



**STATEMENT BY DR GNM PANDOR, MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND COOPERATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE
GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 77TH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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President of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly, His
Excellency Mr Csaba Kőrösi,
Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr António Guterres,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet at a time when the UN family is facing its greatest tests. Member states have to work with the United Nations to develop effective responses to the current challenges. As the theme of the general assembly indicates these are diverse, immense, yet interconnected challenges and no country can respond alone. Some have referred to this moment as a key turning point in history. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Eastern Europe shape our attitudes today, however for South Africa the real inflection point will be the world attending fully to the needs of the marginalised and forgotten. Our greatest global challenges are poverty inequality joblessness and feeling excluded. Acting on the Common

Agenda vision 2021 of the UN Secretary General should become the major objective of this time because addressing poverty and underdevelopment will be the beginnings of the real inflection point in human history.

The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and its human rights protocols all commit us to protecting all people without distinction of any kind. We must acknowledge that we face these crises today because we have not always upheld these foundational principles consistently and fairly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with a roadmap on what should be done and not done to address global challenges. We should use the lessons learnt effectively. There were some noble initiatives such as the Access to COVID-19 tools Accelerator (ACT-A) that was co-chaired by President Ramaphosa, the African Union Champion for the COVID response, and the Prime Minister of Norway. This initiative laid the basis for a fairer distribution of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.

Mr President, global solidarity is also required to meet other pressing challenges such as energy and food insecurity, climate change and the devastation caused by conflicts including the existential threat of nuclear weapons.

Instead of working collectively to address these challenges, we have grown further apart as geopolitical tensions and mistrust permeate our relations. We should, however, move forward in solidarity united in efforts to address our common global challenges to ensure sustainable peace and development.

Mr President,

One of the tasks we must successfully implement to ensure developing countries are not left behind when treatments are available is to create and support research and innovation capacity in Africa for vaccine production invest in strengthened public health systems and produce thousands more professional health workers. This requires sustainable investment in higher education research institutions and in global research cooperation.

The mobilisation of resources and capabilities to strengthen the pandemic response and preparedness of all nations must be substantially increased. It will be a tragic indictment on all of us as leaders if future pandemics found the poorest as unprepared as many were for COVID-19.

We need to strengthen the global health architecture to ensure that we are better able to meet the challenges of new pandemics and other diseases of concern. South Africa is proud to be part of this solution through the establishment of the first mRNA global technology transfer hubs that will contribute to the security of supply of life-saving medication for African countries and other developing countries.

Mr President,

South Africa, like many other developing countries, faces huge developmental challenges, including in our energy sector. We need to collectively address global energy shortages, including by deploying innovative solutions that are cheaper, cleaner and more accessible.

Working with international partners we are developing our Just Energy Transition Plan to significantly reduce harmful emissions in South Africa. Work on an expanded green economy is also gaining significant momentum.

Mr President,

We commend the Secretary-General for focussing attention on transforming education. Education remains one of the most important drivers to end poverty and inequality and we will work towards increasing the access to education that is affordable. South Africa has no fee schools at primary and secondary school levels for the most vulnerable learners. There is also a state bursary for poor students who qualify for tertiary education. These measures have over the years served to increase the enrolment of learners that were previously unable to access education.

In the field of research and innovation, we need more partnerships such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) science infrastructure project hosted in South Africa, which is an international partnership that is one of the largest scientific endeavours in history. Partnerships of this nature must be encouraged to leverage scientific breakthroughs for development purposes.

Mr President,

The multilateral trading system must be strengthened so that we genuinely create a conducive environment for fair trade that also provides opportunities for developing economies. If actionable steps such as these

are not taken, developing countries will remain subject to an imbalanced global financial and trading system.

Mr President,

Using this moment of renewal, we reiterate our commitment to multilateralism as the only means to build a better world. The United Nations itself must be transformed so that it serves its role cognisant of current global dynamics. It is unacceptable that 77 years after its establishment, five nations wield disproportionate decision-making power in the United Nations system as a whole. Transformation must include more representative, transparent and accountable organs of global governance. For the UN to be effective, the General Assembly must be revitalised, the Security Council must be reformed. We also cannot have a credible organisation if persistent transgressors of the Charter are not held accountable.

