



PERMANENT MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
333 EAST 38TH STREET 9TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 213-5583 Fax: (212) 692-2498
Email: pmun@southafrica-newyork.net

STATEMENT

BY

**H.E. MR CYRIL RAMAPHOSA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
73RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Madame President of the 73rd Session of UN General Assembly, Ms María Fernanda Espinosa,
Secretary General, Mr António Guterres,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Majesties,
Heads of Delegation,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I have the honour to address this august body, the United Nations General Assembly for the first time as President of the Republic of South Africa.

It is nearly a quarter of a century since the founding father of our democracy, President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela stood at this podium to declare that:

“The millions across our globe who stand expectant at the gates of hope look to this organisation [the United Nations], to bring them peace, to bring them life, to bring them a life worth living.”

As we mark the centenary of the birth of this great global leader, we are bound to ask whether the United Nations has met the needs and the expectations of the millions who stand at the gates of hope.

We are bound to ask what contribution the United Nations has made to a more peaceful, more prosperous and more equal world.

More importantly, we are called upon to ask – as we did yesterday during the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit – what the United Nations and the assembled global leadership must do to secure lasting peace, reconciliation and stability across the globe.

Allow me to express the deep gratitude of the government and the people of South Africa to the international community for convening the Peace Summit to honour the memory of Nelson Mandela and advance his legacy.

We applaud the Political Declaration of the Summit, which recognises the period from 2019 to 2028 as the Nelson Mandela Decade of Peace.

This reflects a new and sincere commitment by the world’s leaders to comprehensively advance peace and security and resolve all conflicts and wars.

To succeed in giving effect to this commitment, the UN must become what billions of people across the world want it to be – a representative and truly democratic global parliament of the people.

Throughout its seven decades, the UN has been a source of hope for the oppressed, exploited and poor.

During the dark days of colonialism and apartheid, we drew strength, inspiration and encouragement from the UN and its Charter in our quest for self-determination.

To the poor, vulnerable, and marginalised, the UN today is a beacon of promise in a landscape of doubt.

To billions across the world, the UN is the most powerful instrument we possess to achieve a more equal, more humane and more inclusive world.

They are men and women with dreams and aspirations that transcend the hardships of the present, who want to contribute to a new global civilization defined by compassion, justice and solidarity.

They want an end to the greed, ignorance and conceit that is driving the destruction of our only home, the earth.

It is within our hands, as the leaders assembled here today, to forge a more representative, equal and fair United Nations that is empowered and equipped to lead the struggle to end poverty, unemployment and inequality in the world.

We are a youthful world, where more than half the global population is under the age of 30 years.

One of the greatest challenges to the achievement of global prosperity and development is the continued exclusion of millions of women and young people from meaningful economic participation.

It is therefore vital that we deploy every means at our disposal to address youth unemployment and ensure universal access to educational opportunities that are appropriate to the changing world of work.

We need a deliberate programme to ensure that the digital revolution – which carries such great potential for both disruption and empowerment – is effectively harnessed to promote social justice and human progress.

The call to leave no one behind requires that we strengthen the institutions of global governance and make them more responsive to the needs of young people, particularly in the developing world.

This is even more pronounced on our continent, Africa, where two-thirds of its people were not yet born when Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

This places a responsibility on us, as leaders, not only to put the interests of young people at the centre of our efforts, but also to empower women and young people to be more prominent in directing the course of global affairs.

It is young people who are fighting the wars that we started.

It is women who are bearing the brunt and hardships of the wars that continue to destroy their families and lives.

As we speak, young lives are being lost and futures are being destroyed.

There is an urgency to the measures we must take to end conflict and war.

Not only must we stop the death, destruction and human suffering that is visited daily on millions of people, but we must act with purpose to prevent the loss of another entire generation to its aftermath.

We must accept our shared responsibility – and our shared interest – in ending conflict, and, using the outcomes of the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, to empower the United Nations to be a more effective instrument for mediation, peace keeping and post-conflict reconstruction. In this spirit it is crucial that we should preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, which was one of the most important breakthroughs in international diplomacy in recent times.

Our resolve to end ongoing conflicts and our determination to root out terrorism must be matched by action and by the appropriate deployment of resources.

We must act with the same urgency to resolve some of the world's most protracted and intractable disputes.

The fact that the people of Palestine have endured occupation and suffering for nearly as long as the United Nations has existed, makes their plight no less pressing, nor their suffering any less acceptable.

We must similarly intensify our efforts to secure the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination and full national sovereignty.

Institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and the WTO need to be reshaped and enhanced so that they may more effectively meet the challenges of the contemporary world and better serve the interests of the poor and marginalised.

Reform of the United Nations, and particularly its Security Council, is a priority if we are to give full effect to the values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. In this regard, South Africa would like to express its profound gratitude for the strong mandate it received to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the period 2019 to 2020.

We must resist any and all efforts to undermine the multilateral approach to international trade, which is essential to the promotion of stability and predictability in the global economy.

The history of the global economy informs us that no country can prosper at the expense of all others, and that no people can hope to live in comfort and security for as long as millions of others languish in poverty.

It is therefore essential that we take collective responsibility for the development of all nations and for the improvement of the lives of all people.

This responsibility is manifest in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on the financing of development, among others.

Together, they represent our common commitment to tackle poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation.

They represent our common commitment to tackle diseases like Aids, tuberculosis, malaria, diabetes and cancer.

Our task as global leaders is to pursue the policies that are required to turn intent into implementation and mobilise the resources needed to turn implementation into impact.

Your Excellencies,

As Africans, we have made significant strides in addressing the challenges that have confronted our continent over many decades.

We continue to vigorously implement our commitments contained in the African Union Agenda 2063, which is our collective plan to rid our continent of underdevelopment, poverty and conflict and improve democratic governance, the rule of law and the promotion of human rights.

We have reached agreement on the establishment of an African Continental Free Trade Area, which will fundamentally transform African economies, giving rise to a new industrial age on the continent.

We are working to silence the guns in Africa by 2020, to bring an end to conflicts that have cost the lives of millions of our people, displaced many more and stunted economic growth and human development.

As the continent with the youngest population in the world, Africa has the potential to be the next great frontier for global growth.

With effective investment in education, improved health care, good governance and greater economic integration, Africa has the potential to develop its productive capacity on a scale and at a rate that will lift tens of millions out of poverty.

The youth of Africa are poised to transform their continent.

Allow me to conclude by once more drawing on the wisdom of Nelson Mandela, when he said: *"Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great."*

This is not the generation that will stand expectant at the gates of hope. This is the generation that will change the world. This is their time, and this is their age.

Let their greatness blossom.

I thank you.