

## Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the South African Heads of Mission Conference

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Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor,  
Deputy Ministers of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Candith Mashego-Dlamini and Mr Alvin Botes,  
Director-General of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Zane Dangor,  
Ambassadors and High Commissioners,  
Consuls-General,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good Morning,

It is good to be here at the first Heads of Mission Conference since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak fundamentally changed our world.

Not only has the pandemic upended national economies, health systems and societal relations, it has also changed the diplomatic landscape.

I want to thank you for your efforts over the past two years to ensure the work of South Africa's missions around the world continues.

In addition to representing our interests in your host countries, you had to provide our citizens with consular services in an emergency situation that was uncertain and rapidly changing.

Our thanks in particular go to the missions that assisted with repatriations in the early days of the

pandemic.

Over the past two years and at differing points, we have been swept up by both undesirable and favourable currents.

The global response to the pandemic has seen incidents of narrow self-interest, protectionism, parochialism and, at times, anti-Africanism.

At the same time we have also borne witness to remarkable acts of solidarity and unity of purpose.

We witnessed countries coming together to support each other to access medical supplies, equipment and different forms of economic relief, especially in developing economy countries.

Our missions abroad played a large part in forging these relationships, and will need to sustain these relationships in the years ahead.

What has been also remarkable is the resilience and increasing self-reliance that has been forged in the fire of this crisis, particularly on the part of African nations.

The AU's coordinated response to the pandemic has significantly advanced the cause of African unity.

South Africa was closely involved in this effort as it assumed the Chairship of the African Union just weeks before COVID-19 arrived on our shores.

In the space of just two short years, the Continent has made remarkable strides in strengthening institutional capacity, in building health systems resilience, and in advancing the case for the localisation of life-saving medical supplies.

What we can perhaps be proudest of is the principled stance our country has taken on the issue of equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

It was South Africa, alongside India, that initially sponsored the proposal to the WTO for a temporary TRIPS waiver to enable countries to produce their own vaccines.

This stance has put us firmly on the side of social justice and principled solidarity, and reaffirmed our commitment to progressive internationalism.

There are a great many lessons that have been learned from the pandemic.

We have learned about the frailties of the global economy.

The pandemic has highlighted the dire material condition of the world's poor and marginalised, and illustrated just how critical it is that we overcome global inequality.

We have learned that as African countries we will not meet the aspirations contained in the African Union's Agenda 2063 if we are not united, and if we do not speak with a single voice.

We have also realised that we need to develop and produce our own vaccines and pharmaceuticals and strengthen our national health systems and continental health institutions.

The pandemic has challenged the notion that richer countries can successfully insulate themselves from the plight of the developing world.

If the world is to successfully overcome from this crisis, the altruism that brought communities and societies together in the early days of the pandemic must deepen as we work to overcome other domestic and global challenges.

A little over a year ago South Africa received its first COVID-19 vaccine shipment.

Now, nearly 18 million South Africans are fully vaccinated.

The first COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing plant in Africa is producing vaccines in South Africa for domestic and international markets.

Also right here in South Africa, a WHO mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub, one of six on the continent, is working on technology and skills transfer in the licensing of mRNA vaccines with local producers.

The progress we have made since little over a year ago is a product, among other things, of determined diplomacy.

In the course of the pandemic, South Africa's voice on the international stage has been amplified.

In positioning South Africa's diplomacy, the African agenda is paramount.

The continental response to COVID-19 has given the cause of African unity a new lease on life.

Africa has found a new voice that is bold and unapologetic.

As we look to recovery and reconstruction, I call on you as Heads of Mission to use all the diplomatic tools at your disposal to advance the political, economic and social interests of South Africa and the rest of the Continent.

The coming into operation of the African Continental Free Trade Area is the singular most important step towards continental economic integration.

It is up to us to ensure its success.

Our missions must be at the forefront of building networks and being part of activities to strengthen the AfCFTA.

South Africa has just completed its Chairship of the African Peer Review Forum.

The African Peer Review Mechanism is a critical tool to advance good governance and democracy under Agenda 2063, but beyond African countries themselves, there is still not enough awareness about what the APRM has achieved.

Even less is known – even in our own country – about South Africa's review processes and our implementation of recommendations made.

Publicising our successes in advancing democracy, good governance and human rights must form an essential part of our public diplomacy efforts.

We must intensify the effort to silence the guns on the continent.

The ongoing conflict in Ethiopia, the insurgency in the Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique, the unconstitutional removal of governments in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea show the depth and extent of the challenges that the continent must confront.

These developments must encourage us to do more and to act with greater urgency to remove

every last vestige of war and conflict from our continent.

Peace and stability is vital for development.

As a country, our fortunes are inextricably bound with the security and prosperity of our continent.

Minister, Deputy Ministers, Colleagues,

The conflict in Ukraine has had an extraordinary impact on global affairs and these developments will continue to define international relations into the future.

