Public lecture rendered by Ambassador Mxolisi Nkosi, Chief Operations Officer of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), on “South Africa’s international engagements in a rapidly changing world”, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, Limpopo, 12 May 2017.

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University Management and Staff,
The Student Community,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Ndi Masiare!

We are delighted to be here to engage in a conversation on South Africa's foreign policy endeavours. Our presence here today is testament to our undertaking to engage civil society in a dynamic and meaningful dialogue on South Africa's foreign policy. Our intervention will focus on “South Africa's international engagements in a rapidly changing world”.

Accordingly, we shall attempt to cover key elements of the changing global environment within which we operate, and our initiatives and responses thereto.

2017- Year of OR Tambo

This lecture takes place on the occasion of the year our government has correctly dedicated to the memory of Oliver Reginald Tambo, the 10th and longest serving President of the African National Congress (ANC). Had OR, as he was affectionately known, been alive he would have been a hundred years old this year. In a moving eulogy on the occasion of his
funeral on 2 May 1993, then President of the African National Congress (ANC) Nelson Mandela said of the demise of OR:

"A great giant who strode the globe like a colossus has fallen.

A mind whose thoughts have opened the doors to our liberty has ceased to function.

A heart whose dreams gave hope to the despised has for ever lost its beat.

The gentle voice who’s measured words of reason shook the thrones of tyrants has been silenced.

Peoples of the world!

Here lies before you the body of a man who is tied to me by an umbilical cord which cannot be broken”.

His selfless life was an embodiment of humility, honesty, compassion, self-sacrifice, human solidarity, integrity, and self-discipline. In exile, he laid the foundation for a future foreign policy of a free, and democratic South Africa. During his address to the first Congress of MPLA in Luanda, Angola on 12 December 1977, Oliver Tambo defined the thrusts of South Africa's foreign policy when he stated, and I quote, “We seek to live in peace with our neighbours and the peoples of the world in conditions of equality, mutual respect and equal advantage”. Since the democratic breakthrough of 1994, we have been true to this vision by promoting peace, friendship and cooperation amongst nations, and taking an active part in the resolution of conflicts in our continent and beyond.

As we celebrate the centenary of OR Tambo in 2017, we draw inspiration from his exemplary leadership and vision which accorded him international status of a statesman and an astute, consummate diplomat.

**Significant 2017 Anniversaries**

This year we also mark the 60th anniversary of the independence of Ghana, the diamond jubilee. Ghana was the first African country south of the Sahara to gain independence from colonial rule. As we forge ahead with the project of our continent’s integration, it is fitting that we pay tribute to Ghana’s founding President Nkwame Nkrumah, for champion the decolonization project and inspiring us with the vision of African unity. As a pioneer
republic, Ghana was the epicenter of the wave of decolonization that swept through the continent, leading to the freeing of Africa from the bonds of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. This lecture, which takes place in Africa month, with 25 May being Africa Day, is a perfect occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the ideals of Pan-Africanism, namely the unity, peace and development of the African continent and its Diaspora.

In the year 2017 we also commemorate 50 years of the occupation of Palestinian lands, Gaza and the West Bank. The struggles of the Palestinian people against oppression, discrimination and for self-determination and statehood has been synonymous with those of our own against apartheid, hence the solidarity the Palestinian people continue to enjoy from our people and government. We reaffirm our support for a free, independent Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, co-existing with the state of Israel, within the framework of the two-State solution.

**Current global context**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world we live in is characterised by an interplay between power, influence, vested interests and the expression of strategic interests of states through military means and economic power. Increasingly, the conduct of states are informed by the international relations theory of realism, which finds concrete expression in the projection of hard power to preserve, promote and protect geographic, territorial, security, and economic interests. This world of geopolitics poses a major threat to international peace and security, and people-centered development.

Complicating this global state of insecurity is the earlier onset of the VUCA phenomenon: volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, as evidenced by the surge in nationalism, populism, and anti-immigration sentiment. It is heartening though to note that there has been a reversal of this trend following its emphatic repudiation by the electorate in The Netherlands and just last week in France.

