

Speech by: Jaden, Zimbabwe

SDG 9

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, esteemed judges, representatives of the United

Nations, honoured guests, fellow young leaders, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I stand before you today representing the Republic of Zimbabwe and her commitment to Sustainable Development Goal Number 9—Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

I remember driving home from school in 2015 with my father. Now, I don't remember much about the conversations we had, because my concentration was on the fact that the road was

bad. My father wasn't driving the car; it seemed as if he was auditioning for Formula One. Left...

right... left again!

The funny thing is, every afternoon we fought the same battle.

Fast forward to today.

I drive along that same road.

The potholes that once dictated our journey have disappeared. The road that was once dilapidated has been reconstructed. The traffic flows. The journey that once tested my patience

now reminds me of my country's progress.

And that's when it struck me...

Infrastructure doesn't simply change roads.

It is a structure that changes stories and brings about economic growth.

Because every kilometer rehabilitated is a step closer to a desired destination.

It means another entrepreneur refusing to let distance become destiny.

Zimbabwe is still developing.

She is still in her prime.

So don't judge her by today's skyline...

Give her tomorrow's time.

Because no masterpiece apologizes for looking like a construction site because the vision will

soon be in sight because what you get is not what meets the eye.

Today, Zimbabwe is laying more than asphalt. She is laying ambition.

The recently completed Trabablas Interchange is not merely an interchange.

It is an exchange.

An exchange of congestion for connection.

An exchange of delays for development.

An exchange of frustration for flow.

And beyond our cities, the modernization of the Beitbridge Border Post is proving that infrastructure doesn't merely connect places—it connects possibilities.

Beitbridge has become bait to bridge the gap for investment.

Some see concrete.

I see confidence.

Some see pillars.

I see possibility.

The World Bank describes infrastructure as the backbone of economic growth. Zimbabwe heard

that literally. But even when her backbone broke, Zimbabwe chose to crawl until she could stand tall.

Every bridge restored strengthened our backbone.

Every highway rehabilitated came from a point of dedication.

Every investment in infrastructure tells the world that Zimbabwe is preparing not merely to move people—

But to move an economy.

And an economy on the move never stands still. It attracts investment. It creates employment. It

inspires development. Zimbabwe's economy is projected to grow by around six percent—not

merely a rise on a graph, but a reason to grasp new possibilities. Because growth isn't simply

about climbing a chart... it's about giving every citizen a stronger start.

And development doesn't stop where the tarmac ends... that's exactly where opportunity extends. Across Zimbabwe, service stations have become sensation stations. Yesterday they sold

us fuel. Today they fuel commerce. They fuel careers. They fuel communities. Food courts buzz

with families. Small businesses welcome customers. Young entrepreneurs discover that where people stop... opportunity doesn't. Yesterday we filled our tanks... today we're fulfilling our

dreams.

Zimbabwe means House of Stone.

Yet perhaps our greatest story isn't the stone beneath our feet...

But the future we choose to build upon it.

We sit on one of the world's largest hard-rock lithium deposits—the very mineral powering electric vehicles, renewable energy storage and the green economy of tomorrow.

Think about that.

The world is charging its future...

Using minerals from Zimbabwean soil.

But Zimbabwe has made a powerful decision. We are no longer content with exporting tomorrow and that's why we have put restrictions. By restricting the export of raw lithium ore

and encouraging local processing, we are choosing value over volume... creation over

extraction... factories over freight.

The question is no longer whether Zimbabwe has resources.

The question is whether we will remain a quarry...

Or become a factory.

Will we export rocks...

Or become the foundation rock of innovation?

Will we continue selling the ingredients...

While importing the recipe?

Because prosperity is not found in what a nation extracts.

Prosperity is found in what a nation creates.

And perhaps Zimbabwe's greatest resource was never buried underground.

It has been sitting in our classrooms trying to make parents proud.

It is the young boy from Zaka determined to become Zimbabwe's own Zuckerberg... proving that your postcode should never postpone your purpose. It is the young girl from Nkayi who looks at darkness and doesn't curse it... she converts it. She

doesn't wait for the future... she creates it.

It is every young Zimbabwean who doesn't simply consume technology... but dreams of producing it. Doesn't simply download ideas... but dares to upload solutions. Because

Zimbabwe's richest mine has never been beneath our feet... it resides in the young minds who

refuse to let their background define the rest of their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Vision 2030 isn't just a document.

It is an awakening reality.

You see it in roads that are being rebuilt.

You see it in airports that have been modernized.

You see it in growing innovation ecosystems.

You see it in young people who no longer ask,

"Where can I find a job?"

but,

"What problem can I solve?"

Because that...

That is the Zimbabwe I know.

A Zimbabwe that refuses to be defined by yesterday's challenges.

A Zimbabwe determined to build tomorrow's industries.

A Zimbabwe where roads don't simply shorten journeys... they shorten the distance
between

dreams and destiny.

Where minerals don't merely leave the ground... they lift a nation.

Where innovation isn't a privilege for the few... but a possibility for the many.

A Zimbabwe proving that sustainable development is not something we wait for—

It is something we work for.

Brick by brick. Bridge by bridge.

Dream by dream.

Until the road that once slowed my father down... becomes the road that speeds
Zimbabwe

forward.

Because I began this speech talking about a road.

Today, I end it talking about a destination that changes a nation.

And when Zimbabwe finally arrives... the world will realize she was never lost.

She was simply under construction.

I thank you.