

**Budget Vote Speech by the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation,
H.E. Ms N.C. Mfeketo, National Assembly, Cape Town**

22 Jul 2014

Honourable Chairperson;
Honourable Members;
Your Excellencies Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Representatives of International Organisations;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen;
Fellow South Africans;
Comrades and Friends,

I am honoured to address this house on this a very important occasion of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation.

It is important to remember that the 20 years of democracy we celebrate today is a result of a negotiated solution taken through the collective wisdom of the visionary leadership of the time. There were other options that could have been pursued if we were driven by short-sighted, vengeful ambitions of settling scores with perpetrators of injustice. The celebration of the 20 years of democracy is a reaffirmation of the correct decisions taken then by the wisdom of the collective leadership, with the long gaze into the future for later generations to continue building on a firm non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

With this as the spine of our freedom, we stand upright with reassurance to build upon our work with great zest in the next five for the execution of solid plans, which in turn contribute to the long-term goals of the National Development Plan (NDP).

During the release of the 20 Year Review of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma appraised the nation as follows, (I quote):

"This is an occasion to reflect on what has been achieved in our country over the past twenty years, by South Africans working together...The Twenty Year Review is packed with facts and figures to support its analysis and it is honest and frank in its approach. Where the facts indicate that we have made progress, we say so, and where the facts indicate that we have challenges and have made mistakes, we also say so".

(Close quote)

We also move forward into the future with great optimism to realise a prosperous Africa which is at peace with itself as well as a better world as the great Madiba once envisioned. Although Madiba may be with us no more in physical form, especially with the reminder of his first birthday last week, we continue to treasure his memory and the 67 minutes of service marks the invention of a new tradition in the history of our country henceforth. It most fitting to therefore to pause for a moment and salute this, a great son of Africa in Madiba as well as all departed leaders and dedicated cadres that served and sacrificed their lives for this great nation of ours.

Honourable Chairperson and Honourable Members,

As we gather in this House for this important speech and celebrating our 20 years of democracy and freedom, a human tragedy is unfolding in the Middle East. An injustice and gross loss of human life which cannot go unabated in Gaza and other regions of that sacred region of the world is continuing as I stand

here. This tragedy could also serve as a vindication of our collective wisdom in South Africa as the same fate could just be on our shores had we gone the route of military combat. As we celebrate our freedom, let us remember that for other oppressed peoples in the world, this is but a distant dream but we have much to share as we are.

Last week, in the wake of the Israeli offensive into Palestine, we called in the Ambassador of Israel to express our grave concern over the escalation of violence between Israel and Palestinian territories, which has resulted in the loss of civilian life and the destruction of property in Gaza.

We called on both parties to immediately observe a ceasefire and for the State of Israel to allow safe and free passage of civilians and the operation of humanitarian organisations to alleviate the suffering.

Furthermore, we called on both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to immediately resume negotiations leading to a two-state solution with a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel, within mutually agreed and internationally recognised borders based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital;

We demanded the immediate halt to the construction and expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by the Israeli Government, which not only violates international law, but also gravely undermines peace efforts, and threatens the viability of the two-State solution.

We re-iterate all the above positions and continue to oppose any threat of ground invasion and urge the State of Israel to refrain from making utterances that may worsen the situation;

We object to any attempt to use the current situation to undermine the Unity Government in Palestine whose advent was warmly welcomed by peace-loving people the world over;
In addition, the South African Government demands that the Israeli authorities lift all restrictions to the importation of building material and equipment into the Gaza Strip to enable destitute families and the Gaza Administration to re-build homes and infrastructure.

That is because as South Africa, we have a sense of duty to the people both the peoples of Palestine and Israel to support them in their quest for freedom, democracy and self-determination under respected sovereignty. We have to urgently apply our minds to respond effectively to halting the catastrophe by all the peaceful means we can master.

Going back to Madiba as far as this tragedy unfolds and rightly so (I quote):

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances freedoms of others."

