**ADDRESS BY MINISTER MAITE NKOANA-MASHABANE TO AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES ACCREDITED TO SOUTH AFRICA IN THE AFTERMATH OF ATTACKS AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONALS IN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, 17 APRIL 2015**

Programme Director;

Honourable Minister Gigaba

Honourable Minister Mahlobo;

The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador M’poko;

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners;

Members of Business Organisations;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

We have invited you to join us this morning as we reflect on the sad and tragic events in some parts of our country characterised by violent attacks against some of the citizens of your countries.

In the new Constitution of this free and democratic South Africa, we made a promise to ourselves and to the world that we would remain committed to the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms; non-racialism; non-sexism and the rule of law.

Furthermore, at the core of our foreign policy is the commitment we have made to ourselves and to you that we will always prioritise Africa in all our endeavours because we are an integral part of the African continent.

South Africa’s transition to democracy was one of the world’s most iconic testimonies of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Under the stewardship of the father of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela, the country undertook an unwavering dedication to democracy, human rights, selflessness, reconciliation, service to humanity and a better life for all.

The recent attacks on foreign nationals, particularly fellow Africans from various African countries, are a threat to our historical achievements as a nation. Moreover, the attacks go against the democratic values enshrined in the South African Constitution.

It is therefore, with a deep sense of pain and regret, that we, as the South African Government, humble ourselves and express our heartfelt apologies to the African continent and indeed the international community at large for these unwarranted developments.

The South African Government further condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent outbreak of violent attacks in parts of the country against foreign nationals, particularly fellow Africans from various African countries.

The South African Government views the attacks on foreign nationals as a criminal offence that will not be tolerated. South Africa is a constitutional democracy governed by laws. Everyone working and living in the country must obey its laws in their totality. No one has the right to take the law into their own hands. The South African Government will enforce the laws of the country and will not hesitate to act against criminal activity or those found to incite violence.

The South African Government will also do everything within its power to ensure the safety of all citizens and foreign nationals irrespective of their status. Similarly, foreign nationals must meet all the legislative and regulatory requirements as prescribed by our immigration laws.

South Africa is a diverse society that welcomes and promotes interaction among people of different backgrounds. As such, nothing can justify the criminal activity and intolerance that these attacks represent. Solutions can be reached through constructive engagement and by working together.

South Africa adheres to various United Nations and African Union conventions and protocols relating to the status of refugees. As a country that cherishes human rights, we have to protect the basic rights of every human being within our borders.

Your Excellencies,

The South African Government has thus far responded as follows to this matter:

* President Jacob Zuma has on a number of occasions provided his leadership on this matter by publicly condemning the unwarranted violent attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of their businesses. President Zuma also appealed for calm and tolerance across the country. The most recent of these statements by President Zuma were issued at the National Assembly meeting at our Parliament yesterday;

* President Zuma has assigned the Ministers of Home Affairs (Mr Malusi Gigaba), Police (Mr Nathi Nhleko) and State Security (Mr David Mahlobo) to stop the violence that has broken out in parts of the country particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province in some Durban residential areas. This includes the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Task Team to coordinate the response;
* A Panel of Experts has been set up under the leadership of the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Judge Navi Pillay. Its purpose is to advise the Government on the integration of foreigners into the local communities on an ongoing basis;
* Additional law enforcement officers have been mobilised from around the country and deployed to the affected areas to enforce the law and prevent further attacks;
* Thus far, a number of suspects have been arrested;
* All district disaster management centres have been placed on high-alert. A 24-hour call centre has been established and remains accessible in the event that further attacks of this nature occur in the future;
* Shelters have been set up to accommodate displaced foreign nationals and basic amenities such as water, sanitation, and healthcare are being provided;
* The South African Government is working closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), as well as non-governmental organisations to provide food, psycho-social and other support to those affected;
* The process of reintegrating those who were displaced back into their communities has begun;
* The Ministry of Small Business Development, will fast-track the implementation of the National Informal Business Upliftment Strategy (NIBUS) as part of addressing the concerns and challenges that face the informal business sector. NIBUS is based on three key pillars, namely skills development among the South African population, exploring partnerships between locals and foreign traders and reviewing policies and regulations; and
* Community engagements are being conducted through the Communities in Dialogue programme, Community Safety Forums, Ward Committees, and through Community Development Workers, amongst others.

We are also encouraged by the united stance against the violent attacks against foreign nationals taken by various South African political parties. In addition, there have also been commendable initiatives by ordinary South Africans who have taken a stand against xenophobia in general by organising peaceful marches in the affected areas, such as the Johannesburg Peace Bus initiative by a group of young South Africans.

Your Excellencies,

Addressing the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Tunis, Tunisia on 13 June 1994, President Nelson Mandela, had occasion to mention that:

*“Africa shed her blood and surrendered the lives of her children so that all her children could be free. She gave of her limited wealth and resources so that all of Africa should be liberated. She opened her heart of hospitality and her head so full of wise counsel, so that we should emerge victorious. A million times, she put her hand to the plough that has now dug up the encrusted burden of oppression that had accumulated for centuries”*

South Africa will not forget the hospitality and support we received from fellow Africans during the difficult times of our anti-apartheid liberation struggle. Our continent opened her doors and became home for many South Africans who fled the persecution of the apartheid government. For many decades, Africans made tremendous sacrifices in fighting side by side with us in a war against apartheid, contributing to the freedom we have today.

Since the advent of democratic governance in 1994, we worked cordially with fellow African countries not only to consolidate bilateral relations which are flourishing politically, economically and socially, but also to advance continental integration.

Inspired by the spirit of Pan-Africanism, the motive force of our liberation struggle, South Africa’s foreign policy is driven by the vision to achieve a united African continent that is peaceful, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous and which contributes to a world that is just and equitable.

South Africa pursues this vision, informed by the values of Ubuntu (Humanity). Ubuntu is the central concept of social and political organisation in the African global outlook, it consists of the principles of sharing and caring for one another. This means, generally speaking, that to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others and establish mutually respectful relations with them. Moreover, this adage teaches us that to denigrate and disrespect the other human being is to denigrate oneself. I can therefore state with utmost conviction that the spirit of Ubuntu is tightly woven in South Africa’s moral fibre, more especially in our interaction with fellow Africans and the international community in general.

South Africa stands unwaveringly against all intolerances such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia and sexism.

The South African Government, therefore, urges South Africans not to allow a few individuals to reverse and undermine our historical achievements.

Your Excellencies,

As I conclude to allow more time for discussion, let me reiterate the commitment of the South African Government, working in partnership with your Governments and people, to address underlying causes of this recurring challenge in our society with a view of seeking sustainable long-term solutions.

Our gathering today, which I hope will be one of open engagement, is, therefore, an ideal platform that will facilitate the exploration of lasting solutions to this problem.

I thank you for your attention.