



*Monday, 21 September 2020*

Dear Fellow South African,

The United Nations will this week begin the 75th session of its General Assembly, where the nations of the world gather to seek collective solutions to global challenges.

In any other year, heads of state and government would travel to the UN headquarters in New York to address the General Assembly. But this year, because of the coronavirus pandemic, this gathering is taking place virtually, using technology to bridge the distance between the capitals of the world.

As South Africa, we will be addressing the General Assembly by videoconference from the Union Buildings and will be participating in several other meetings.

This is an important moment for the United Nations. It is 75 years since its formation following the destruction of the Second World War. The countries of the world were determined that never again should such a human tragedy be allowed to happen. They believed that through an organisation like the UN, the world's problems could be peacefully resolved through cooperation.

As the world confronts another global crisis, this time caused by a virus, the United Nations remains as important and relevant as ever.

The UN has played a vital role in supporting cooperation among countries and international organisations like the World Health Organisation as they have worked to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. It has focused attention on the most vulnerable countries and those parts of society most badly affected by the pandemic.

Importantly, the UN has enabled countries to focus on the work that needs to be done to not only to rebuild economies, but to do so in a manner that advances the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN is leading the effort to ensure that the world that emerges from COVID is better, fairer and more peaceful.

In the 75 years of its existence, the UN has proven the value of cooperation and solidarity.

To resolve our global challenges – be they health emergencies, transnational crime, conflict and war, climate change, migration or natural disasters – we must work together. It is only through multilateralism that we can forge common strategies for the benefit of all.

We therefore need to strengthen bodies like the UN, ensure they are properly resourced and that they are representative. We must use this anniversary to push ahead with the reform of the UN and particularly its Security Council, which does not give equal voice to the different regions of the world. As South Africa, we will use our virtual presence in New York to continue to advocate for Africa – a continent of more than a billion people – to have permanent representation on the UN Security Council.

We recognise that global peace is not just about a world free of conflict, but one free of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. It is a world of inclusive economic growth and shared prosperity. By providing all the world's people with the means to live secure and productive lives, we are laying the best foundation for peace and stability.

One of the greatest challenges to the achievement of this goal is the continued exclusion of half of the world's population through discrimination and marginalisation.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women, which placed the emancipation of women firmly on the global agenda. It is a valuable opportunity to not only review the progress made over the last quarter century, but most importantly to clearly outline the actions we must now take to ensure that women occupy their rightful place as equals in all areas of life in all societies.

For Africa, this means, among other things, that we must intensify measures to empower women economically. This is in line with the African Union decision to

dedicate this decade to the financial inclusion of women. We therefore welcome the opportunity later this week to take part in a panel of G7 and African countries on women's digital financial inclusion in Africa. It will look at how women can take advantage of technological advances to start businesses, trade and find meaningful employment.

There is much that can be achieved by ensuring that women have greater access to affordable financial services and education. This should take place alongside other measures we are pursuing on the continent, such as efforts to increase the portion of public procurement set aside for women-owned businesses.

Our message is that unless women are brought into the mainstream of the economy they will continue to bear the brunt of exclusion and be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Our message is that a world that empowers women is a prosperous and sustainable world.

This sitting of the UN General Assembly must also address the climate change crisis. As the world rebuilds in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic we have an opportunity to place the global economy on a low-carbon, climate resilient path. We should be building green economies, not just for the sake of environmental sustainability but because of the opportunities for job creation and growth.

This pandemic has presented the world with a choice – between the global cooperation envisaged in the UN Charter or the pursuit of narrow self-interest. It is a choice between prosperity for all or for a just a few.

At the 75th UN General Assembly, the leaders of the world have an opportunity to begin rebuilding a new global order based on justice and equality.

By drawing on the spirit of solidarity, friendship and unity of purpose that has long defined the United Nations, we will set a clear path towards lasting peace and sustainable development.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.