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SPEECH BY CHIEF OF THE SA NAVY AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF THE SA NAVY'S FIRST VALOUR CLASS FRIGATE SAS AMATOLA IN SIMON'S TOWN ON 16 FEBRUARY 2006

The First Lady of South Africa, Mrs Mbeki, Honourable Minister of Defence, Mr Lekota, Honourable Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr George, Chief of the SA Defence Force, General Ngwenya, Secretary for Defence, Mr Masilela, Chairperson of the European South African Corvette Consortium, Chairperson of Armscor Board, Dr Molefe, Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council, Flag Officers, Generals, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and Officer Commanding, Captain Jamieson and ship's company of the SAS AMATOLA.

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At 12:30 on 7 June 2002 our First Lady, Mrs Mbeki named the SAS AMATOLA in Hamburg Germany. After the successful installation and testing of the combat suite that was completed in South Africa we have now reached a major milestone in not only the SA Navy, but also our country.

Today we are here to witness the commissioning of SAS AMATOLA. What we are about to experience is a historical occasion for the SA Navy and marks the rebirth of a Navy that has been rejuvenated with sophisticated and advanced technological ships and submarines.

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The significance of the occasion is that she, after successfully completing trials of the newly fitted combat suite, is now fully operational and ready to fulfil her role.

With each step taken in the commissioning of our new ships and submarines we come closer towards living out our vision, mission and core business, which is "to be unchallenged at sea", "to win at sea" and "to fight at sea".

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Shortly she will be followed by her sister ships, SAS ISANDLWANA, SAS SPIOENKOP and SAS MENDI. Together they will have the roles of not only protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of South Africa, but also play a major role in assisting the SA Army, Air Force and Medical Health Services in participating in Peace Support Operations on our continent, in support of our Government intentions to see a stable Africa emerge from conflict and hunger.

We also need to appreciate the significance of these new acquisitions in

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the ability of our country to exercise Sea Power. Sea Power is the ability of a nation to conduct activities that defend and promote her interest in the maritime environment within its area of jurisdiction.

Given the fact that our country has a lengthy coastline and an extremely large Exclusive Economic Zone we must have the assets to patrol and protect our marine resources which are a source of wealth to not only our people now but particularly to our future generations to come. With these new ships and submarines in the inventory of the SA Navy the Navy now

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has the tools to effectively yield Sea Power in the interest of the people, and the future generations, of our country, region and continent.

For this reason we pride ourselves as the Peoples Navy, the Navy for our people and the Navy our People want.

We must not forget that on our continent the military has a vital role to play in promoting the realisation of the African Renaissance through the objectives of NEPAD to ensure an environment of peace and stability.

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Without this stability there will not be economic growth and development to uplift the plight of our people on the African continent.

The gradual success of NEPAD is evident from recent statistics released that show that the average economic growth rate for Africa in 2004 was 5,15 as compared with 3,7% in 2003 and 2,9% in 2002. This is the highest in 8 years and shows positive movement forward. To however bring about this stable environment will require the concerted effort of all the countries of our continent to work towards stamping out poverty, hunger disease,

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corruption and conflict that will ensure the well being and development of our people and allow the continent to flourish from its wealth of resources both on land and at sea.

In addition to Peace Support Operations there is the need for freedom and security of our seas surrounding our continent. There is the need to eradicate the plundering of our seas by poachers that deny our people the benefit of the marine resources along their coasts. There is a need to ensure the safe passage of ships going about their lawful business of

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conducting trade to and from our ports from ruthless pirates that operate off our coastlines. The activities of smugglers of illegal goods, drugs and arms must be stopped. And most abhorrent of all, the human trafficking at sea must come to an end.

These unscrupulous activities pose a threat and to our economy and the subsequent well being of our people by denying them the economic benefit from the vast resources of our continent. The SA Navy cannot alone carry the burden of being the sole policing maritime agent of the continent.

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These challenges must be addressed collectively and it is vital that the Navies of Africa have the capacity and capability to effectively patrol their sea areas.

