

## **Remarks by Minister GNM Pandor At the Parliamentary Debate on the SONA, 13 February 2024**

Honourable Speaker,  
Honourable NCOP Chairperson,  
Honourable President,  
Honourable Deputy President,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Fellow South Africans

As we reflect on the past 30 years of South Africa's foreign policy, the country can be proud of the work of our Department of International Relations and Cooperation which has consistently seen South Africa punch above its weight on the global stage. South Africa is considered a champion of human rights around the world, a leader of the Global South, and a leader on the African continent, driving continental integration.

The work of DIRCO has been guided by our national interests, and we continue to work towards contributing to the improvement of the lives of all South Africans, with a view to building a better South Africa, Africa, and a better world. Over the past five years the department has embarked on concerted efforts at economic diplomacy to contribute in a more direct manner to achieve poverty eradication, job creation and growth. We have consistently prioritised growing intra-African trade and are working towards the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.

Our government has honoured the undertaking we gave the South African people in 2018 that we would attract new investments much needed in our economy. The pledges at the annual South Africa Investment Conference over the past four years have exceeded President Ramaphosa's target of R1.2 trillion in investments by R306 billion, overachieving the target by 26 percent. These investments will go a long way in stimulating economic activity and creating jobs.

Multilateralism remains a focal point of South Africa's foreign policy, and we will continue to promote an equitable rules-based multilateral system, and advocate for the reform of global governance institutions. The UN Security Council does not reflect current global political and economic realities, and we continue to advocate the reform of the existing global governance architecture with a view to improving its responsiveness to the needs of developing states. South Africa must never tire of pushing for text-based negotiations on UN reform. South Africa successfully completed three terms as an elected member of the UN Security Council from 2007-2008, 2011-2012, and 2019-2020.

South Africa has played an active role in the development of international human rights and humanitarian law, seeking to protect victims of abuse and combat impunity. South Africa was elected to serve on the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term commencing on 1 January 2023. This will be South Africa's third term on the Human Rights Council, having successfully served as an elected member of the Council from 2006-2010, and from 2014-2019.

South Africa was a driving force in the establishment of the African Union and has taken on leadership roles at various levels of the continental organisation. In 2002 President Thabo Mbeki served as the inaugural Chair of the AU, and from 2012-2017 Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma served as the AU Commission Chair. From February 2020-February 2021 President Cyril Ramaphosa served as AU Chair, and South Africa has chaired the AU's Peace and Security Council on numerous occasions.

President Ramaphosa chaired the AU at a particular difficult juncture as the world was upended by the Corona virus. South Africa was praised by the World Health Organisation for the strategies it devised to deal with the pandemic. As AU Chair, President Ramaphosa appointed special envoys to mobilise international economic support for the continental fight against COVID and established the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team. By August 2021, the team had managed to secure 400 million vaccine doses for African countries despite hoarding by the North.

South Africa played a major role in the fight to make COVID vaccines more accessible to the developing South. South Africa and India requesting a TRIPS waiver at the WTO to enable developing countries to manufacture COVID vaccines and therapeutics. Despite

huge resistance from developed countries who wanted to preserve profits for their pharmaceutical industries, the waiver was granted. As a result, in 2021 the AU Heads of State established the Partnerships for Africa Vaccine Manufacturing under the Africa CDC. The Africa CDC is working with four other National Regulatory Authorities to boost capacity to manufacture 60 percent of vaccine needs in Africa by 2040.

President Ramaphosa drove the campaign for African vaccine manufacturing to ensure self-sufficiency on the continent. When Johnson & Johnson licenced Aspen to produce and supply vaccines in March 2022, the agreement was the single biggest win for the African continent in the fight against future pandemics. It was an important milestone in making sure gross vaccine inequality is not repeated.

In June last year, the WHO praised South Africa for how it managed its own response to the COVID pandemic despite the social and economic challenges the economy faces. South Africa implemented one of the fastest and strictest responses to COVID by closing its borders and imposing a lockdown before it announced its first death. The WHO Director General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus praised South Africa's community-based approach saying, "This kind of consultation with community that South Africa is doing is very, very important."