The global economy has now entered its sixth year of stagnation, and the growth outlook for 2017 shows a continuation of this trend. A projected stabilization (and even
strengthening) in energy and commodity prices may provide a small tailwind for resource rich economies in 2017, but the medium-term trend continues to be dominated by weaker growth in key inputs, notably investment and labor supply. Global growth for 2017 is projected at 2.7 percent, 0.1 percentage point lower than the June 2016 forecast, and 0.4 percentage points higher than the estimate for 2016. Going forward, global growth is projected to pick up modestly, reaching 2.9 percent by 2018.

The consolidation of the BRICS group and the continued shift of the centre of global economic gravity from the West, to the East and the South has introduced a new, welcome dynamic in the structure of the global economy. Representing over 40 percent of the world’s population and 30 percent of the world’s GDP, BRICS growth rates have helped counterbalance the effects of low advanced-country growth on overall global growth.

China’s growth rate is expected to be around 6.5 percent in 2017, and inflation will remain low at around 3 percent. China has adopted measures to rebalance its economy away from an over-reliance on investment spending and exports in favor of greater consumption spending, and its transition from a manufacturing economy to one with a significant services sector. Indeed, the anticipated benefits from this transition have allowed China to remain a top destination for future foreign direct investment. China therefore also provides potential for value added exports.

Africa’s growth remained higher than world growth despite strong headwinds from the international economy. Despite its slowdown, the African continent remained the second fastest-growing economy in the world. Several African countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Tanzania) were among the fastest-growing countries in the world with growth between 6% and around 10%.

**Fourth Industrial Revolution**

Ladies and gentlemen, we stand on the brink of a technological revolution that, in the words of Klaus Schwab, the Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF),
"will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society".

Whereas the First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. Now a Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the Third, the digital revolution that has been occurring since the middle of the last century. It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.

There are three reasons why today’s transformations represent not merely a prolongation of the Third Industrial Revolution but rather the arrival of a Fourth and distinct one: velocity, scope, and systems impact. The speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. When compared with previous industrial revolutions, the Fourth is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace. Moreover, it is disrupting almost every industry in every country. And the breadth and depth of these changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance.

While this development poses real risks and threats to status quo, it creates enormous, unimaginable potential for technology to be used not only to provide business solutions, but to address a myriad of contemporary development challenges, including but not limited to access to clean/renewable energy, education, and health care.

As a country we need to catch this wave by investing in research, development, and innovation: we should embrace the digital age by modernise our systems and work process, while taking deliberate measures to mitigate its negative effects.

With this background in mind, permit me now to offer a brief overview on the evolution of our foreign policy without over-indulging you in its historical context. I will later focus on our foreign policy objectives which entail strengthening political integration of SADC, consolidation of the African agenda, our North-South Cooperation, South–South solidarity and cooperation as well as the reform of institutions of global governance.
Key milestones in the evolution of South Africa’s foreign policy

Our current foreign policy has been shaped by various epochs of history, starting with our African identity that was eloquently articulated by Pixley ka Isaka Seme who distinguished himself as an orator of note and published the timeless essay entitled: The regeneration of Africa in 1906. The seminal piece was the first real conceptualisation of the African Renaissance.

The next phase in the evolution of our foreign policy took place in 1955, with the late Moses Kotane and Maulvi Cachalia attending, on behalf of the South African liberation movement the Bandung Conference in April 1955. At this historic and epochal conference representatives from twenty-nine governments of Asian and African nations gathered in Indonesia to discuss peace and the role of the global South in the Cold War, economic development, and decolonization. South-South Solidarity, as a canon of the future South African foreign policy crystallized during this conference.

The third phase in the evolution of South Africa’s foreign policy can be traced to the period when then ANC President OR Tambo was mandated to establish an international mission in 1960 following the unbanning of the ANC. It was in this third phase that the ANC mobilised the largest movement of anti-Apartheid forces across the globe, the iconic Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) which contributed immensely to the democratic breakthrough of 1994. The AAM brought two key elements that were to conclude the quartet of pillars of democratic South Africa, namely, South-North cooperation and multilateralism. Pan-Africanism, South-South Solidarity, South-North cooperation, reform of the Multilateral System of global governance (Multilateralism) have been consistent themes in South Africa’s foreign policy since 1994.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to elaborate on how these themes find expression in our foreign policy. The African Agenda remains a cornerstone of our foreign policy and as such our own development is inextricably linked to the development of our continent. Consequently, we have defined and continue to pursue an African Agenda which is predicated on the entrenchment of democracy, peace and security, and acceleration of economic growth for the betterment of all Africans citizens.
In essence, this commitment encapsulates our Pan Africanist foreign policy configuration which I attested to during my introduction.

