



SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY R O M E



20 December 2018

Message from Ambassador Shirish M. Soni

Dear Readers,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to share with you a brief overview of some of the highlights from the activities of the Mission during the last three months. The last Quarter saw the end of a very busy summer and the beginning of what I would like to refer to as a “sizzling” autumn.

From 12 to 14 August 2018, we were very pleased to welcome our former President of the Republic, Hon. Kgalema Motlanthe to Italy, when he received honorary citizenship of the City of Fermo (Marche) and also participated in important ceremonies commemorating the end of the Second World War, in Florence.



At the end of August 2018, I had the privilege of visiting the beautiful City of Venice, where, besides my usual institutional engagements, I attended the Gala Dinner to mark the opening of the 75th International Venice Film Festival, on 29 August 2018, and had the opportunity to meet a plethora of local and regional leaders.



South Africa's Honorary Consul in Venice, Ms Francesca Bortolotto Possati, very kindly facilitated many of the arrangements for my visit.

From 19 to 21 September 2018, I visited the charming City of Genoa, where I had very useful institutional meetings. I also had the opportunity to visit the Cemetery of Staglieno, where Paolo De Barbieri, the famous grandfather of our Honorary Consul, Enrico De Barbieri, is buried.



Paolo De Barbieri is considered to be one of the best violin makers of the school of Genova. My visit to Genoa coincided with the 58th International Boat Show, at which I met the Minister of Transport and Infrastructures, Dr Dario Toninelli.

Through the good offices of Honorary Consul De Barbieri, I was invited on a tour of the Genoa Port aboard a boat of the Guardia di Finanza, which included a visit to the wonderful City of Portofino. While in Genoa, I was also privileged to pay a visit to representatives of the community that lost houses and belongings in the tragic collapse of the Morandi Bridge. The meeting with them was very touching and allowed Mrs Soni and myself to hug and console those who had been directly affected by this terrible disaster.

The Italian Athletic Federation (FIDAL), in conjunction with the Municipality of Rome and the Vatican, collaborated with the Mission to host an international marathon titled "Run For Peace" on 23 September 2018. Over 5000 runners participated in this high-profile marathon, which was dedicated to the Centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. A Run for Peace, 5 Km non-competitive race kicked off the event, in the name of the freedom fighter and global icon, in the context of the Centenary.



In another highlight of the past Quarter, on 9 October 2018, I was honoured to present my Letters of Credence, as the non-resident Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to the Republic of Albania, to the President of the Republic of Albania, Mr Ilir Meta, at the impressive Palace of Brigades, in Tirana.



Soon after, I departed for South Africa, as the Minister of International Relations and

Cooperation of South Africa, Ms Lindiwe Sisulu, convened all the Ambassadors and Consuls-General serving in South Africa's Diplomatic Missions abroad for the biennial Heads of Mission Conference, in Pretoria, from 21 to 26 October 2018, under the theme: "A new dawn: Inclusiveness of South Africa's foreign policy which aims to promote a better South Africa, Africa and the world."

The Conference held very useful deliberations on national, regional, continental and global trends and dynamics, in the context of the strategic implementation of South Africa's foreign policy vision and mission.

The Heads of Mission Conference coincided with the highly successful inaugural South Africa Investment Conference, hosted by President Cyril Ramaphosa in Johannesburg on 26 October 2018, which generated announcements of investments of R290 billion (**approximately Euros 17.6 billion**) from companies in mining, forestry, manufacturing, telecommunications, transport, energy, agro-processing, consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, financial services, energy, ICT and water.



The Mission in Rome secured the participation of some of the international delegates to the Investment Conference, such as our Honorary Consul in Albania, Dr Zenel Hoxha, our Honorary Consul in Genoa, Dr Enrico De Barbieri, the son of our Honorary Consul in Venice (Italy), Dr Alessandro Possati, Ms Romina Nicoletti, a very close contact of the Mission, and her business partner, the architect Filippo Di Teodoro. The Conference was complemented the next day by a Fun Walk in the streets of Soweto.

On 22 October 2018, there was the Screening of the documentary film "One Humanity", in conjunction with the European House-Ambrosetti. The screening was held as one of the events to commemorate the Centenary Year of Nelson Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu. The film was screened at the Avalon Cinema in Kyalami in Johannesburg, in the presence of about 200 guests. Ms Ndileka Mandela also attended the event and gave support from the Mandela Family to all the endeavours

pursued by the South African Mission in Rome.