Close quote

It is also fact our government has achieved substantially in the last 20 years. Despite all that, however, our country is still grappling with challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty which are the direct result of the 300 years of brute colonialism and the legacy of apartheid.

We have developed and are moving forward in the course of our international engagements. South Africa's relations with nations of the world have deepened and strengthened over the last two decades. Today we are active members of the international community, with membership in various global fora. We will continue making use of our key strategic membership in these fora to strengthen our support for

the African Agenda, especially the AU Agenda 2063, which the Minister has already addressed in her statement.

Just like Africa, Americas and Europe-Asia and the Middle East continue to occupy a very special place in our foreign policy. Today our country boasts strategic diplomatic relations with countries of these regions.

South Africa's relations with Asia

Asia has emerged to change the face of international power dynamics and the strong ties South Africa has historically forged with Asia places us in a great opportunity to take a greater role in the making of a new era in international relations.

In the last decade, Asia has emerged to be South Africa's number one trading partner with trade having grown from approximately R40 billion in 1994 to almost twenty times more at approximately R760 billion in 2013. Multilaterally, South Africa co-operates with some of the key partners in Asia and other regions in organizations such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

This is a good story and a highlight of the success of our foreign policy engagements for this bears directly on our economic diplomacy objectives which in return add to core domestic tenet of our governance, namely job creation.

Our relations with countries of this region such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, among others, remain excellent and continue to receive attention. These countries are important to our socio-economic and political agenda. Our government continues to engage these countries through various structured bilateral meetings, some of which took place in 2013. The objectives of these bilateral interactions are to, among others, follow up on commitments made earlier and identify further areas of potential cooperation in fields such as trade, investment and tourism, and in sectors such as health, education and infrastructure development.

It is also humbling when we as a country are often requested to share our experience and implementation of collective wisdom in conflict resolution, national reconciliation and nation building.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation as well as nation-building experiences are of great interest to a number of countries in South Asia such as Sri Lanka and Nepal. In fact, of the more recent interactions between Sri Lanka and South Africa, was the visit to that beautiful country by the Deputy President of South Africa, in his capacity as President Jacob Zuma's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka, Honourable Mr Cyril Ramaphosa on 7-8 July 2014.

As President Jacob Zuma's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka, the Deputy President met President Mahindra Rajapaksa and other political leaders in discussions on how best to possibly share South Africa's own experiences of the past 20 years of our journey towards transformation with a focus on truth, reconciliation and nation building.

Honourable members;

Not so long ago President Zuma, accompanied by a delegation of Ministers and business people, visited Malaysia in August 2013, with a view to further strengthen socio-economic bilateral relations.

Within the context of our country's foreign policy priority which seeks to strategically enhance our partnership with the developed North, South Africa's bilateral relationship with Japan reached the

pinnacle of bilateral co-existence when these relations were elevated in 2010 to “Strategic Cooperation Partnership.” Japan is South Africa’s second largest trade partner in Asia after China. The ties between South Africa and Japan are multifaceted and span many technical areas of cooperation. Approximately 112 Japanese companies with investments in South Africa provide skills development training to their South African employees who are our own nationals. This initiative contributes immensely to the transfer of technology which is supportive of our industrial strategies.

Our bilateral relations with Japan span a broad spectrum of human endeavour. We are particularly pleased that this country continues to provide valuable scientific and technical cooperation and skills development to our country. In 2013, bilateral trade with Japan was in the amount of R 93 billion and growing rapidly. The 13th Partnership Forum meeting will soon be hosted by Japan and is scheduled to take place in Tokyo during this second half of 2014.

As far as South Africa’s bilateral ties with the Republic of Korea (ROK) are concerned, we continue to engage with a view to further maximising economic and technical cooperation opportunities. South Korea is South Africa's 4th largest trade partner in Asia. In 2013 bilateral trade was in the region of R30.2 billion. The 8th Policy Consultative Forum South Korea is scheduled to take place in Seoul later this year.

