

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA AT THE LAUNCH OF THE REINTEGRATION EMPLOYMENT CONCERNS, THE BAYGEN/NICRO FACTORY

Cape Town, 7 May 1998



Master of Ceremonies;
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests;

With the advent of democracy in our country, we all became quickly aware of the extent of the devastation left by apartheid on our people. We realised the enormity of the challenges facing the new government, amongst them widespread poverty, hunger; unemployment; a lack of skills; inadequate shelter; health services; and education for the vast majority.

Government cannot tackle these problems by itself, and we have been calling for a partnership across sectors and groups to help rebuild our country.

Many individuals and institutions have answered that call by assuming their share of responsibility in the reconstruction of our new society. When we called for the business community to help us fight crime, we were heartened by the establishment of the Business Against Crime Forum.

The factory we are opening today is a perfect model of just such a partnership. It reflects the ideals of the new democratic South Africa in many ways.

Firstly, by bringing together business and the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders it opened the way to finding lasting, genuine and creative solutions which help chip away at the mountain of challenges we face. With the equity shared by NICRO, a workers trust, the Liberty Life Foundation and Baygen, the project extends profit sharing to the workers at the same time as providing training for them. This makes a real contribution to bringing the disadvantaged into the formal economy.

Secondly, the partnership is able to exploit a technology which has been hailed across the world for its use in areas where people have no access to electricity. The wind-up flashlight is expected to fulfil similar needs in the developing world.

Thirdly, the manufacture of these products in South Africa helps boost our exports and therefore strengthen our economy. This contribution was recognised in Baygen's winning of the "Exporter of the Year" trophy for its exports of the wind-up radio and Braille typewriters. Along with your partners in the international arena, we are looking forward to your breaking former records with exporting this wind-up flashlight.

Fourthly, this project will create jobs and provide opportunities for those who would otherwise be condemned to the margins of society. The ex-offenders who, as NICRO's clients are offered the opportunity to work here have a real chance to reintegrate into society.

With 10 000 prisoners being released from prison each month, successful reintegration is a burning necessity. If they are rejected by potential employers and the rest of society, reintegration into society is made that much harder. Many return to crime or become dependent on the charity of others. Stable employment can break this cycle.

It is encouraging to know that the project also employs the relatives of imprisoned breadwinners; people who have received warnings rather than sentences, and abused women. Women are often trapped in abusive relationships - by working at the factory, they can earn an income, work in a supportive environment and be empowered to make their own decisions.

The message that resonates from this project is one of hope and optimism, that we do indeed have the means and the will to fight crime at its root: poverty and unemployment.

All those involved in this initiative of Reintegration Employment Concerns, must be commended. The Baygen Power Group; the Liberty Life Foundation and NICRO have broken new ground in the relationship between business and welfare.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The deep concern that we all feel about crime - and particularly about violent crime - calls for creative strategies of many kinds to rebuild the nation's soul. Such strategies can only be devised when all South Africans join hands to create the kind of society we want for our children - a society where people feel safe to roam our streets freely; where they do not lack basic human needs like food or employment; and where they treat fellow human beings with respect and dignity.

This factory can become a welcome microcosm of such a society. With that, I would like to declare this factory officially open.

Thank you

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