

**WEBINAR ADDRESS BY DR NALEDI PANDOR, MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION, DURING THE MOTSEPE FOUNDATION'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SUMMIT: 08 MARCH 2021**

First Lady Madame Kagame, Ministers, Ambassadors;  
Motsepe Foundation Co-Founder and CEO, Dr Precious Motsepe;  
Distinguished Panellists and Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

***'Harnessing the role of women leadership in the post pandemic recovery.'***

**Introduction**

International relations has had to assume a key role in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Prior to the pandemic going global, multilateralism had been severely marginalised by US isolationist policies and attacks on multitalented institutions.

Diplomacy is often the ability to build networks and to use them maximally when needed. Picking up the phone and calling colleagues for assistance and support may not be part of the political armour provided in training but for foreign relations it's an indispensable art.

The year 2019 was one that signalled significant practical action in support of gender equality globally. 2020 was to be the year in which twenty years of the women peace and security agenda would be celebrated and reinforced, 25 years since the Beijing platform of action and the beginning of the implementation of the Generation Equality forum practical action.

The UN Generation Equality Forum is one of the most promising international women's movements since Beijing. It is made more important by the advocacy and leadership young women worldwide have taken up in it.

These young women supported by our Dr Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka have decided they want to be the generation that concretises the achievement of gender equality. Their initiative has highlighted important priorities as we grappled with COVID-19. Gender based violence and femicide are a global challenge that all societies must combat effectively and in unity. We used this awareness into our chairship of the African Union and the African response to COVID-19.

Through the AU we developed a coordinated and coherent response that we monitored consistently, we ensured all member states were informed and involved by using all our structures on the continent and in regions. As chair South Africa inserted the priority of GBV response on to the AU agenda and promoted 2020-2030 as the decade of the financial inclusion of women in Africa.

Generation Equality has drawn the entire globe into the effort to combat inequality. All sectors are being addressed, justice education labour laws security, icy access and many others. The initiative draws together the public private and civil society stakeholders to establish inclusive collaboration and ensures that all role players make a contribution.

Responding to the pandemic also exposed Africa's and the developing world's vulnerabilities and pointed to areas that we need to address speedily. Our public health systems are weak and vulnerable and must be supported by increased investment and an expanded well trained pool of health professionals in a range of fields. Debates on treatments also exposed our research inadequacies and space for significant innovation capacity. Emergent vaccine nationalism means Africa should not rely on global goodwill to access new treatments or diagnostics. We should development our own capacity and learn to produce what we need.

Governments also had to develop emergency relief measures and when we compare with the rest of the world Africa had little room for manoeuvre. For example while support was found for formal workers women in high risk economic sectors were hard hit by inequitable access to business relief and financial sector support. Women lost employment in larger numbers than men and as the ILO has reported the position of women as income earners has severely worsened. This has added to the burden of

unpaid care work, unequal access to professional careers and unequal pay for women. Leadership post pandemic requires focussed attention to this discrimination. Countries such as Spain, Norway and Chile have passed laws outlawing these abuses and we should ensure women have similar protection in South Africa and Africa.

I thank you