

Our foreign policy – moving SA forward through diplomacy

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This year has been a significant period for South Africa's foreign policy.

Our government used the occasion to consolidate ties with the international community by utilising its global footprint comprising 126 diplomatic missions to strengthen bilateral political and economic relations and advance multilateralism.

South Africa's diplomats have worked tirelessly this year in executing our international relations programme.

Through their hard work and continued dedication, we have yet again recorded significant achievements in a complex global environment and adjusted our approaches to meet its unprecedented changes.

South Africa is enhancing its strategic engagements globally aimed at promoting the objectives set out in the National Development Plan (NDP).

This includes accelerating our economic diplomacy efforts, creating new trade opportunities aimed at opening market access, increasing investment and deepening existing economic ties.

South Africa's economic diplomacy, trade, investment and tourism efforts are bearing fruit.

These initiatives yielded increased sales of manufactured value-added exports by R1.2 billion, which brings the cumulative total for the year to R3.8 billion.

Furthermore, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows pipeline represents potential FDI of R13.1 billion, particularly in the energy and chemicals sectors.

This brings the total potential FDI to R30 billion.

International tourism continues to be an important part of our economic diplomacy efforts, contributing to job creation and economic growth.

Tourist arrivals figures went up by 14, 8% in 2016 compared to the same period in 2015.

About R39.3 billion foreign direct spend was achieved during the first months of 2016, which contributes to job creation and sustains the local economy.

This information confirms that South Africa remains a popular destination for international tourists.

These figures confirm a sharpened focus on economic diplomacy, the results of which are helping to address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality as outlined in the NDP.

The NDP enjoins us to build a resilient economy while meeting our international obligations and in doing so, we must contribute to the development of the Southern region and the African continent at large.

In this regard, we have worked within the collective of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to enhance the implementation of the regional integration programme following the launch of the SADC-COMESA-EAC Free Trade Area (FTA) in 2015.

South Africa will utilise its tenure as Chair of SADC in 2017 to lead the regional efforts aimed at improving the living conditions of our people through increased economic connectivity and prosperity.

In the same vein we have spared no energy in implementing the African Union's 2015 Johannesburg decision to negotiate the launch of our continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). We are therefore encouraged by the determination to conclude these negotiations in 2017.

We continue to be guided by the AU's shared vision as encapsulated in Agenda 2063 which, among others, commits us to silence the guns by 2020 in order to

realise our socio-economic development trajectory and a sustainable, developed and economically integrated Africa.

South Africa was elected to the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) for the period 2014-2016 and again for 2016-2018.

The AUPSC has made a significant contribution over the past ten years in addressing the challenges of peace and security in Africa through peace-building and peace-keeping efforts, as well as post-conflict reconstruction.

The majority of peaceful elections that took place in various countries across the continent is a testimony to our populace and leadership commitment to entrench participatory democracy as an important ingredient for development.

South Africa will support the AU Commission and its new leadership that will be elected in January 2017 in order to continue with our continental journey towards the Africa we aspire by 2063.

The outgoing AU Commission Chairperson, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, has displayed admirable leadership, in particular the conceptualisation of Agenda 2063, which has since been adopted as the continent's vision – the "Africa we want".

Dr Dlamini-Zuma's emphasis on continental self-reliance in funding the AU's programmes and projects will be one of her enduring legacies, as well as the marked improvement in the working methods of the AU.

It is therefore incumbent on us to continue championing the African Agenda, as well as ensuring sustained effective and efficient running of the continent's affairs.

The African continent will thus remain high on the agenda in our engagements with other partners across the globe.

In this regard, we have completed the necessary processes for the launch of the Brics New Development Bank African Regional Centre in 2017.

This followed our participation in the 2016 Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Brics) Summit in India which, among others, commended the Bank for its commencement with operations.

Furthermore, efforts are underway to ensure successful implementation of the 2015 Johannesburg Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit outcomes.

We are satisfied with the progress made by the FOCAC Coordinators charged with overseeing the Implementation of the Follow-up Actions.

South Africa will chair the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 2017-2019. We view the IORA as the pre-eminent regional organisation linking Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Australasia via the Indian Ocean.

South Africa views the Ocean Economy as a strategic focus area for the foreseeable future. Our preliminary priorities as Chair of IORA include the Blue (Ocean) Economy; promoting innovation, research and development; and a deepened and broadened interaction with regional organisations.

As Chair, we will also have an African perspective as we will seek to align the activities of IORA to the “2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy” in areas such as maritime security, capacity building, skills development, and technology transfer in the ocean economy.

We have strengthened our relations with countries and formations of the South without negating our important ties with strategic formations of the North.

In this context, South Africa signed an Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union (EU) in June 2016 with a view to leverage increased market access for our products in to the region.

We did so, conscious of the challenges that could follow the pending exit from the EU by the United Kingdom, which may in future require us to conduct more trade negotiations with that country at a bilateral level.

This however augurs well with our bilateral relations strategy which focusses mainly on the promotion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), tourism and market access with a view to addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Our economic diplomacy seeks to contribute towards the realisation of the NDP vision and by extension the AU’s Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I am confident that in 2017, Government and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation in particular, will consolidate progress and register more achievements in the implementation of our foreign policy.

We will keep moving South Africa forward through diplomacy as we reaffirm our commitment to serving the South African citizenry towards achieving a Better South Africa, a Better Africa in a Better World.

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