We continue to deepen co-operation with Central Asia which is gaining strategic prominence on the world stage. We also want to honour in this House the presence of a new Asian Mission with the resident Embassy of Kazakhstan established in Pretoria.

China and Mongolia are two countries that remain our good friends, and therefore critical not only to our own development but also that of the African continent as a whole. The People’s Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa a privileged relations as we share a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Trade between our two countries has grown to such an extent that China has since become our biggest trading partner in 2009. This achievement has been sustained since and is being intensified at all fronts every day. Bilateral and Trade co-existence trade with China has grown from R118,5 billion in 2009 to R142,9 billion in 2010, R193,8 billion in 2011, R204,7 in 2012 and R270.1 billion in 2013.

Given the nature of our trade relations, currently dominated by the export of raw materials, it is inevitable that there will be a trade deficit on the South African side. However, both sides are working extremely hard to manage these relations in a more sophisticated manner, particularly concerning concerted efforts to increase beneficiation of our exports products within South Africa before they leave our shores. We have targeted various industries, such as jewellery design and polishing, the automotive industry, agro-processing, manufacturing, and so on.

The Joint Working Group on South Africa-China Co-operation, established in March 2013, with its main focus on trade, investment, infrastructure and market access, will be an instrument to balance trade relations between the two countries. The Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a multilateral instrument through which China provides development assistance and support to African countries. As co-chairs, we will be working closely with China over the next five years to ensure the implementation of the 5th FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2013/15). In this regard, we will be hosting the 6th FOCAC Ministerial in 2015.

Even more interesting, as we celebrate 20 years of our Freedom, we are simultaneously celebrating the Year of South Africa in China. These celebrations comprise of cultural events, trade seminars and exhibitions, participation in film festivals where the movie adaptation of the story of our beloved Madiba is shown. The visits by key delegations and solidifying thereto are already growing the critical people-to-people relations.

Honourable Chairperson;

Oceania is a key region for South Africa. It is a region that presents many opportunities for our country, especially in terms of trade. This area of engagement has not yet developed to its full potential, as is evident from trade figures. In terms of trade with Australia, for example, which is our largest trading partner in the region, total trade figures for 2013 amounted to around R20 billion. More could and should be done in this important area. A Bilateral Plan of Action between South Africa and Australia, which was adopted in 2013, provides the framework for conducting our bilateral relations. Areas of cooperation include trade and investment, energy, people-to-people links, as well as development cooperation and education.

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project which was jointly awarded to South Africa and Australia in 2012 is another issue that enjoys a prominent position in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. This project has led to significant achievements in radio telescope development, radio astronomy and the development of a dynamic, vibrant, growing and world-class base of scientists and engineers in the SKA South Africa and Australia teams, in universities in South Africa, and increasingly in other African countries.

South Africa's relations with the Middle East

The Middle East region remains critical for us especially in view of the fact that we are intent on fully intensifying our robust socio-economic transformation strategy in the next five years. For us to realise the fruits of this strategy, we need a stable region. On the contrary and most challenging, however, the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is entering its fourth year with costs to human lives at more than 140 000 people and counting. The displacement of more than 4 million as a result of this war had elevated the Syria crisis or conflict to become one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent history.

It is an indictment on the current system of global governance's ability to bring a speedy end to international conflicts and the suffering of the people of Syria especially the most vulnerable groups, women and children. The increasing instability within Syria's immediate neighbours and the Middle East region as a whole, caused by the conflict, is detrimental to the interests of our country. We believe that no military solution to the crisis exists and that the opposing factions will, inevitably, solve their differences around the negotiation table. We will also continue to raise this issue as part of our agenda in our bilateral and multilateral engagements.

In a similar vein, we will continue our efforts with regard to the Middle East Peace Process by pursuing a nuanced and focused diplomatic approach as far as the peace process is concerned. We have been officially requested by the Palestinian National Authority to remain engaged in the Middle East Peace Process until such time that lasting peace can be realised.

