

Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of the General Debate of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations, New York, 23 September 2025

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International Relations and Cooperation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

President of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly, Ms Annalena Baerbock,
United Nations Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Eighty years ago, the United Nations was established to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and build a peaceful, prosperous and just world arising from the devastation brought about by global conflict.

Through the UN Charter, the nations of the world pledged to uphold peace, development and human rights underpinned by international law.

Now more than ever, we are called upon to uphold the values and advance the purpose of the United Nations.

We are called upon to advance cooperation and solidarity between nations.

We are called upon to promote multilateralism and safeguard the institutions that enable it.

South Africa's engagement in the international sphere echoes our domestic imperatives of eradicating poverty, reducing unemployment and addressing the root causes of inequality.

Our foreign policy is guided not only by the needs of our people, but also those of the continent of Africa and the Global South.

Inspired by our own history, South Africa strives to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes through negotiation and dialogue, not war.

We therefore welcome the strong partnership between the African Union and the United Nations in promoting peace, security and stability on the African continent.

This year, South Africa is honoured to preside over the G20.

This is the first time that the G20 Leaders' Summit will be held on the African Continent, the Cradle of Humankind.

South Africa's G20 Presidency is guided by the theme of *Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability*.

As Member States of the United Nations, we adopted the Sustainable Development Goals.

Many of these goals remain elusive.

There are many reasons that hold many countries from fulfilling and implementing these development goals. Some of the reasons are lack of sufficient financial resources.

Many countries with developing economies, especially in Africa, do not have adequate capital to finance their development goals. They are indebted and are paying more on debt servicing than they do on health and education.

Yet through global solidarity, by having fairer lending rules especially for several countries of the Global South, we can achieve our shared commitment.

Through the G20 process we are working towards consensus on how this problem can be tackled, including the reform of international financial institutions, particularly multilateral development banks, to better tackle global challenges.

The multilateral trading system needs to be reformed as we re-confirm that the World Trade Organisation remains the only multilateral body capable of managing differences and coordinating positions in global trade.

Trade is one of the most important instruments to mobilise domestic resources for development.

It is concerning that geopolitical shocks and unprecedented trade policy volatility are destabilising the global economy and jeopardising a critical source of development financing.

We must redouble our efforts to strengthen the link between trade and development.

Unilateral trade practices and economic coercion have a detrimental impact on many nations. This includes the economic embargo against Cuba, which has caused untold damage to the country's economy over the years. This unfair embargo must be lifted.

In the midst of global trade uncertainty, the African continent is providing a pragmatic example of constructive collaboration by using the African Continental Free Trade Area as an engine for sustainable growth and development.

This will, with commitment, become the central pillar of economic cooperation and integration for our continent.

As part of the effort to build more inclusive economies, South Africa's G20 Presidency has launched an Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Wealth Inequality.

This committee, chaired by Professor Joseph Stiglitz a Nobel laureate, will deliver the first-ever report on global inequality to G20 leaders.

Climate change is an existential threat.

We are failing future generations by our inability to reduce global warming.

Climate change is reversing economic growth and development gains in many countries, especially in the Global South.

Although Africa carries the least responsibility for climate change, many countries on the continent experience much of its harshest effects.

Extreme weather events like floods and droughts are driving food insecurity, displacing populations, causing damage to infrastructure and leading to the unnecessary loss of livelihoods.

Member States must honour their undertakings and commitments in line with the guiding principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

The Secretary-General recently reported that global military expenditure has reached historic highs just as the world is falling behind on its core development promises.

We are building weapons, when we should be building social infrastructure.

We are fighting wars that cause death and destruction, when we should be fighting poverty and developing the livelihoods of vulnerable people.

We must act decisively to silence all guns, everywhere, to realise the goal of sustainable development and global peace.

As we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the UN, the relevance of this institution and multilateral processes for the maintenance of international peace and security is being wilfully undermined.

There is an increasing reliance on unilateral military action in contravention of international law.

The United Nations Security Council has proven to be ineffective in its current form and composition in carrying out its Charter mandate to maintain international peace and security.

South Africa remains deeply concerned by the erosion of the credibility of the Security Council and its failure to ensure accountability and uphold international law.

As the security and humanitarian situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Gaza and elsewhere deteriorate, it is a matter of grave concern that there are countries that continue to violate international law and defy UN resolutions and rulings from bodies like the International Court of Justice.

The establishment of the Hague Group and the Madrid Group aim to reaffirm the primacy of international law, promoting accountability and ensuring support for a just peace.

We cannot and should not accept that members of this Organisation continue to violate without consequence the Charter that we have all agreed to uphold.

Therefore, as nations that have pledged to uphold the UN Charter, we have the ultimate responsibility to ensure and protect the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Consistent with the case that South Africa brought before the International Court of Justice, there is growing global consensus that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

Just last week, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry found that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza.

As Palestinians continue to face genocide and famine, we have a duty to act.

We welcome the historic High-Level Meeting held yesterday on the Two-State Solution yesterday in this chamber. This reflects the determination of the global majority that Palestinians deserve a peaceful state alongside a peaceful Israel.

The long overdue announcement by an increasing number of countries to recognise the State of Palestine is testament to this determination.

We have a responsibility as the Member States of the United Nations to reaffirm the right of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

The very first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, in January 1946, called for the elimination of atomic weapons.

The resolution was passed shortly after the catastrophic use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Decades later, we have not made significant progress in the fulfilment of the commitment to nuclear disarmament.

In 2026, South Africa will be presiding over the first review conference of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

This Treaty reaffirms that there is no greater assurance of non-proliferation than the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.

This year, we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as a roadmap for the achievement of gender equality.

South Africa reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the empowerment of women and their full, equal and meaningful participation in all spheres of life.

This milestone reminds us of our shared responsibility to advance human rights, dignity and justice for all.

The right to development must be central to the policies and operational activities of the UN and its specialised agencies, programmes and funds.

It must be at the core of the policies and strategies of the international financial and multilateral trading systems.

As we celebrate 80 years of the United Nations, we must seize the opportunity to build a better UN for the next 80 years.

What is needed now is a stronger and more capable United Nations, based on a renewed commitment to its founding principles.

We must invigorate the negotiations on Security Council reform at the Inter-Governmental Negotiations in the General Assembly, including by initiating text-based negotiations.

The Security Council must be more accountable, representative, democratic and effective in executing its mandate.

We look forward to working with the Secretary-General on the UN80 Initiative to ensure that our Organisation works more effectively and efficiently.

Mandates given by Member States must be implemented and the necessary structural changes and programme realignment must be implemented across the UN system.

In the face of the decrease in funding to the United Nations to fulfil its mandate, the UN80 Initiative is important to maintain the integrity of the multilateral system and to uphold international law.

Lastly, I am reminded that our collective membership of the United Nations is our shared humanity in action.

The UN at 80 compels us to reflect on our collective achievements, and to chart a way forward in building an Organisation that is able to address our common challenges.

We must rise to the occasion and do our utmost together to ensure the political, economic and social freedom of all humanity.

We must reaffirm that freedom is indivisible and that the denial of the rights of one person diminishes the freedom of us all.

We must reaffirm the equal dignity and worth of every person and must therefore leave no-one behind.

I thank you.

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