The conflict has caused extensive destruction and immense human suffering.

As a country, we are committed to the articles of the United Nations Charter, including the principle that all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means.

We support the principle that members should refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of other states.

The conflict has exposed the inability of the UN Security Council to fulfil its mandate of maintaining international peace and security.

The current formation of the UN Security Council is outdated and unrepresentative.

It disadvantages countries with developing economies.

The entire peace and security architecture of the United Nations needs to be overhauled.

Decision-making needs to be democratised so that the Council can be true to its mandate and move beyond the paralysis brought about by a few member states.

Powerful countries must no longer be allowed to disregard international law.

We need to curb the unilateral actions of these countries to shape global politics through aggression and other coercive measures like the imposition of unilateral sanctions.

In keeping with our strong commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflict, we have urged the

parties to pursue a negotiated political solution to the war in Ukraine.

We have encouraged our international partners to consider confidence-building measures that will bring the parties closer together rather than adopt measures that will further alienate the parties and result in the escalation of armed conflict.

We are deeply concerned about the broader implications of the conflict in Ukraine for the global economic recovery.

It has disrupted global supply chains, driven up the price of essential commodities and plunged the world into a new era of economic instability and uncertainty.

The focus on the African Agenda and resources committed to it have been diverted, and urgent global issues like climate change have been eclipsed by the rising global tensions.

Our fundamental responsibility as a global community is to ensure that the human suffering in Ukraine is brought to an end, and that a sustainable and just peace is achieved.

As a global community, we have an equal responsibility to bring a decisive end to human suffering in Yemen, Palestine, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Mozambique and the Eastern DRC.

We will continue our efforts to bring about peace in a number of these conflict zones.

South Africa will continue to leverage its membership in multilateral fora to advance the cause of peace.

We will defend our non-aligned position and maintain an independent foreign policy.

We will pursue our national interest as we pursue the common interests of our global humanity.

We need to ensure that countries with developed economies honour their obligations to support developing economy countries in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Specifically, we need to encourage more strategic partnerships to mobilise funding for a just transition to low-carbon economies.

As Heads of Mission you are tasked with leading the drive to promote our country abroad.

In this period of reconstruction and recovery, our foremost responsibility is to foster growth and employment.

So we want you to be ambassadors not just for our flag, but for our economy.

You need to seek out new ways to grow trade and attract investment into South Africa.

You need to pave the way for outbound investment into existing and new markets.

We count on you to market abroad the immense opportunities that exist in the South African economy.

The Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is our roadmap, and each of you have an essential role to play in its implementation.

In the State of the Nation Address in February, I provided an update to the country on our progress in implementing the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan and our plans for the year ahead.

Our missions need to provide progress updates on structural reform, our infrastructure build programme, immigration reform and new investment in all their engagements.

We need to be briefing potential investors on the progress we are making.

We should, for example, refer to the 4th South Africa Investment Conference, held two weeks ago, which resulted in some R332 billion in new investment pledges.

We should report that we have now reached 95 per cent of the R1.2 trillion target we set in 2018.

Some Heads of Mission have taken the initiative in recent years to bring business delegations to our Investment Conferences and to our tourism and mining indabas, film festivals and aerospace shows.

This is the type of initiative we want to see.

Our Heads of Mission should look at the needs of our various provinces and understand the type of

industries that we need to help lift people out of poverty.

In this respect, they can rely on the analyses undertaken as part of the District Development Model plans to decentralise and diversify our economy.

Twinning provinces and cities is one way to forge economic relations with countries abroad.

Budget constraints have impacted on the work of our diplomats, but this does not mean we have to be any less effective.

Diplomats need to be more innovative and find new ways of practicing their craft.

We need to adapt to digital diplomacy and host targeted seminars to sell South Africa.

We need to scale up our public diplomacy efforts, including with South Africans living abroad.

I just returned from the Dubai Expo where I had the opportunity to meet with a South African business owner who is doing remarkable work in the hospitality industry.

We need to popularise these stories, and see how we can craft communications like the successful Homecoming Revolution campaign.

Such initiatives can and do make a difference, because ultimately we want all South Africans to be part of our country's development.

We are emerging from the dark days of a devastating global pandemic.

Those who stood by us through this time have proven to be solid, dependable partners.

This is in no small part due to the diplomatic efforts of the men and women in this room today.

As we strive for an equitable recovery, we will continue to count on you to be our emissaries for economic growth.

Just as you helped us get lifesaving equipment and then vaccines, we want you to now bring investment into our country.



I wish you well in your deliberations and thank you for all you have done.

Continue to serve your country with pride and to make our foreign missions centres of excellence.

Continue with your most urgent task of building a better South Africa, and realising a better Africa and a better world.

I thank you.

*Ayil Ramaphosa*