Over the same period, the 5th Edition of the South Africa-Italy Business Summit/Indaba took place in Johannesburg, from 23 to 24 October 2018. Organised by the European House-Ambrosetti, the Summit presented a very useful forum for discussions on the promotion of cross-national business ties between Southern African and European business leaders. The Summit was attended by approximately 60 companies from Italy and 200 South African delegates and was complemented by a Gala Dinner, in the presence of – among others - the Premier of Gauteng, the Mayor of Johannesburg and the Italian Deputy Minister of Education, Research and Universities, Mr Lorenzo Fioramonti.

Also while in South Africa, I addressed approximately 100 invited guests at the Italian Club in Bedford View, on 20 October 2018. This was quite an important event, recorded also by the national Italian TV channel, RAI. It was an occasion for fruitful networking between Italian and South African stakeholders, to analyse past achievements and look at future

undertakings in the context of the bilateral relationship.

On the occasion of the Ambrosetti Business Summit, a delegation from the City of Reggio Emilia travelled to South Africa – as has been the case every year for the last three years – as part of an exchange project with the Province of Gauteng. The delegation from Reggio Emilia, headed by the Deputy Mayor responsible for international relations, Ms Serena Foracchia, consisted of representatives from various sectors, including sport, culture, education and business. During their visit, a Solidarity Dinner was hosted at the Italian Club in Johannesburg. This year, it was dedicated to Mama Albertina Sisulu and to the commitment of women for the promotion of human rights and the struggle against apartheid.

By way of context, the solidarity and cooperation between Reggio Emilia and South Africa has a long history. It began more than forty years ago when, in 1977, a year after the Soweto massacre, Reggio Emilia signed a Pact of Friendship and Solidarity with the African National Congress. In 1978, the International Year Against Apartheid, Reggio Emilia organized the “National Conference of Solidarity for the people of South Africa against colonialism, racism and apartheid”. After the first national solidarity conference, Reggio Emilia organized the

Second National Conference against racism and apartheid in South Africa and for an independent Namibia, in 1982. The cooperation and friendly relations has continued and developed ever since, including through initiatives such as the creation of a Reggio-Africa Archive.

Also, during the same period, the Second Edition of the OR Tambo Soncini Social Cohesion Games, which were launched for the first time last year, took place at the Germiston Stadium. The Games resulted in a grandiose closing with Gauteng’s young talent scooping awards in various sporting activities, including swimming, athletics, basketball, netball, rugby and soccer.

Italian Deputy Minister Lorenzo Fioramonti visited South Africa to address the South Africa-Italy Business Summit, as well as a workshop organised by the Italian Embassy in Pretoria, entitled “Enhancing the collaboration in radio-astronomy between Italy and South Africa”, held on 24 and 25 October 2018. The workshop was held to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the signing of the bilateral Agreement on Scientific-technological Collaboration between Italy and South Africa.

I was also very honoured during the past Quarter to present my Credentials to the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Dr Jose

Graziano da Silva, on 10 September 2018, and to the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Mr David Beasley, on 21 November 2018.



I was honoured to present my Credentials to the Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino, their Excellencies, Messrs Mirco Tomassoni and Luca Santolini, on 30 November 2018.



I promised their Excellencies that I would work very closely with the Foreign Ministry in San Marino to establish joint mechanisms to ensure that the bilateral engagements grow each year. During the visit to San Marino I also had an opportunity to meet with the Foreign Minister, Mr Nicola Renzi, as well as with Ambassador Giacomini, San Marino's Non-Resident Ambassador to South Africa.

I visited Trieste from 7 to 9 November 2018 and met regional and local leaders, and representatives of the private sector and the well-known scientific institutions there.



I also managed to fit in a visit to the historic factory of Illy Caffé.



My visit was facilitated by Dr Leslie Ferlat, Honorary Consul of the Republic of South Africa.



The last highlight of the Quarter that I want to touch upon is the fact that I undertook a regional visit to Bari, Puglia, from 10 to 12 December 2018, where I held meetings with regional and local leaders, representatives of important companies in the City, including the Chamber of Commerce and Bari University "Aldo Moro".



I also delivered a Nelson Mandela Lecture entitled "Nelson Mandela Centenary: Be the Legacy", hosted by the Rotary Club of Bari, of which the Honorary Consul Morfini is a member.

In addition, I participated in a round table entitled “The Outlaw War”, with a speech entitled “The approach of Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela: Conflict resolution, mediation and peace”, co-organised by the Mediterranean Centre of Geopolitical and Strategic Studies and the Balkan Eusin Danubian Observatory, hosted in the Premises of the Region Puglia.

All in all, October 2018 was a very busy month. Having caught our breath, we are already embarking on new and challenging adventures!

In closing, Mrs Ruweida Soni and I wish you and your loved ones a very Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and a Prosperous New Year. We look forward to strengthened and fruitful cooperation in 2019, for mutual benefit.