Mr President,

We must act immediately to protect the environment and the world we live in, for ourselves and for future generations. Africa is the least responsible for the climate crisis, and yet it finds itself at the epicentre of its worst impacts. We should therefore emerge from COP27, in Egypt, with an agreement that contains enhanced and balanced actions on adaptation, mitigation, and financing. This must take into account our common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. In addition, we must agree on a mechanism for loss and damage.

In South Africa, our Cabinet has approved wide-reaching policies to ensure that we can meet our climate change targets. We have established a Presidential Climate Finance Task Team to lead and coordinate negotiations with the International Partner Group to give effect to the Just Energy Transition Partnership or JETP. The JETP seeks to address South Africa's investment needs in infrastructure to facilitate our coal phase-down in a manner that ensures that no one is left behind.

Mr President,

Building a better world requires peace and stability. South Africa continues to believe that conflict resolution must not come through fuelling conflicts, but through investing in efforts aimed at political dialogue. We should aspire to peace as a global public good. There have been no winners of the wars of the past seven decades. Instead, they engendered strife, distrust among nations, divisions, a perpetual misallocation of resources to weapons, increased poverty and underdevelopment.

While we work to address contemporary conflicts, we should not ignore long-standing ones such as Palestine that has been on the United Nations' agenda throughout the seven decades of existence of the organisation. We cannot ignore the words of the former Israeli negotiator at the Oslo talks, Daniel Levy, who addressed the UN Security Council recently and referred to, "The increasingly weighty, body of scholarly, legal and public opinion that has designated Israel to be perpetrating apartheid in the territories under its control." Israel must be held accountable for its destructive actions that have significantly impaired the possibility of a two-state solution.

Similarly, we cannot ignore the decades-long struggle for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We must treat all conflicts across the globe with equal indignation, no matter what the colour or creed of the people affected.

South Africa calls for an end to the embargo against Cuba, which continues to impede the right to development of her people. In the same vein, we call for an end to unilateral coercive measures against Zimbabwe, which have compounded the problems experienced by the people of Zimbabwe and have a detrimental effect on the broader Southern African region.

Mr President,

Our quest to build a better world will remain unfulfilled as long as people are still discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, or language.

We have a responsibility to make sure that every girl child receives an education and that every woman has an opportunity to work, to study, to start a business and to have choice and control over her life and body.

We need to end the violence perpetrated against the most vulnerable, most often women and children. We have witnessed that women in conflict situations are particularly vulnerable, including women journalists. The killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, and others is a stark reminder of the dangers that women in conflict situations face. We must do all we can to protect them, and hold those accountable for harming them.

We must also strengthen the capacity and draw on the voices of the youth on the African continent. In this regard, we need to harness the demographic dividend by maximising our investment in quality education as a means to address intergenerational poverty, together with inclusive economies.

Mr President

Home to more than 1.3 billion people, Africa is fast emerging from centuries of colonialism, occupation and exploitation, from wilful neglect and under-development.

Through the African Continental Free Trade Area, the countries of Africa are laying a firm foundation for a new era of trade, commerce and productivity.

African countries are establishing the conditions for the seamless flow of goods and services between African markets, for the growth of industry and for the construction of the roads, bridges, railway lines, ports and power stations that will enable growth.

As we continue our efforts to end war, conflict and insurgency in several parts of our continent and to prevent the unconstitutional seizure of power, we will continue to seek greater alignment between the agendas of the United Nations and the African Union.

Mr President,

To overcome all these acutely global challenges, we must agree to a common path out of an increasingly polarised world. A rules-based international system, predicated on international law and strict adherence to the provisions of the UN Charter, is essential. Such a system must safeguard the interests of all and not only the powerful countries.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Secretary-General through his vision contained in the report on 'Our Common Agenda', to provide us with options to be able to put aside our differences, build trust and forge a world where future generations will prosper and thrive.

I thank you.