes, twenty five years on, South Africa is still grappling with the immense challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Recently, allegations of state capture and corruption have entered the fray.

Professor Hassim, gender issues in particular also continue to be of concern not only in South Africa but in Africa as a whole. Today, the diversity and complexity of issues and areas of global interest go beyond gender and yet women continue to be excluded, especially in your area of interest: gender and politics. Certain behaviors and power structures have been entrenched which, unfortunately, have reinforced gender inequalities and overt discriminatory practices in a number of fields.

Even our President, H. E. Cyril Ramaphosa, reminded us of how important the topic of gender is when he spoke at the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based violence in December 2018 in Pretoria. The President reminded us that condemnation against Gender-Based violence should be fierce. He said, <and I quote>

“It requires that we address societal issues of patriarchy, economic relations and changing the way of thinking about gender relations. Despite having progressive laws and being a signatory to many international instruments... our country does not have an effective, coordinated response to the scourge of gender based violence. ”

<End quote>

And this is true in many African countries. I have no doubt that as you and the Institute of African Studies conduct researches around gender and African politics you will add valuable information to the body of knowledge and bring forward wisdom so that our continent recognises the value of women in politics and leadership.

It is encouraging though that South Africa has managed to carve a society that constantly strives to improve itself. Yes, we have passionate debates at time, but more often than not, we are able to work together to unite a previously divided nation and the process we are going through right now is very important as we try to correct the ills which threaten our democracy. Failure is not an option, because should South Africa fail to timeously and properly address these challenges, the country risks leading itself into a deep systematic crisis.

Professor, the media coverage though does not necessarily see any positive in what our country is going through. South Africa does not receive positive coverage in the media here in Canada. So we hope that you will help us to inform many of the Canadians you encounter about the positive stories that the world needs to know about South Africa, stories and people to be celebrated and Professor you are one of those stories which need to be celebrated.

For this, I know that you are in good hands here at the Institute of African Studies, under the directorship of Professor Adesamni. We have a wonderful relationship with the Institute. They are like family to us because they do *not* always say what we *like* to hear, but they sometimes tell us what we *need* to hear both South Africa as a country and Africa the continent. We are therefore under no illusion that you will be focusing on South Africa alone but we appreciate that your contribution will be for the benefit of the African continent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, Carleton University's Vice-President Rafik Goubran recently quoted Professor Hassim's application when she said she hopes her participation in the Institute for African Studies would "disrupt conventional geographic boundaries in scholarship." I like that. Be a disruptor, Professor. We would expect no less from a South African!

Welcome to Canada.