**Southern Africa**

Firstly, colonialism and apartheid had destructive effects to the entire Southern Africa and left a legacy of a disintegrated region. The leadership of democratic South Africa undertook to rebuild our country and contributing to peace and development in Africa and the world. The South Africa reconstruction agenda was linked to that of the entire region in order to achieve sustainable development as clearly articulated in the apex national policy document, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP envisioned a Southern Africa regional economy that is sustainable and contributes to shared prosperity.

SADC is the fourth most advanced REC in Africa having grown its intra-regional growth from $20 billion in 2004 to $72 billion in 2014. SADC has attained the following achievements:

The SADC Free Trade Area (FTA), as envisioned in the 2005 SADC Protocol on Trade, entered into force in August, 2008, when the REC attained the minimum conditions of having zero duty on 85% of intra-regional trade. The maximum tariff liberalisation was attained in January, 2012, when the tariff phase-down process for sensitive products was completed.

In 2003, SADC’s Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) set out for the REC to become an FTA by 2008, a Customs Union (CU) by 2010, a Common Market by 2015 and a Monetary Union by 2016, with a single currency by 2018. However, we have been to establish a Customs Union due to several challenges including: multiple memberships of SADC countries to several overlapping Regional Integration Arrangements (RIAs) and AU RECs and the subsequent challenge of having to meet multiple obligations; complex and divergent trade policies and revenue constraints; differences in the levels of development of member states; complicated rules of origin; poor infrastructure and trade facilitation systems.

The RISDP which covers the period from 2005 to 2020 underwent review and the revised document was adopted by the SADC Summit in April, 2015. We are committed to achieving the outstanding milestone set in the RISDP.
South Africa will assume the chairpersonship of SADC from August 2017, and will use its position to drive the acceleration of the regional integration agenda with a specific focus on creating a framework for industrialisation.

**The Broader African continent**

Our experiences during the anti-apartheid struggle, including the period leading up to the democratic breakthrough of 1994 guide and inform our foreign policy approaches and strategies on the African continent. We have always sought, and continue to seek a peaceful resolution of conflicts based upon an inclusive political framework. This we believe is the only guarantee for durable solutions rather than non-inclusive, zero-sum impositions. Guided by this template, we have significantly contributed in peace-making efforts in inter alia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Ivory Coast, Madagascar and Zimbabwe.

Currently, our efforts are directed at contributing to the realisation of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 vision and the implementation of its first ten year plan. We are conscious that strong structures are required to effectively implement AU decisions as well as the realisation of the aspirations of Agenda 2063. In this regard, regional economic communities are an essential building bloc for the continent’s eventual integration within the framework of the Lagos Plan and the Abuja Treaty. As a build-up towards continental economic integration, a key advance was that representatives of most of the 26 member States of COMESA, EAC and SADC, with a combined GDP of $1.2 trillion signed the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement on 10 June 2015 in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt. It aims to liberalize 100 per cent of tariff lines. Sixty to 85 per cent of tariff lines are to be liberalized upon entry into force of the Agreement, while the remaining 15 to 40 per cent will be negotiated over five to eight years.

A key pre-requisite to the continent’s development is the expansion and rehabilitation of infrastructure, particularly in the transport, energy, and communications sectors. Work in this regard is currently being undertaken within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) which is a core element of our development agenda.

**Global South and Emerging Economies**
This year South Africa will assume the chairpersonship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which brings together 28 countries from the East and South Coast of Africa, South and South East Asia, the Gulf region and Indian Ocean islands. Unlocking the potential presented by the Blue Economy, including, the sustainable exploitation of marine resources, the creation of value chains, as well as maritime security will be a major priority for South Africa. The goals set in Operation Phakisa will guide our engagement in this regard.

At the Fifth Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) Summit South Africa hosted the first outreach dialogue session of BRICS in 2013, during which the AU leadership was invited to dialogue with the BRICS Leaders regarding the continent’s infrastructure development agenda. A pertinent outcome of the Summit was the decision of BRICS Leaders to establish the New Development Bank which will have its regional office in Johannesburg. This office will serve as a catalytic institution to fast-track our continental infrastructure development programmes. The regional office will focus initially on project preparation and facilitation.

