

**DEBATE ON STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION, DR NALEDI PANDOR: 17
FEBRUARY 2021.**

Madam Speaker;

Chairperson of the NCOP;

Mr President;

Mr Deputy President;

Honourable Members:

Mr President your address last Thursday was both candid and honest in its assessment of our current challenges and bold in its articulation of policy and goals geared to moving our country to a prosperous, just and democratic state in which many more people enjoy a livelihood and improved socio-economic conditions. Therefore welcome this forward-looking SONA and will continue to work hard to ensure that we also continue driving the South African agenda of building a more progressive, equitable global order based on respect for multilateralism and human solidarity.

Alongside our plans for South Africa we remain committed to a better Africa and to the reform of global institutions of governance and global equity, the promotion of international human rights, upholding the principles of international law, multilateralism, conflict resolution and reconciliation through dialogue, and focusing on transitional justice and the rights of victims.

This is why during your service as AU chair, we devoted close attention to the cause of the people of Palestine and the struggle of the people of Saharawi. The return of the United States to the community of nations has pointed to the emerging signals of

more positive attention to these struggles. We hope you will work with the new US administration to ensure positive progress including for the people of Libya.

Nothing has illustrated our commitment to Africa more than the positive role South Africa has played in supporting the continent in its response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

As chair of the African Union you gave life to a most impactful co-ordinated African response to COVID 19.

The pandemic struck Africa just as the global community was weakened by unilateralism, conservative nationalism and unwarranted attacks on Global UN Institutions.

The reality that only a global response would work, drove our AU responses led by the AU leadership.

While creating the Africa COVID 19 Fund was critical and while support to ACDC was imperative, you are right Mr President that much more is needed.

The focus on innovation, Research, vaccines development and a robust African innovation platform is very important Pan-African advice for greater African economic freedom and prosperity. The inclusion in the African CDC agenda of a focus on African indigenous remedies and treatments augurs well for the development of institutions and businesses in this sector.

In response to your call, we are working hard to raise South Africa's global visibility, promoting our strengths as the best place to be, to do business, to visit, to work, to study and to live. We are also responding to new opportunities and harnessing the collective capabilities of DIRCO's resources both at home and abroad. The agenda we seek to support has been clearly outlined by you.

We will identify new opportunities and expand those that have benefit for South Africa. In pursuit of this objective, South Africa has created a significant footprint in Asia, which is the continent showing the most promise of a speedy return to pre-COVID-19 levels of economic growth.

Last year South Africa acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to take up significant trade and development opportunities available in this region. We will also benefit from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) of these countries. This partnership created the world's biggest trading bloc, estimated to account for about USD 26 trillion or 30% of global GDP and 28% of global trade.

The ASEAN countries have a total population of 650 million people and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$10 trillion. South Africa will leverage engagement with ASEAN to enhance mutually beneficial trade, investment and tourism ties and to support skills development and training for South Africans and building the capabilities of the state through cooperation with partners in the region.

South Africa secured significant beef export opportunities to the Malaysian market as of November 2020. Market access was also obtained for fruits to Thailand. Product protocols are being negotiated in the region and are at an advanced stage, these include table grapes to Vietnam and South Korea, avocados to India and Japan, and pears to China and India. Total two-way trade with Asia and the Middle East (inclusive of Oceania) breached the important milestone of R1 trillion (R 1009 726 847 172), for the first time, in 2019 (SARS 2019) and is set to grow further.

Many companies from the Asian region have made significant investment pledges during the President's investment Summits and State Visits. Companies such as Toyota, Isuzu, Tata Motors, Mahindra and Motherson Sumi have expanded their investments in the country. China has pledged to invest US\$14 billion, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates US\$ 10 billion each. All these achievements Mr President

during your tenure are ignored by the opposition for good reasons they have to create and promote the false news that nothing is being done even when they know there is progress.

We aim to build on these successes ensuring growing global trade which is one of the best ways to fight poverty, inequality and unemployment in our country and our continent.

- **Africa response to Covid-19 pandemic.
global health governance.**

Madam Speaker;

South Africa and the African continent have had to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic within the context of the need for a better global health governance.