As a country, we have continued to demonstrate our commitment to Palestine through a range of activities in support for the UN declaration of 2014 as the 'International Year of Solidarity with Palestine'. We have successfully hosted a Heads of Mission Conference for Palestinian Ambassadors accredited to Africa on 29 – 30 April 2014, including a Palestinian Solidarity Seminar in Cape Town on 2 May 2014. This initiative brought together academia and civil society.

Honourable Members;

The year 2014 also commemorates South Africa's twentieth anniversary of diplomatic relations with most of the countries of the Gulf States. South Africa has cordial relations with the Gulf States manifested in the strong economic as evidenced by last year's exports reaching over R18 billion.

In this region, South Africa also receives an important source for South Africa's energy fuels especially oil. Just last year, half of South Africa's crude oil imports came from Saudi Arabia.

Some important investments, amounting to hundreds of millions of Rands, have been made by the Gulf States in South Africa. Most of these investments have been made in South Africa's real estate sector and its hospitality industry.

With regards to the current situation in Iran, our government has consistently emphasised the importance of a peaceful resolution to the outstanding questions regarding the nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. We have welcomed the successful conclusion of the negotiations between the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which culminated in the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action on 24 November 2013. South Africa supports continued negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran to reach a final comprehensive agreement. We remain committed to the maintenance of good bilateral relations with Iran and seek to position these relations for a post-sanctions era.

Public Participation Programmes (Imbizo) and Public Diplomacy

It is vital that our people should be aware of our international relations policies, as this is the thrust of public accountability. Public participation and public diplomacy remain critical strategies to achieve this aim. We will achieve this through ongoing campaigns and programmes.

Honourable members, let me draw from the wells of wisdom of the inspiring message President Zuma shared on the occasion of the State of the Nation Address of the 5th Administration when he said: (I quote):

"As part of our 20 years of freedom and democracy celebrations, all archive material or records turning 20 years this year, such as those of the late former President Nelson Mandela's first days in Office, will be transferred to the National Archives. This year will also see the listing of the CODESA Multi-Party Negotiating Forum Records in the International Memory of the World Register".

Close quote

All this archiving of information is a direct invitation for us to utilise this rich history in order to strengthen our various programmes in the next five years and beyond. This milestone also emphasises the importance of our heritage and its significance, especially the advancement of the legacy of those who laid down their lives for our freedom and struggle. We shall never forget them.

Honourable Chairperson;
Honourable Members,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Our government is of the opinion that a united Palestine will be better placed to represent their people in the effort to obtain independence.

Ilizwe lethu nemanyano yehlabathi zimele ukuthabatha olunye unyawo ekupheliseni imo egqubayo phakathi kwelizwe lakwaSirayeli nelamaPalestina. Ukubukela kutshatyaliswa imiphefumlo yabantwana, abantu abadala, namakhosikazi ngokungenalusini ePalestina kulento yenzekayo yoluhlaselo akusoze kunyamezeleke na nini na.

We are of a firm view that the tangible benefits of our relations with countries in Asia and the Middle East must be felt by the ordinary masses of our people. If we can be able to achieve this milestone, we will have set our relations with the region on the right path.

Knowing how to use international relations policy to achieve domestic priorities is a strategy we have to continue to strengthen and deepen in the next five years. After all, it is in the interest of our citizens that we educate them about our foreign policy, and how it can respond to our domestic priorities.

It is imperative that a good story of our international relations be told in our successes or achievements, challenges or otherwise to the level of each and every South African as all our endeavours are on the behalf. We invite you therefore to all come with us on this, a remarkable journey towards Africa's Renaissance and our country and continent's assumption of its rightful place among the international community.

Let us look back and reflect on where we come from. It is only through this noble act that we will find courage and inspiration to build a people-centred foreign policy, supported by our own history and inspired by the vision we have for this country and the renaissance of the African continent as a whole, for our past, present and the future.

I thank you.

Issued by: [Department of International Relations and Cooperation](#)