

DINNER WITH SAKI MACOZOMA

Date: 23rd July 2009
Venue: Fairlawns Hotel, Morningside
Speaker: Saki Macozoma, Chairman
Liberty Life

At a recent dinner of SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter, Liberty Life Chairman, Saki Macozoma, was invited to deliver the keynote address.

In the absence of SwissCham President, Juerg A. Schalch, acting President Roberto Agustoni welcomed the more than forty guests present and extended a special welcome to the new SwissCham members who recently joined the Chamber.



Acting SwissCham President, Roberto Agustoni

The new members are: BCC Pharmaceuticals, Deloitte & Touche, Eikendal Wineries, Friedland Hart, International Coffee Equipment (Jura), Juerg Schalch Consulting, Mark Daniels Commodities, Lonrho, Novartis, Pannonia Precision Engineering, Safin, Sicpa and Swisafin.

After a delicious starter and main course, Roberto Agustoni introduced the guest speaker, Liberty Life Chairman Saki Macozoma, whose topic centered around the regime change in South Africa and the impact of the global economic crisis on the local economy.



Saki Macozoma, Chairman, Liberty Life

Saki Macozoma likened the political events of the past eighteen months in South Africa as “having all the dramatic elements that would make a good plot for a novel”. In particular he mentioned “the broeder-twis in a party some had agreed would rule until Jesus comes back”. “This had resulted in the formation of an opposition party from the bosom of the once omnipotent ruling party”, alluding, of course, to COPE. “The often theatrical goings-on of an alliance of forces brought about largely by their

opposition to Thabo Mbeki and how the agenda of that coalition of forces was dressed up in a left-leaning agenda. The alliance of leaders of minority group interests in opposition to Thabo Mbeki who was vigorous in his pursuit of an African agenda. Whilst some were prepared to commit class suicide in order to get rid of him, many were not comfortable with the emerging alternative in the last eighteen months” Saki elaborated.

“The question remains: What kind of government has this transition produced”?

According to Saki Macozoma, “the Cabinet is large and unwieldy with concurrent responsibilities between ministries. Effectiveness of ministries will depend on individual competences and personal chemistries between the principal actors” he observed. “The government has a substantial mandate and significant goodwill in many sectors of society, including business. The ruling party has made the correct noises in terms of policy continuity and the new government has enough low-hanging fruit in critical areas such as health and crime in terms of improving from the previous administration”.

Saki elaborated on the challenges faced by the new government, in particular the increasing exposure to serious criticism which he says they have to learn to live with. “Some analysts are skeptical as to whether there is enough political skill in the leadership to transform themselves from a protest movement within the ANC into a leadership core that is respected by the movement within the ANC into a leadership core that is respected by the entire country” he said. He also drew attention to the internal political strife which was ultimately more about contestation for power between the various elements of the ruling coalition and their respective economic interests. Saki touched on the balance between the political and technical competence required to govern a complex society such as South Africa and the need to reward political loyalty. He said that indications were that they are not getting this balance right with people in key and public profile appointments who lack societal respect.

“They have inherited a dysfunctional local government system that is contaminated by a party-political system that does not encourage the choosing of competent local government officials, thus reducing the possibility of municipalities tackling the huge infrastructure and service

challenges in a creative and competent way” he said.

On the impact of the global economic crisis on South Africa, Saki agrees with Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan’s ‘enlightened pragmatism’. According to Saki, such ‘enlightened pragmatism’ would mean that the single goal at this time should be to emerge from the crisis first and robust enough to defend its position in the world market and to take advantage of opportunities. “We have to agree as a matter of urgency that this is the goal that we need to pursue as a nation” he says.

“For the ‘enlightened pragmatism’ to become our weapon of mass destruction of the constraints and challenges we face, we need to build a new societal consensus”. “We need it because we have just gone through a strange and painful political transition that, if we are not careful, can become our pre-occupation instead of defending our society and preparing for it to regain its competitiveness. If we cannot build this consensus urgently, we will be fiddling while Rome burns” Saki warns. “Such a consensus will require many of us to abandon our pet projects, hates, loves and idiosyncrasies. At least to put those on the back burner as we realize that the ‘call’ of our country at this time is to rebuild our economy and our competitiveness in the world economy” he stressed.

In closing, Saki stated that the only way to achieve this “is to eradicate unemployment and poverty as well as creating skills that will form the basis of the current and future competitiveness”. “This will also mean that infrastructure must be put in place which will reinforce competitiveness in the world economy”. “We will exercise stewardship over the resources God has endowed us with such that future generations will have the benefit of them” he declared.

Acting President, Roberto Agustoni, thanked the guests for coming and the evening ended with dessert and coffee.



SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter – Saki Macozoma dinner – 23rd July 2009