Dr Michael Ryan, the Executive Director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Program, said South Africa used its initial lockdown very well and put in place a 4-point plan for preparedness and response. He said the deployment of 39 mobile laboratories across the country was a huge innovation, and the training of 30,000 community health workers to do contact tracing and testing was effective. He also lauded South Africa for its swift technological response which allowed it to develop COVID 19 testing capacity early on and assist other countries on the continent to test for cases.

South Africa has capitalised on its membership in important multilateral organisations such as the G20 and BRICS to advance the priorities of the AU's Agenda 2063 – Africa's development blueprint. We have played a major leadership role in the development of continental infrastructure, the procurement and development of vaccines, and science and innovation, but we are determined to play an even bigger role in the second 10 years of implementation of Agenda 2063.

While we have achieved some major successes in terms of regional peace and security, we still have a long way to go. South Africa successfully hosted the Inter-Congolese dialogue at Sun City in 2003 which led to a peace agreement between the warring parties and a government of national unity in the DRC. South Africa also successfully mediated in other conflicts like Burundi and South Sudan. In 2022, DIRCO successfully hosted the AU-led peace talks between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, which resulted in a peace agreement. But a number of simmering conflicts on the continent remain unresolved.

South Africa has made a noticeable impact in Science and Innovation on the world stage. We are very proud of Dr Tshilidzi Marwala who was recently appointed Rector of the UN University. He was appointed in August 2023 to the UN Scientific Advisory Council and he has co-authored a book on modelling interstate conflict. Dr Marwala was the Vice Chancellor of UJ and specialised as an artificial intelligence engineer, computer scientist, and mechanical engineer. When our very own Dr Marwala judges the Youtube SpaceLab competition with Stephen Hawking, that is something to celebrate.

We also have a number of award-winning black women scientists to celebrate such as Tebello Nyokong, who is Rhodes University's Director of the Institute for Nanotechnology Innovation. She has received many awards for her research on photodynamic therapy of cancer and on eliminating antimicrobial resistance. Her pioneering research is paving the way for a safer cancer detection and treatment, without the debilitating side effects of chemotherapy. Last year Pope Francis appointed Professor Nyokong to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Then there is Senamile Masango, who is a nuclear physicist and an esteemed scholar who presents her work on some of the biggest science stages in the world. She mentors young girls through her foundation and has declared she wants to be the first African woman to travel to space. Our country has a myriad of influential talented minds.

Some of those inimitable minds comprised our world class team of international law advocates who presented our case to the International Court of Justice last month on Israel's genocide in Gaza. People world-wide have hailed South Africa's case, and the finding of the court that there is a plausible case of genocide has had reverberations

worldwide. This case is particularly significant as it is rare that the ICJ is seized by such an important matter of peace and security where a country of the South is asking the World's highest Court to hold a country of the North accountable for their violations of the Geneva Convention.

The judges of the ICJ set out provisional measures which Israel has ignored. The silence of the Democratic Alliance is deafening. On 10 March 2022, the Western Cape government said, in reference to Ukraine, that "it cannot and will not remain silent in the face of a major international crisis that threatens the very foundation of our liberal international order". But in the face of genocide, collective punishment, and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, Premier Alan Winde and the Western Cape cabinet have not uttered a single word in condemnation of Israeli atrocities. This exposes their double standards and selective morality.

DA Speaker Daylin Mitchell shamefully chose to silence discussions on Israel's genocide in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis within the Western Cape legislature, exposing the DA's disregard for democratic values and the gravity of human rights concerns. The DA should be ashamed for axing Ghaleb Cachalia from the DA's shadow cabinet for saying on X, "I will not be silenced. Israel is committing genocide. Full stop." DA Party Leader John Steenhuisen called his remark "a display of remarkable selfishness and disregard for a formal decision of the DA's national caucus," and claimed that by removing him from cabinet the DA was prioritising the best interests of the party. The DA effectively snuffed out their only voice of conscience. Now that Israel is massacring civilians in Rafah – the place they were ordered to flee to as a safe area – we all wonder whether the DA will find its voice.

I thank you!