The BRICS-Africa’s trade engagement continues to show exponential growth, reaching approximately US$ 300 billion by 2015. This success was driven not only by the industrialisation and innovation trajectories of BRICS partners, but also by the expansion of South African business into the markets of our BRICS and African partners, creating an unprecedented consumer demand for our goods and services.

Next year, 2018, South Africa will be honored to assume the chairpersonship of BRICS. The intensification of intra-BRICS cooperation in diverse fields, as well as its consolidation as a significant player in shaping a new global political and economic order will inter alia be our strategic focuses.

**Mutually beneficial relations with countries of the North**

Our cooperative relations with the developed countries of the north is based on our shared commitment to build mutual beneficial partnerships to address the needs and aspirations of our people. Our mutual beneficial cooperation takes place at both bilateral and multilateral levels. It is our continued commitment to leverage the opportunities presented by these relations in an effort to close the widening gap between the prosperous North and the deprived developing South.
We will continue to prioritise consolidating the Strategic partnership with the European Union (EU). We are conscious of the recent development in relation to the BREXIT and as such we will negotiate a bilateral trade regime with UK while maintaining our relations with the EU as a bloc.

**Multilateral Relations**

Since our re-admission and acceptance to the family of nations, our efforts have been focused on contributing to a just, fair, and equitable world order. We have consistently advocated for a people-centered development that takes into consideration all dimensions of development. This multi-faceted approach to sustainable development got traction at the historic UN Millennium Summit which adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000. This summit represented a high watermark in global efforts to place development at the center of the global agenda. The three dimensions of sustainable development, namely the promotion of economic development, social development and environmental sustainability, are the plank on which the recently adopted sustainable development goals are built. The outcome document of the 2015 UN Summit has given renewed hope to millions in the global South as it affirms the resolve of the international community to remain engaged in continuing the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals. We consider this as a major achievement for the developing world at a time when the world’s preoccupation with security issues could have pushed development issues to the back burner.

Another landmark development in the multilateral system was the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which adopted a historic agreement in Paris to address greenhouse gas emission for the post-2020 period, The watershed Paris Conference constitutes a successful conclusion of the mandate agreed to by consensus at the Durban conference in 2011 to enhance the implementation of the Climate Change Convention.

The agreement represents a big step forward in committing all countries to act decisively against climate change. Through this agreement, hope has been restored for a safe and prosperous future, where climate change will be adequately addressed.

South Africa's approach to peace and security on the continent has been magnified in the UN Security Council, where we have championed the prioritisation of African conflicts and
at the same time advocated for closer collaboration between the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council. We have also focused on defending the integrity of the UN Charter and the Rule of Law as the foundation for multilateral cooperation.

A highlight of our term on the Council was our Presidency of the Council in January 2012, which had as its theme the strengthening of the partnership between the UN and the African Union (AU). Building on the success of South Africa’s 2007/2008 UNSC term in promoting closer cooperation between the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council (AU-PSC), South Africa promoted greater coordination between the two bodies in order to increase the effectiveness of the UNSC in addressing African conflict situations. President Zuma presided over a meeting, which resulted in the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2033 (2012). This resolution formalises cooperation between the UN and AU as a permanent part of the Council’s work and focuses on achieving coherence between the two bodies in dealing with African conflicts.

While we have been vocal proponents for the reform of the UNSC long before our stint in the non-permanent category, our tenure in the UNSC has convinced us that the reform of this premier organ of global peace and security is more urgent than ever before. We are of the firm view that the enlargement of the UNSC to reflect current realities will ensure that it is representative, democratic, and enjoys legitimacy. In addition, internal reforms will have to be undertaken to improve the working methods of the UNSC to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we remain convinced that the path and role history has determined for us is the correct one, it defines where we come from, who we are, the exigencies of the moment and our future aspirations as a nation. It is encapsulated in the apex policy statement of our government, the National Development Plan (NDP) vision 2030 that enjoints us to assume our role as a responsible global citizen in the community of nations, and develop partnerships that advance our national interests and values, thus contributing to a better South Africa, in a better Africa, in a better and just world!

Ndo Livhuwa!