



GENERAL DEBATE OF THE ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
SOUTH AFRICA COUNTRY STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY KHUMBUDZO
NTSHAVHENI, MP, ACTING MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY

July 2021

Mister President

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Our sincere appreciation to you, Mr President, for convening the 2021 High-level Political Forum at a time when the world continues to suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic. The fragility of humanity has been exposed and the pandemic has shown us that we need to urgently and collectively increase our efforts to end inequality and poverty in the world and to do so in a sustainable way.

International research shows us that the global pandemic has set back efforts by developing countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda by twenty years. Rather than finding ourselves in the closing decade of implementation, we are at ground zero and back at the starting line of the 2030 Agenda. This grave situation is further compounded in the African continent because we are also experiencing a severe liquidity and debt crisis. The pandemic is exacerbating poverty, inequality and unemployment and has a disproportional impact on the most vulnerable countries and sectors of society, including women and youth.

Now more than ever, the central role of the United Nations High-level Political Forum is required to provide much-needed political leadership in our collective multilateral effort to recover from the pandemic and achieve the sustainable development goals through global solidarity.

Mr President,

Key to our collective recovery will be the equitable manufacturing and distribution of vaccines to allow our peoples to survive the pandemic and to restore the world economy.

No-one is safe until everyone is safe. No national economy can thrive in isolation from the inter-connected global economy.

President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his capacity as Champion for the COVID-19 vaccine strategy and acquisition for Africa, is advocating for the equitable and timely access to COVID-19 vaccines to ensure that at least 60% of the African continent's population is vaccinated. In this regard, South Africa and an ever-growing number of countries are appealing for a temporary waiver to the WTO's Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property to allow African and other developing countries to produce COVID-19 related vaccines, therapeutics, and equipment. President Ramaphosa is also co-facilitator of the ACT-A High-level Facilitation Council, which has already brought vaccines to over 100 countries and secured millions of effective and affordable diagnostic kits and treatment courses for low and low-middle-income countries. We call on all countries to assist and to massively ramp up this effort.

Mr President,

As countries across the globe seek practical ways to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to work together through the United Nations to address global challenges, such as climate change and the multiple environmental crises including loss of biological diversity and dwindling water resources.

As the originator of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Paris Agreement through the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, South Africa underscores the need for all Parties to fully implement the Agreement. Equal importance needs to be accorded to the three global goals on mitigation, adaptation, and support for developing countries, with full transparency on both action and support. It is important that the right of developing economies to policy space and sufficient time to achieve a Just Transition be respected and that they receive enabling support. We should be careful not to advocate one-size-fits-all approaches to disinvestment from fossil fuels or impose non-tariff barriers or discriminatory taxes that would unfairly harm developing economies.

South Africa is confident that, with the able leadership of the United Kingdom as COP26 President, trust amongst Parties will be built, in accordance with the UNFCCC's practice of inclusivity and transparency in a consensus-based and Party-driven process, where all voices are heard, and no one is left behind.

For its part, South Africa is finalising a comprehensive and highly ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement for submission to the UNFCCC ahead of COP26. In its capacity as a mega-biodiverse country and an international leader in sustainable wildlife management, South Africa is also continuing to enhance its marine and terrestrial environmental conservation efforts.

Mr President,

The sustainable development goals will only be attained if there is adequate provision of predictable, appropriate, and accessible means of implementation support to developing

countries, especially to African, least developed, land-locked, small island developing states and countries in special circumstances, including those under foreign occupation. Domestic resources alone are entirely insufficient and African and most other developing countries require international assistance in the form of finance, technology transfer, capacity building support and debt relief to enable them to achieve the sustainable development goals.

In this regard, we welcome the focus on the digital economy while highlighting the impact of the 4th Industrial revolution technologies on developing and least developed countries. Without capacity building, the digital divide will result in bigger economic disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization around the world, but as life has shifted increasingly online, cybercriminals have exploited the opportunity to attack vital digital infrastructure. States across Africa, where digital capacity continues to lag the rest of the world, have emerged as a favourite target of cybercriminals, with costly consequences.

South Africa also welcomes initiatives to expand training and education in the digital economy, particularly for girls and women. Women's empowerment is central in poverty eradication and will promote inclusive economic growth in Africa. In this regard, investing in education as well eliminating financing barriers that discriminate against women can increase women entrepreneurship while expanding economic opportunities and enable them to participate meaningfully in the economy.

Mr President,

South Africa associates itself with the HLPF's Ministerial Declaration, notably the principle of leaving no-one behind, the commitment to gender equality and women empowerment, addressing the significant challenges faced by middle-income countries, the urgency in achieving peace and security for all peoples in the world, the centrality of human rights, the cross-cutting role of water, the importance of children and youth, the needs of countries in special situations, the urgency to restore the disruption in trade as a result of the pandemic and the importance of addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity on Earth.

We fully support the Secretary General's call to Build Back Better, ensuring that we focus both on development and recovery. South Africa appreciates that global challenges require global responses. As a priority and in the spirit of solidarity we must join our efforts to help the world recover faster and better by ending the pandemic, addressing access to water and sanitation, food security and hunger, getting all children back to school, addressing climate change and protecting our natural resources and the most marginalised. We must ensure that no one is left behind.

Mr President

South Africa remains concerned at the increasing resort to unilateralism and unilaterally imposed measures that undermine the UN Charter and international law. The continued economic sanctions undermine the capacity of affected countries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, with dire consequences. South Africa calls for sanctions imposed on countries to be lifted to ensure access to

essential supplies, COVID-19 tests and medical support. We must emphasise that this is the time for solidarity, not for exclusion.

As we address the challenges brought about by the pandemic, we must recognise that this global public health emergency has exacerbated the already difficult conditions of those living under foreign and colonial occupation. In this regard, we reiterate our solidarity with the peoples of Palestine and Western Sahara.

South Africa further calls on the international community to continue to support the efforts of UN agencies to bring humanitarian and medical aid to those living under foreign occupation. In all our efforts to address COVID-19, focus must be on the most vulnerable and ensuring that the rights of all people are protected.

In conclusion, Mr President

South Africa reiterates its commitment to promoting, preserving and strengthening multilateralism and multilateral decision-making processes through the UN with the aim of creating a just and equitable global governance system.

I thank you