



Statement by Dr Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, on the occasion of the end-of-year Media Briefing,

14 December 2021

Thank you, Programme Director,
Deputy Ministers Mashego-Dlamini and Botes,
Members of the media,

This briefing is being held to provide you with an overview of work done in implementing South Africa's foreign policy in 2021. This is the second year in which we work under the challenging conditions imposed by the pandemic.

I am addressing you following a very successful working visit to four West African countries, I will say more about this later.

I will thus focus on the work we have done – and will continue to do – to pursue our foreign policy mission of “championing an African continent which is prosperous, peaceful, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and united and which aspires for a world that is just and equitable.”

I shall give an overview of some of our work, which includes:

- SADC's role in restoring peace and stability in the region;
- Fostering closer bilateral political and economic ties with fellow African states;
- International solidarity work relating to Palestine and Western Sahara; and
- South Africa in the multilateral system (the UN, its institutions and other bodies).

South Africa's role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the SADC region

South Africa continues to play an active role within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), working as part of a regional collective and assuming specific responsibilities as assigned through the decision-making structures of the regional body.

SADC has undergone changes, this year, the most notable of which is the appointment of a new Executive Secretary, His Excellency Elias Mpedi Magosi. South Africa will continue to support the work of the SADC Secretariat, which is tasked, among other things, with coordinating our response to the development and security challenges facing the region.

The situation in the Republic of Mozambique is of particular concern to all of us in the region. Following extensive discussions, SADC has deployed the Regional Coordination Mechanism on the operations of SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM).

The last Extraordinary Summit of the SADC Troika, which met in Pretoria in October 2021, approved the extension of the SAMIM “to continue with offensive operations against terrorists and violent extremists to consolidate the stability of security and create a conducive environment for resettlement of the population and facilitate humanitarian assistance operations and sustainable development.”

The SADC region remains unwavering in its commitment to continue supporting the Republic of Mozambique in achieving peace and security in some parts of the central and northern Cabo Delgado province. The leaders of our region have committed to contributing towards the efforts to bring about lasting peace and security, as well as reconciliation and development in the Republic of Mozambique.

In August 2021, South Africa took over the role of Chair of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security. Our responsibility is to continue to support efforts aimed at supporting the achievement and maintenance of security and the rule of law in the SADC region. The SADC Treaty, the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs and the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO) II are the key documents that guide the activities of the Organ.

Fostering closer bilateral political and economic ties with fellow African states

South Africa is a strong proponent of African unity and solidarity. We believe that continental unity, peace and prosperity begins at bilateral levels when individual states reach out to others and forge closer bilateral ties. Strong bilateral ties provide the foundation for greater pan-African unity. This is, we worked harder at forging closer bilateral ties with several of Africa’s leading economies, including Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.

President Cyril Ramaphosa recently hosted his Kenyan counterpart, President Uhuru Kenyatta, on a State Visit to South Africa. South Africa and Kenya share friendship, mutual respect, common values, and solidarity not only on issues of bilateral concern but also on the vision for the continent. Both countries are proponents of unity and integration and have a common vision for the development and Renaissance of Africa as encapsulated in the AU Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

After the Kenya State Visit, President Ramaphosa led a delegation comprising of government and business leaders on a State Visit to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, at the invitation of President Muhammadu Buhari.

The State Visit to Nigeria coincided with the 10th Session of the Nigeria-South Africa Bi-National Commission (BNC), which reflected on the progress made in advancing trade and investment between the two countries.

President Ramaphosa also undertook a State Visit to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire at the invitation of His Excellency President Alassane Dramane Ouattara.

The State Visit was historic. It was the first since diplomatic relations between South Africa and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire were established in May 1992.

A third State Visit was to the Republic of Ghana at the invitation of President Nana Addo Akufo-Addo.

Bilateral relations between South Africa and Ghana have grown significantly over the years. We are focused on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and advancing the objectives of the economic integration of our continent.

Business relations are thriving. There are over 200 South African companies registered in Ghana, employing nearly 20,000 Ghanaians and around 500 expatriates. There is, however, still room for improvement, and our two countries are exploring more opportunities for further economic collaboration.

President Ramaphosa undertook a further Official Visit to the Republic of Senegal at the invitation of President Macky Sall. The President took part in the Dakar Peace and Security Forum.

South Africa and Senegal enjoy cordial bilateral political, economic and social relations underpinned by strong historical ties dating back to the years of the liberation struggle.

A visit to Goree Island was a moving highlight of the visit.

Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic

As part of its continuous response and effort in fighting against COVID-19, South Africa has (through the African Renaissance Fund) paid a grant into the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust which was established by the African Union, when President Ramaphosa served as Chair of the African Union ("AU"), this followed the establishment of the COVID-19 African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team ("AVATT") in November 2020. The main purpose of the Task Team is to ensure that the African Continent secures vaccines and blended financing resources for achieving Africa's COVID-19 vaccination strategy which targets vaccinating a minimum of 60 per cent of Africa's population.

The recent announcement that Johnson & Johnson has granted South African Pharmaceutical Company Aspen, an intellectual property license to produce its vaccines under the new brand name, "Aspenovax", is not only a step in the right direction but also a good sign that our diplomacy and advocacy work is bearing fruit. This is what South Africa has been calling for.

International solidarity work relating to Palestine and Western Sahara

In 2021, we have highlighted concern that the situation relating to Western Sahara and Palestine remains deadlocked – in some instances even worsening. The question of Palestine is still unresolved after 70 years and continues to challenge human conscience and international justice.

In keeping with South Africa's long-term and principled support for the Palestinian People, the Government of South Africa remains committed to supporting initiatives aimed at refocusing the international agenda on Palestine and the Middle East Peace Process. The Palestinian question remains at the heart of the Middle East situation.

The South African Government believes that the only way to bring about lasting peace in the Middle East is to have a comprehensive and unconditional negotiated settlement to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and Israel's continued blockade of Gaza. The ongoing delay in achieving such a settlement leads to an unending cycle of violence.

In the context of Israel's continuing violations of its international law obligations, we have worryingly seen the African Union Commission this year granting Israel the status of an Observer in the AU. This came as a shock, given that the decision was made at a time when the oppressed people of Palestine were hounded by destructive bombardments and continued illegal settlements of their land.

The unjust actions committed by Israel offend the letter and spirit of the Charter of the African Union. The AU embodies the aspirations of all Africans and reflects their confidence that it can lead the continent through the practical expression of the goals of the Charter, especially on issues relating to self-determination and decolonisation. The decision by the AU Commission in this context remains inexplicable. We look forward to the 35th Ordinary Summit of the African Union where the Heads of State will discuss this matter.

South Africa in the multilateral system (the UN, its institutions and other bodies)

South Africa is a proud member of the world community of nations. During this year, we continued to play active roles in institutions of global governance, including the United Nations, the G20 and BRICS. We are currently serving in the UN Peacebuilding Commission for 2021-2022.

South Africa participated in the United Nations 76th Session of the General Assembly (UNGA76) in September 2021 under the theme: "Building resilience through hope – to

recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, and revitalise the United Nations.”

In his address to the General Assembly, President Ramaphosa called for fair and equitable distribution of vaccines saying “In this interconnected world, no country is safe until every country is safe”.

In the G20 held in Rome, Italy, South Africa joined other countries in discussions aimed at forging a common global recovery effort from the COVID-19 crisis and enable sustainable and inclusive growth. Together with other G20 members, South Africa committed itself to overcoming the global health and economic crisis stemming from the pandemic, which has affected billions of lives, dramatically hampering progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and disrupting global supply chains and international mobility.

The year 2021 saw the BRICS commemorate 15 years of its existence. Together with its BRICS partners, South Africa takes pride in the achievements of this organisation. These achievements include the creation and operationalisation of the New Development Bank (NDB), the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), the Energy Research Cooperation Platform, Partnership for New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) and the Science, Technology and Innovation Framework, to name but a few.

Cooperation among BRICS member states continues to grow. Last week we announced that the South African Government has invited scientists from Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICS) to collaborate on research, including sharing of data and information on COVID-19 with a particular focus on Omicron - the new variant first discovered and reported by South African scientists.

South Africa is currently the host of the BRICS Vaccine Research Centre and the research on the Omicron variant will form part of the centre’s initiatives.

Lastly, we have been and continue to engage all countries that have imposed unscientific and discriminatory travel bans on our country and region. We are pleased that diplomacy is bearing fruits. Some of them have already begun lifting these restrictions that are inflicting so much harm on our economy and families. It turn out that the Omicron variant had long been in the backyard of most of these countries who rushed to close their borders, ignoring science and warnings from the World Health Organisation and the United Nations.

This year we launched the Charlotte Maxeke African Women’s Economic Justice and Rights (AWEJR) Initiative.

This will be our contribution to the empowerment of women and girls in the global agenda of economic justice, peace, security, reconstruction and development.

This summary is not the total of the work we’ve done this year. Our diplomats work tirelessly daily to market South Africa as a trade, investment and tourism destination of

choice. This is one of the ways in which we contribute to the fight against poverty, inequality and unemployment in our country and continent.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION

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