



STATEMENT BY H.E MR CYRIL RAMAPHOSA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2021

President of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly, Mr Abdulla Shahid,
Secretary General, Mr António Guterres,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Colleagues,
Friends,

We join today's General Debate from around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed the nature of multilateral engagement, of diplomacy, of business, of basic human interaction.

And yet even as we are separated by the expanses of geography, the noble ideals of fellowship, solidarity and cooperation stand firm.

They are the bedrock on which the United Nations was formed 76 years ago, and they have been our guide as we confront the worst global health emergency in over a century.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great devastation around the world.

Millions of lives have been lost and livelihoods have been destroyed.

It has shaken our sense of well-being and security.

Yet, the strong bonds of solidarity between nations have enabled us to overcome great challenges.

It was through multilateral solidarity, support and cooperation between Member States that countries in need were able to access much needed medical equipment and supplies.

In dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic it is generally agreed that vaccines are the greatest defence that humanity has against the ravages of this pandemic. It is therefore a great concern that the global community has not sustained the principles of solidarity and cooperation in securing equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

It is an indictment on humanity that more than 82 per cent of the world's vaccine doses have been acquired by wealthy countries, while less than one per cent has gone to low-income countries.

Unless we address this as a matter of urgency, the pandemic will last much longer and new mutations of the virus will emerge.

South Africa reaffirms its call for fair and equitable distribution of vaccines.

We urge all member states to support the proposal for a temporary waiver of certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights to allow more countries, particularly low- and middle-income countries, to produce COVID-19 vaccines.

In this interconnected world, no country is safe until every country is safe.

We need to prepare now for future pandemics and work with greater determination towards the goal of universal health coverage.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must increase investment towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by providing low-income countries with the means of implementation.

In this respect, the G20 Debt Standstill Initiative is a welcome response to the fiscal and liquidity challenges faced by least developed economies.

The agreement on the allocation of \$650 billion in Special Drawing Rights is significant, but it is insufficient to meet the extent of the need.

South Africa therefore reiterates its call for 25% of the total allocation, amounting to around \$162 billion, to be made available to the African continent.

Mr President,

Climate change is an existential crisis for the entire world, yet poor countries are particularly vulnerable.

Although we bear the least responsibility for causing climate change, African countries are among those that carry the greatest cost.

For the forthcoming COP 26 in Glasgow to respond adequately to the crisis we face, we need to see greater ambition and progress on mitigation, adaptation and the means of implementation.

COP26 must therefore launch a formal programme of work on the implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation.

The pandemic has been a stark reminder of our mutual dependency, and that instability in one region of the world inevitably impacts its neighbours.

That is why we seek to enhance the relationship between the UN and the African Union in maintaining peace, financing peacebuilding efforts, and advancing post-conflict reconstruction and development.

South Africa continues with its efforts to contribute to international peace and security through our membership of the Peacebuilding Commission and our continued engagement in UN peacekeeping.

The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination has been raised in this General Assembly for almost as long as this body has been in existence.

We raise it again today, not because we are bound by practice to do so, but because we resolutely believe that there shall be no peace and no justice until the Palestinian people are free from occupation and are able to exercise the rights for which this United Nations stands.

We have a responsibility, as the nations of the world, to spare no effort in finding a just, lasting and peaceful solution based on internationally agreed parameters enshrined in the relevant UN resolutions.

We reiterate our position that the people of Western Sahara have the right to self-determination in line with the relevant African Union decisions and UN Security Council resolutions.

South Africa further affirms its solidarity with the Cuban people and calls for the lifting of the economic embargo that has caused untold damage to the country's economy and people.

Mr President,

This year marks 12 years since the start of the Inter-Governmental Negotiations process and 16 years since the World Summit of 2005, where world leaders unanimously agreed on early reform of the Security Council.

We have not honoured this undertaking.

South Africa reiterates its call for urgent reform and a move to text-based negotiations through which an agreement can ultimately be reached.

We must address the under-representation of the African continent in the UN system, and ensure that the voice of the African continent and of the Global South in general is strengthened in the multilateral system.

Concurrent with achieving equitable geographical representation in the UN we must also address the question of gender parity.

Yesterday, we marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at the World Conference against Racism in South Africa.

This remains the international community's blueprint for action to fight racism and other forms of intolerance.

We are bound by a common responsibility to fight both the legacy of past racism and the manifestation in the present.

Racism, like sexism, xenophobia and homophobia, demeans us all.

It undermines our humanity and stifles our efforts to build a world rooted in tolerance, respect and human rights.

Let us use this anniversary to renew our commitment to combatting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance wherever they are found.

Mr President,

The challenges we face are immense.

We have to drive the global recovery.

We have to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We have to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women.

We have to address climate change, maintain peace and security, and protect society's most vulnerable.

Above all, we must close the wounds of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment that are preventing societies from realising their full potential.

This can only be done within the framework of a revitalised and reformed multilateral system, with a strong, capable United Nations at its centre.

At this defining moment, this General Assembly of the nations of the world is once again being called upon to inspire, to guide and to lead.

The UN stands as a beacon of hope for all who dream of a better world.

Let us, together, with the United Nations as our instrument, write a new history for humankind – one of equality, freedom, fundamental rights and shared prosperity for all.

Leaving no-one behind

I thank you.