

Minister Ronald O Lamola's Remarks at the Presidential Working Dinner with South African Companies Doing Business on the African Continent

18 November 2025

Good evening, distinguished guests, business leaders and partners.

Thank you for joining us tonight.

We are hosting the G20 at a unique moment. Widening geopolitical fractures, marked by trade tensions and shifting power dynamics, necessitate that we strengthen our focus on economic diplomacy.

Just after the European Union gateway announcement President Ramaphosa instructed me to convene this gathering of South African business invested in our continent, the African continent.

It is against this background that my introductory remarks will pivot around how South Africa, in the face of growing global uncertainty, positions itself to withstand external shocks while advancing its development priorities.

Responding to the uncertainties of today's world, our government is fine-tuning an economic diplomacy strategy that rests on a few key assumptions and aspirations.

In a world defined by competition for markets, minerals, technology, skills and investment, economic diplomacy can no longer be optional.

It is an indispensable part of positioning South Africa for long-term resilience and addressing our domestic challenges.

Let me turn now to outline this economic diplomacy strategy, which we hope to canvass with you in due course:

First is the obvious truth: *Africa is our home; Africa is our destiny*. For three decades, the belief that Africa is our destiny has been a consistent thread in South Africa's foreign policy.

This economic diplomacy strategy gives practical expression to that orientation.

The fate of our continent requires Africans, including ourselves, to act together to advance and defend our interests and to play our part in transforming the global order.

Second, the aspirations of this strategy are straightforward.

We want to attract investment, stimulate economic growth and build stronger regional value chains, particularly in sectors such as critical minerals and manufacturing.

This work aligns with our Medium-Term Development Plan of 2024 to 2029, which places inclusive growth, reindustrialisation, employment creation and the expansion of our trade footprint at the centre of our development agenda.

This is what economic diplomacy must deliver, and this is the standard by which it should be judged.

The continent's boundless potential is familiar to you as players in telecoms, food retail, construction, logistics, mining, or finance.

Africa is demographically young. By 2030, our youth will make up more than 40 per cent of the global youth population. By 2050, our population will reach 2.5 billion.

The minerals that will power the global energy transition lie beneath and above African soil. From Guinea to Gabon, South Africa to Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar to Mozambique, Zimbabwe to the DRC, Africa holds the key to a low-carbon future.

And yet, despite this potential, only 16 per cent of Africa's trade is with itself.

In the SADC region our trade is at 21 percent, we must strive for a 50 percent regional integration on trade in the SADC region which will be a catalyst to increase our trade in the whole continent to more than 16 percent.

But interestingly, when African countries trade with each other, over 60 per cent of the goods traded are processed or semi-processed. This means more value added at home, more knowledge transfer and more decent jobs for our people.

The full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area could create a market worth \$3.4 trillion. Unlocking this potential will require sustained investment in infrastructure and seamless cross-border connectivity.

Let me offer three provocations for our conversation tonight. Think of them as a *three-legged pot*.

The **first leg** requires us to deepen regional investment in genuinely reciprocal ways.

For years, South African companies have played a catalytic role across the continent, building roads and power lines, expanding financial services, and growing retail and telecoms networks that create real jobs.

Yet this path is not always smooth. Sudden policy shifts and uneven and unpredictable regulation continue to slow the growth of regional value chains and intra-African investment.

Some South African firms often face challenging operating conditions in certain countries due to strict exchange controls, allegations of anti-competitive practices, export restrictions, and even unfair treatment. This weakens our ability to scale regional value chains, grow intra-African investment and strengthen South Africa's economic leadership.

Mr President, I am pleased to report that DIRCO and the dtic, working closely with business, have established a new coordination platform to unlock opportunities across the continent.

This mechanism, known as the Committee for the Coordination of Economic Diplomacy (COMED), brings Government and the private sector together to advance South Africa's economic footprint.

Business leaders who attended a working dinner we hosted last year shared with me their investments on the continent as well as the challenges they encounter. Tonight's engagement and what we have been preoccupied with since that exchange is a practical demonstration of government's commitment to support our companies across the continent.

I am also pleased to share that we are also developing a proactive investment facilitation framework that will offer support through our foreign economic offices, improve market intelligence and regulatory advice, and strengthen risk-mitigation tools.

This will be anchored in the Protection of Investment Act of 2015 and will prioritise transparency, predictability, simpler administrative processes, and effective dispute prevention.

It will also balance investor protection with the sovereign right to regulate in the public interest and complement the AfCFTA Investment Protocol as well as the WTO's Investment Facilitation for Development.

Our economic diplomacy aims to create an investment climate that supports our companies and encourages African firms to see South Africa as a destination of choice.

The **second leg** is about the growing public mood in our country against regional integration and international cooperation on home soil.

How do we show, in tangible ways, that regional integration, greater intra-Africa trade and deeper exchange among our peoples are not the preoccupation of an aloof political class or a profit-maximising business elite.

Put differently, how do we demonstrate that ordinary people in this country stand to gain as much from regional integration as anyone else?

Part of the answer offered by this economic diplomacy strategy is that South Africa's international engagements must deliver measurable and lasting economic benefits for its people.

The **third leg** speaks to the ability of the business community and the leaders here tonight to look beyond the immediate pressures of commercial success and the bottom line.

This strategy relies on business playing the long game and resisting the pull of short-term gain in favour of stronger returns over time and stronger returns for our society. This is neither naïve nor idealistic.

This economic diplomacy strategy makes a bold yet straightforward assertion: *A horizon limited by short-term gain serves none of us.*

You may argue that this three-legged pot of provocations is missing one vital element.

That is the fire to keep the pot burning.

You are right and it is us in this room that must start fire.

Through President's Ramaphosa leadership we can secure buy-in from key actors in society, especially the people in this room.

President Ramaphosa, your steady leadership, strategic judgement, and cooperative spirit grounded in Ubuntu will be vital as we advance on this path.

Mr President, with those words, I now yield the floor to you.

Thank you very much.