



***55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council,  
South Africa's Statement on the High-Level Segment  
Geneva  
26 February 2024***

Mr President

Your Excellency, Volker Turk, High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,  
Distinguished delegates,

Mr President,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be addressing you today. I bring you warm greetings from the government and the people of South Africa.

The year 2024 marks 30 years of constitutional democracy in South Africa. Our Constitution, which guides our foreign policy, took inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other key international instruments of International Law. The South African Bill of Rights recognizes the equality, dignity and worth of every person. This incorporation of international law in our constitution has strongly influenced the nature and focus of our foreign policy.

Post Apartheid, South Africa has made remarkable progress in implementing the Bill of Rights.

We ensured that the Bill of Rights would not be on a standard lower than that of international legal instruments. We always therefore acknowledge the valuable contribution of the international community to our freedom.

We believe that it is our collective duty to ensure that the Human Rights Council is always fit for purpose. However, the current divisions in the Council are impeding us from focusing on the victims of human rights in all regions of the world. We need to restrain ourselves from being party to the instrumentalisation of the Council and address the current polarisation, selectivity, and double standards in relation to human rights matters. In addition, as the High Commissioner stated this morning we also need to overcome the binary view and logic that if you are not with us, you are against us.

Mr President,

During this Session, South Africa will continue to focus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, particularly racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. Efforts to combat racism and the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, remain critically important in the current geo-political context.

Mr President

We are committed to a robust and coherent United Nations to ensure that all who yearn for freedom and self-determination are supported. Determined efforts by the United Nations family will guarantee freedom for the people of Palestine and the people of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. South Africa is committed to the advancement of human rights and freedoms, not only in our country and continent but around the world.

This Session takes place when we are still reeling from atrocious incidents of a conflict exacerbated by unrestrained attacks on the innocent and vulnerable, including children. Therefore, this is the appropriate forum to register our despair over a lack of respect for life and livelihood that has been observed in Gaza, since 7 October 2023.

South Africa calls for an immediate comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza, inclusive of hostage releases, resumption of talks on a just solution to end the suffering of the Palestinian people and unhindered and expanded humanitarian access to people in need of basic and critical services. Israel has a duty to implement the provisional measures pronounced by the ICJ, following South Africa's referral of the situation in Gaza to the World Court.

While it is correct to call out Hamas for its crimes against the innocent, we must also deplore our inaction in seven decades of occupation.

South Africa remains steadfast in advocating for international peace and security through inclusive dialogue and the peaceful political settlement of disputes, in our continent in Africa and all over the world. In an interlinked global community, in which we are interdependent on one another, we must recognise that tolerance is a precursor to peace.

Mr President,

Current global challenges require the promotion of an equitable multilateral system and we will continue to advocate for the reform of global governance institutions to protect human rights, for all, everywhere.

We urge the Council to respond to all violations and abuses, regardless of who and where they are committed. Honouring this mandate will promote peace and security, an important component of sustainable development.

Thank you.