

OPENING ADDRESS

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Ten years of independence and development: it is only a short period, and yet it is an extremely important phase for the take-off of Zimbabwe.

The eyes of the world were turned upon this country for many reasons. During the colonial period, the resistance was not only fighting for its own cause, the Ian Smith regime was moving towards a Rhodesian type of apartheid. The victory of the black resistance put an end to the illusion that apartheid could be exported to neighbouring countries. The day Mr. Mugabe won the elections and became prime minister gave a final blow to the blue print of an economic regional integration under the South African umbrella. It was at the same time a decisive step towards the formation of SADCC.

Zimbabwe showed the world that a system, dominated by colour and straight racism could be turned into a society based on multiracial cooperation. The influence on Namibia and the Republic of South Africa should not be underestimated.

But there was still another issue at stake. The new leadership clearly announced that independence meant more than reshuffling the deck chairs while the ship was continuing its capitalistic course. Zimbabwe demonstrated the possibility to combine socialism and development without a massive violation of human rights or turning terror into a system. Surely, the country had its share of burdens and part of the

problems were the result of political mistakes. However, there remains enough space for correction and the political leaders proved that freedom and socialism are not mutually exclusive. At least, if socialism is not confounded with dogmatism or is looked upon as something waiting just around the corner and if freedom is not seen as a side product of a free-market economy or the result of a non-intervention of the state.

Having the honour to welcome you today is more than a formal duty illuminated by empty formulas. Today I think is a sign for hope. Indeed, in the past, Western European countries and Belgium could be blamed for avoiding a firm stand against South Africa and racism for both political and economic reasons. It would be a violence to the truth if I would state today that this attitude belongs to the past, for many reasons, and self-interest is one of them. The attitude, however, is changing. The launching of the Belgium-Zimbabwe Friendship Association in September last year is one of the manifestations of an alternative policy towards the region as a whole and towards Zimbabwe. I don't want to go into details about all the motives because it doesn't matter after all whether the cat is white or gray. The main point is that the Association aims to stimulate cooperation between equal partners. Equality is not a given thing, it is the result of a continuous battle. It has to be built on the sharing of correct information, the definition of a common interest and finally on common trust. No one doubts that there are many pitfalls and grounds for misunderstanding.

Cooperation does not mean that one has to turn a blind eye towards the weak points of the counterpart. There is no need for Belgium do-gooders and grateful recipients. A solid cooperation can only be built on a no-nonsense approach and a critical solidarity. That is where friends are for.

That's why I called this seminar a sign for hope because the researchers here present and the audience do reflect this point of view.

When Ghana gained its independence, Kwame Nkrumah said on behalf of the whole country: " The long night is over ". He was, as so many of his contemporaries, over-optimistic because he underestimated the damage from colonialism upon the human relations between black and white. Zimbabwe has taken irreversible steps towards a new kind of relationship. Let the Friendship Association be the first tiny move towards another North-South perspective. It's my hope that this day may be the expression of this spirit.