To promote this collectiveness the first Sea Power for Africa was held in August last year in Cape Town. The intention of the symposium was for the leadership of all Navies and maritime elements of Africa to discuss issues of mutual interest and formulate solutions to the unique challenges facing our continent.

This was successfully achieved and a resolution that will enhance co-operation at all levels in the maritime environment was adopted. This is a most positive step forward and the second Sea Power Symposium will take place in May this year in Nigeria.

In addition to this continental initiative we have the Standing Maritime Committee of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee on which the maritime elements of the SADC countries are represented. The aim of this Committee is to achieve optimum maritime military co-operation in the

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Southern African region. The annual meetings of this Committee have been successfully addressing the promotion of co-operation between these maritime forces over the past years.

In line with this approach considerable headway has been made with mutual co-operation in the field of military and functional training. Members of African Navies are being trained and provided with practical sea time in our Navy, while SA Navy members are attending courses offered by African Navies.

The sea is not only a means of transport for trade, mining and fishing activities, but provides the effective means for transporting humanitarian aid to areas affected by natural disasters, such as the Tsunami in the Far East in 2004.

Many regions of the African continent experience natural disasters, famines and outbreaks of disease that is devastating to the local population.

In support of International obligations these ships are multi-purpose. They can show our flag and operate in coastal states on the African continent

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and elsewhere and can be used as a command post, a base for transport and combat support helicopters, to evacuate refugees, to land and sustain medical teams, be used for diplomatic purposes and provide support and protection for troops deployed on land. This ability to carry personnel, equipment and material can also assist in rebuilding infrastructure that has been destroyed through conflict, natural disasters or neglect, such as hospitals, schools, agricultural activities, installing water and energy supplies and the transport and distribution of food aid.

As you can see from the composition of the ship's company, the Navy's initiatives and implementation of plans to improve representivity and gender empowerment is progressing well. I am proud to say that women are increasingly being empowered to following careers in all combat and support branches of the Navy at all levels, including careers as divers and submariners. A number of uniform and civilian women have also been appointed on to the senior decision making forums of the SA Navy.

The SA Navy's contribution to developing the youth of our country is continuing successfully through the Military Skills Development programme

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being conducted at Naval Gymnasium SAS SALDANHA and certain of these members are either being provided with the opportunity to follow careers within the SA Navy or take up service in the Naval Reserve.

The future looks good for the SA Navy, and with these new ships and submarines and the high quality of personnel trained to operate and support them, the SA Navy can proudly maintain its high listing within the international maritime communities as a professional and respected Navy of the world.

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Finally, I would like to thank both the overseas and local contractors for their successful installation of the combat suites. The support from you, R Adm (JG) Kamerman and his project team has been excellent and we as South Africans are extremely proud and grateful. Through the integration of the new technologies into our Navy we will have a formidable Navy at our disposal for not only in use for potential conflict situations but also peacetime roles.

An internal study within the SA Navy indicated that the Navy must prepare for 26 new technologies in order to effectively operate these ships. These

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cutting edge new technologies include water jet propulsion, gas turbines, over the horizon surface-to-surface missiles, electro-optic trackers and many more. This transfer of knowledge of these technologies not only benefits our expertise within the SA Navy but is also of considerable benefit to our local defence industry.

Captain Jamieson and ship's company of SAS AMATOLA – your ship was named after a brave battle in the history of our country.

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I want you all to live up to this proud name and serve our country and our people with dedication, loyalty and distinction in all the roles that you will be required to fulfil.

To Government I extend my thanks for equipping our Navy with these ships and give the assurance that they will be deployed for the purposes for which they were acquired.

General Sir I accept this frigate on behalf of our committed sailors at sea

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and ashore. On behalf of our people of South Africa and to report to them that their Navy is now equipped to protect and defend our territorial integrity and sovereignty whenever Government will desire. I stand here as a proud Chief of the Navy, with an attitude that we too can be counted as a winning team that is inspired and ready to serve our country with our dearest possession – our lives.

To Chief of Joint Operations – I say the Navy is ready for deployment in support of the re-construction and development of the continent.

I thank you.