

79TH UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE

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±13.00

24 SEPTEMBER 2024

NEW YORK, USA

15 mins

President of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Philemon Yang,
United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thirty years ago, South Africa was born as a new nation; equal, united and free from apartheid. We adopted a new constitution as the birth certificate of our new nation.

Our first democratic elections brought the tyranny of apartheid to an end, a system that this General Assembly declared to be a crime against humanity.

In adopting Resolution 2202 A (XXI) in 1966, the United Nations was a beacon of hope in our quest for justice.

The great wave of solidarity of the peoples of the world led by the United Nations turned the tide against apartheid.

Today democracy flourishes in South Africa.

We have a progressive constitution, an entrenched human rights culture and strong institutions.

We have laws to advance equality, and programmes to protect society's most marginalized.

We continue to transform our economy so that it is more competitive, creates more jobs, attracts more investment, and benefits all.

South Africa is party to global treaties on human rights, gender equality, child rights, refugee protection and environmental protection.

A few days ago South Africa also endorsed the Pact for the Future, that charts the course for a better future for global governance and towards the attainment of the SDGs.

As signatory to the Paris Agreement, we are contributing our fair share towards the global effort, and have a Just Energy Transition Plan to guide our low-carbon, climate resilient development.

Through the African Union, we are working to advance Agenda 2063. We are involved in mediation and conflict resolution across the continent, and actively contribute to peacekeeping missions.

Our political culture has evolved and matured.

We have just held our seventh free and fair general election since democracy, paving the way for the formation of a Government of National Unity.

Ten political parties have coalesced around a common agenda for economic growth, job creation, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

We are in a new era, one of great promise.

In what some have called our second miracle, South Africans of all races have rallied behind the Government of National Unity.

We are making headway in resolving some of our most pressing challenges. Our economy has begun to improve and investor confidence is on the rise.

Our country's prospects look bright, and we look to the future with hope.

The South African story bears witness to the enduring role of the United Nations in global affairs.

In supporting our struggle, the UN affirmed the principles of the UN Charter – fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of every person, and the equal rights of nations large and small.

It affirmed the aspiration contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that we should strive for a world free of barbarous acts that outrage the conscience of mankind.

Genocide was declared to be a stain on the conscience of the world. And the world community took a stand against it.

Apartheid was declared a crime against humanity and a stain on the conscience of the world. The United Nations took a stand against it.

These were crimes against humanity then, and they are crimes against humanity now.

Mr. President,

It has been eleven months since the Hamas attack that killed 1 200 people and where hostages were taken. As South Africa we have condemned this attack.

In response, Israel embarked on collective punishment in its assault on Gaza

The torment of the people of Gaza continues unabated.

More than 40 000 Palestinians have been killed.

Homes, hospitals and schools lie destroyed.

Famine and disease stalk the streets.

This cannot but shock our collective humanity.

The violence the Palestinian people are being subjected to is a grim continuation of more than half a century of apartheid.

We South Africans know what apartheid looks like.

We lived through it. We suffered and died under it.

We will not remain silent and watch as apartheid is perpetrated against others.

Through the United Nations and the instruments it wields, we must end this suffering.

We are called uphold the principles of the UN Charter, and to uphold – consistently and in their entirety – the fundamental tenets of international law.

International law cannot be applied selectively. No one state is more equal than any other.

In December last year, South Africa approached the International Court of Justice seeking an order to prevent Israel from committing genocide against the people of Gaza.

We did so in terms of our obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

As South Africa we welcome the support that a number of countries have given to the case that we launched at the ICJ.

The ICJ's orders make it clear that that there is a plausible case of genocide against the people of Gaza.

They further make it clear that States must also act to prevent genocide by Israel - and ensure that they are not themselves in violation of the Genocide Convention by aiding or assisting in the commission of genocide.

We reiterate our call for an immediate cease fire, and for the release of all hostages.

The only lasting solution is the establishment of a Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Our moral conscience further demands that we exert every effort to bring peace to the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Sudan, to Yemen, to Ukraine and to the troubled Sahel region.

We must realise the aspirations of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination.

Achieving and maintaining peace and security requires the collective will of the community of nations.

It requires that the UN Security Council is representative and inclusive.

Seventy--eight years since its formation, the structure of the UN Security Council remains largely unchanged.

Africa and its 1,4 billion people remain excluded from its key decision-making structures.

The Security Council has not fulfilled its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

The UN Security Council must be reformed as a matter of urgency. It must become more inclusive so that the voices of all nations are heard and considered.

Africa stands ready to play its part in building a safer global order.

The African Union and its member states are engaged in mediation, dialogue, and diplomacy across the continent, to create conditions under which peace and development can take hold.

There must be greater collaboration between the AU and the UN towards resolving these conflicts, and also in addressing their root causes.

Pandemics and endemics pose a serious threat to us all.

We are concerned by the spread of MPOX across the world, and Africa in particular.

We urge the international community to mobilise vaccine stockpiles and other medical counter measures for deployment where they are most needed.

Economic prosperity is key to sustainable peace.

Through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, we are establishing the foundation for a massive increase in trade and investment in infrastructure.

The AfCFTA will further integrate regional economies and accelerate Africa's industrialisation.

The climate crisis is now a full-blown climate emergency.

The impacts have been swift and devastating. Extreme weather such as flooding, fires and droughts is wreaking havoc on societies, economies and livelihoods.

Despite being least responsible for climate change, developing economy countries and particularly African countries are on the front line.

As South Africa we remain committed to contributing our fair share to reduce global emissions, guided by the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.

We have adaptation and mitigation programmes and policies in place, and have passed a Climate Change Bill to further support our emissions reduction targets.

It is essential that climate actions do not deepen global inequality or stifle the developmental aspirations of the Global South.

The industrialised nations are not honouring their climate commitments, and we repeat the call for predictable and sustainable financing for climate action.

We must operationalise the agreed-upon climate financing and capacity building instruments to advance mitigation and adaptation.

Pursing sustainable development necessitates that those with the means should support those who lack them.

The world faces annual financing gap of USD 4 trillion to achieve sustainable development.

We call on better resourced countries to scale up their levels of support to developing nations .

Debt is the millstone around the neck of developing countries – stifling their potential.

Debt servicing is robbing countries of much-needed funds for health, education and social spending.

South Africa endorses the UN Secretary-General's call for reform of the global financial architecture to enable developing countries to lift themselves out of the quicksand of debt.

We must commit to systems for financing development that are more accessible, agile and equitable.

In 2025 South Africa will assume the presidency of the G20.

We will use this important role to advocate for the peoples of Africa and for all the global South.

South Africa welcomes the adoption of the Pact for the Future.

It is a platform for us focus on those actions we need to take together to build a world in which the equal worth of every person and the equal worth of every country is recognised and valued.

We particularly welcome the commitments to place poverty eradication at the center of all our efforts; and for the SDG financing gap in developing countries to be closed.

The disparities in wealth and development within and between countries is unjust and unsustainable.

We must continue to strive for equal treatment, opportunity and advancement for all individuals and nations.

The Pact for the Future must reinvigorate international solidarity.

Like veins that carry sustenance to every part of the body, solidarity is the lifeblood of human progress.

It binds us together to nourish the greater good.

It is achieving the greater good, for the common good, to which we all strive.

Through dialogue, through respect for the rule of law, through the advancement of human rights, through cooperation and solidarity, we can – and we will – achieve a better world.

I thank you.