While commendable multilateral cooperation between States has been witnessed, the pandemic also raises the question of how the world should be organised in its aftermath. Some negative trends that already existed before the pandemic, such as racism, xenophobia, populism, nationalism and some major geopolitical tensions may worsen.

South Africa has called for a model of response that would allow the world to collaborate and deliver fair outcomes for all States following the pandemic. A robust socio-economic response is required, with additional assistance to developing countries. In this regard the G20, International Financial Institutions and some bilateral donors have provided assistance but much more is needed, African countries are calling for a debt standstill, as well as the issuance of additional Special Drawing Rights by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These measures would free additional resources for developing countries to respond to the pandemic.

South Africa's confidence in the W.H.O and its ability to promote universal health coverage is in part motivated by the benefits it has enjoyed since the outbreak of COVID-19. Among others, the WHO has supported South Africa and all African

Governments with early detection of the pandemic, the training of health workers and the enhancing of surveillance in communities as well as working with a network of experts to address the containment and prevention of the pandemic.

Under the leadership of President Ramaphosa, the African Union (AU) has established the COVID-19 Emergency Fund, which included additional funding to boost the capacity of the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The President's leadership was acknowledged by AU leaders through his appointment as AU COVID 19 Africa champion.

We believe it is of utmost importance for everyone, from governments, to international organisations, to public-private partnerships, to technical experts as well as ordinary citizens to come together in solidarity and collaboration with one another to ensure global peace, health and prosperity, and to ensure that no one is left behind.

What the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored is the imperative for multilateralism, solidarity and collaboration, and the benefits of sharing best practices, financial and human resources, formulating early warning systems and response mechanisms to fight this war and improve the health of millions of people globally.

Madam Speaker;

Our country has just concluded its two-year term as an elected member of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). Foremost in our approach was the promotion of the multilateral approaches to international peace and security. South Africa is a firm believer in the utility of multilateralism as the only credible and just instrument for addressing global challenges, ensuring just transition as well as bringing about lasting and sustainable peace.

Through the elevation of preventative diplomacy mechanisms as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development, South Africa's approach is driven by its constitutional values which put a premium on seeking diplomatic political solutions to human conflict.

We are confident that the partnership between the UN and the AU that we advanced during our term for the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes on our continent will continue to provide a platform to address African conflicts. The benefit of this partnership and cooperation resides in its promotion of the principle of comparative advantage, complementarity and burden sharing.

Continental Economic Integration

Madam Speaker;

On Saturday, 6 February 2021, during the 34th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU, held virtually under the theme: "Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want", South Africa handed over the Chairship of the AU to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

South Africa presided over the AU at a momentous time which heralded the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a major achievement towards the economic integration of our continent. Even though the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to move the launch from July 2020 to 01 January 2021, the landmark African step has finally been realised.

The founding fathers of African Unity have been vindicated in the most glorious terms. With a population of more than one billion people and a combined Gross Domestic Product of US\$ 1 trillion, an AfCFTA-driven Africa is widely seen as the largest common market in the world.

We are looking forward to enhanced intra-Africa trade, reignited industrialisation and notably meaningful integration into global value chains and the global economy in general.

In addition the AfCFTA will provide a stimulus African economies to catalyse diversification, which will in turn minimise Africa's vulnerability to the vagaries of commodity and resources price fluctuations.

Our approach recognises that our agenda have to be set by the imperatives of the South and should continue to be guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit, including the recognition that South-South Cooperation should not be seen as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and further stressing that it is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North South Cooperation.

In this regard, the country continues to play a leading role in the sub-region, the African region and the broader global South. South Africa's active participation in SADC, African Union, the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA), Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa (BRICS) initiatives demonstrates in no uncertain terms this global commitment.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, we are confident that the ground we have laid during our terms as the AU Chair and a non-permanent member of the UNSC will go a long way towards enabling both our country and continent to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, bring about a progressive global agenda pivoting on fair representation of the interests of the South, and create conditions for the economic reconstruction and development of both South Africa and the African continent.

