



GENERAL DEBATE OF THE ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL
POLITICAL FORUM 2022

SOUTH AFRICA'S COUNTRY STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY, MONDLI GUNGUBELE, MP, MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY

Wednesday, 13 July 2022

Mister President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

We express sincere appreciation to you for convening the 2022 High-level Political Forum at a time when the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic remains with us. Whilst the pandemic has had a profound negative impact on our sustainable development efforts and our collective efforts to eradicate poverty and combat environmental degradation, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity to reset the global economy on a pathway towards a more equitable and more environmentally sustainable and low-carbon developmental trajectory.

International research shows us that the global pandemic has seriously impeded efforts by developing countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda and set back progress by

twenty years. Rather than finding ourselves in the closing decade of implementation, we are back at the starting line of the 2030 Agenda. This grave situation is further compounded in the African continent because we are also experiencing 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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through global solidarity.

Mr President,

The key to our collective recovery will be the equitable manufacturing and distribution of vaccines to allow our people to survive the pandemic and 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, has advocated for equitable and timely access to COVID-19 vaccines to ensure that at least 70% of the African continent's population is vaccinated. South Africa welcomed the outcomes of the WTO MC12 held in Geneva, Switzerland from 12 to 17 June 2022, in particular the decision that eligible countries could override COVID-19 vaccine patents until 2027. The decision on whether to extend this to COVID-19 therapeutics and diagnostics was delayed for six months. South Africa had been leading the call for the WTO to waiver intellectual property rights tied to COVID-19 vaccines that will ensure equal access to vaccines and enable countries that can manufacture vaccines to do so.

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 of 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. In addressing global environmental challenges, it is essential to maintain the momentum behind a collective, multilateral response and to adhere to the Rio Principles, in particular equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

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. South Africa's biodiversity provides an important basis for economic growth and development, while critical to people's livelihoods. Cabinet has recently approved the draft White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity for public comment. This draft overarching policy on conservation and sustainable use, once finalised will be implemented across all spheres of government, ensuring that conservation is central in the country's drive to accelerate economic growth and job creation.

The unsustainable management of our land resources affects our health, food, water, energy, and livelihoods amongst others. With that, there is an urgent need for us to continue protecting and restoring our natural ecosystems or degraded landscapes as this will help us in the fight against poverty, rural development, and water and food security.

South Africa is a country where three of the world's oceans meet, namely the South Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Southern Ocean, and we are endowed with a magnificent, world-famous coastline that is home to a plethora of unique species. Our oceans also support many thousands of livelihoods as well as important

industries, including the tourism sector. In our mission to address poverty and unemployment, we have identified the blue economy as a potential driver of growth and development, and we have enacted a program to unlock more fully the economic potential of our ocean and coastal areas known as Operation Phakisa. Under Operation Phakisa-Oceans Economy, we aim to grow the ocean's contribution to the country's GDP significantly, unlocking up to a million jobs. In so doing, we have concurrently enacted strong measures to conserve our ocean and coastal biodiversity.

Mr President,

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, we hereby call for the mobilisation of new, additional and predictable international financial resources to complement traditional means of funding to bolster the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

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.

Former President Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". South Africa welcomes initiatives to expand training and education in the digital economy, enabling equitable access; particularly

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

Mr President,

We are pleased that the 2022 HLPF has agreed on a Political Declaration as its outcome, which stresses, inter alia, the importance of leaving no one behind as we pursue the 2030 Agenda, 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 and marine resources on Earth.

We fully support the Secretary General's call to "Build Back Better", as the path toward a better and truly inclusive development trajectory that will form part of the legacy of the post-COVID-19 response and recovery plans. 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,

In 2021, the UN Secretary-General gave the global community renewed hope when he presented a global vision of inclusive and transformed multilateralism. He proposed the adoption of a common agenda for humanity that will see us address climate change, conflict, poverty, and insecurity in a manner that promotes inclusion, shared development, and equality.

The 2021 General Assembly enthusiastically welcomed the Secretary General's initiative and committed to his common agenda. We thus began 2022 with renewed hope for the global community.

The Russia and Ukraine war has severely eroded that hope and has divided the world once again and diverted us from the Secretary General's common agenda.

Despite our calls for a ceasefire, and for UN-led negotiations, the war rages on, with millions displaced and thousands maimed and dead. We remain steadfast in our belief that war benefits no one and that all efforts should focus on the peaceful settlement of disputes.

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, the 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 to create a just and equitable global governance system.

I thank you.