



**2020 GENERAL DEBATE OF ECOSOC  
HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM**

**SOUTH AFRICA COUNTRY STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, MR MJ MTHEMBU, MP  
MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY**

**17 JULY 2020**

Madam President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

At the outset, allow me to convey the appreciation of the Government and People of South Africa to the President of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for convening the 2020 United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF). We meet virtually at a time when the world is confronted with the harsh reality that the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic is making the achievement of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 even more challenging. Now more than ever, it is essential for the people of the world to unite in global solidarity under the banner of the United Nations as the centrepiece of multilateralism to confront our shared challenges together. Recovery from COVID-19 presents us with an opportunity to urgently transform the global economy towards a more equitable and sustainable pathway. We owe this to current and future generations, and we need to start by heeding the call of the United Nations Secretary-General to focus on addressing the apex priority of eliminating human poverty.

As we approach the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations established to save future generations from the scourge of war and commence the decade of accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is necessary to finally

confront the stubbornly persistent reality of an unequal world. Inhumane historical and current practices have made some countries and sectors of society more vulnerable than others. There is further a grave backlog in the provision of predictable, appropriate and accessible means of implementation support, especially to African, Least Developed, Land-Locked, Small Island Developing States, and Countries in special circumstances, including foreign occupation. This is compounded by a crippling debt burden.

A key message we therefore wish to convey, in our capacity as the 2020 Chair of the African Union, is that the short-term recovery effort from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will not succeed unless it is firmly premised on addressing the overarching and enduring objective of sustainable development, ensuring that “no one is left behind” – and assisting those left most behind first. Domestic resources alone are entirely insufficient and African and most other developing countries urgently require international assistance in the form of finance, technology transfer and capacity building support and debt relaxation or write-offs, to empower them to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, developing country debt is a foremost concern. South Africa is encouraged by the collaboration of the G20, the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations, towards finding solutions to developing country debt sustainability and related issues. South Africa therefore wholeheartedly supports the call of the African Union for a debt standstill for four years.

The African Union has convened a record number of high-level events this year towards developing a comprehensive continental recovery strategy as its leaders collectively confront the COVID-19 challenges. To cite just one of many African initiatives, which may be of interest as a global best practice and an opportunity for partners to support Africa, the African Union has established the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP). This is a non-profit initiative to provide a platform aimed at improving Africa’s access to critical medical resources. One of its objectives is the prioritization of African suppliers, especially Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), women and youth-owned businesses. It is anticipated that the expansion of this Platform will extend beyond medical supplies to other commodities as the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) comes into full effect and institutions build on the best implementations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While dealing with the pandemic, we have also had to tackle the ugly injustices of racism and gender-based violence, which are offensive to core founding values of the United Nations, and call for special efforts to protect the human rights of everyone regardless of race and gender.

At a national level, South Africa has mobilised resources to mount a comprehensive and multi-faceted response to the multiple socio-economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The South African Government has introduced a financial stimulus package of R500bn which amounts to almost 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); established a national Solidarity Fund as a catalyst towards alleviating poverty; enhanced social safety nets through a Social Relief Grant for the unemployed; and has set up a COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Fund for relief benefit to businesses and employees. We have prioritized the strengthening and preparation of the health care system and have a special focus on the most vulnerable, including the needs of women and children. In doing so, we are conscious of the need to leave no one behind and to help those most behind first.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, it is critical that essential services for other infectious diseases and chronic health conditions, such as TB, HIV, Diabetes and Hypertension do not lose our focus. The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 have had an unintended negative impact on some TB and HIV services. To ensure the continuation of critical services for people living with HIV and individuals with active TB, the South African government is embarking on strengthening HIV and TB service provision to maximise the health and safety of our vulnerable HIV and TB patients during these unprecedented times. Existing resources already deployed in South Africa to assist in the COVID-19 response will be leveraged in a manner that ensured that HIV and TB services remain accessible to those who need them.

These national measures have been complemented by participation in international initiatives aimed at addressing the COVID-19 crisis. For example, in April, our President joined other world leaders and the World Health Organization at the launch of a global partnership for the accelerated development and production of new vaccines, tests and treatments for COVID-19. South Africa continues to contribute

towards this partnership to ensure that the common good of humanity is best served in a collective and participatory manner.

It is imperative that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic leverages synergies and complementarities between health, social, economic and environmental measures, for a holistic response to the crisis. The pandemic presents an unprecedented opportunity to reset the global economy on a pathway towards a more environmentally sustainable, nature friendly and low-carbon developmental trajectory. To this end, recovery strategies must be aligned to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In line with this, South Africa is part of an initiative launched in May 2020 by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment for an African Green Stimulus Programme, aimed at supporting with urgency key sectors in Africa hardest hit by the pandemic, such as ecotourism, conservation and the associated nature based economies.

Allow me to conclude with the observation that the COVID-19 pandemic has served to further highlight the central importance of a collective, multilateral response to global challenges that no country can address alone. The fallout of this pandemic has starkly exposed the need to focus on a comprehensive and holistic approach that simultaneously addresses all pillars of sustainable development.

The United Nations is the main driver of the progressive development of international law, norms and values for collectively addressing global challenges, and it provides a unique and unrivalled platform for global discussion and policymaking amongst Member States, providing an increasingly important role to non-state actors, civil society, and other stakeholders such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. This role can further be amplified and enhanced by adopting a bottom-up approach to policy solutions; promoting more effective global partnerships and platforms for cooperation and knowledge sharing; and involving more women, youth, indigenous and vulnerable groups in policy and decision-making processes.

South Africa recommits both to the pursuit of the universal achievement of all the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, as well as to ensuring

that the United Nations We Want, is ever more responsive to the needs of all humanity, especially the most vulnerable.

The United Nations remains the indispensable and central pillar of the architecture of global multilateralism and human solidarity.

**END.**