

## **Opening Remarks for SAIIA's Trade and Climate Change Conference, October 2009**

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen: it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the South African Institute of International Affairs' Trade and Climate Change Conference. We meet against intense preparations for international negotiations on Climate Change that will take place in 50 days time when the UN Climate Change Conference will meet in Copenhagen to find solutions to this grave global threat.

Following decades of debate the science is now clear; the steep rise of green house gases into the atmosphere will affect our environment with disastrous impacts to humankind. Scientists conclude that climate change is 'unequivocal'. Political leaders characterize the climate crisis as one of the 'world's greatest challenges and as the preeminent geopolitical and economic issue of our era'. Economists consider it 'the greatest market failure the world has ever seen'. Sadly, our excessive reliance on a carbon based economy is destroying our planet's resources and threatens to impoverish the poor. But paradoxically, it is the same carbon based economy that has enriched substantial parts of the world making us to some extent victims of our own success.

Fortunately, ladies and gentlemen, countries have in various fora committed to global action and forged an array of multilateral agreements in response to climate change, the most prominent being the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Convention). The Convention is considered by most to represent an equitable framing of the problem and its global solution. In broad brushstrokes, the Convention holds that all countries shall contribute to addressing climate change; that developed countries shall take the lead and provide finance and technology to assist developing countries in their efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change; and that developing countries share 'common but differentiated responsibilities' based on their national circumstances. This issue, as straight forward as it seems, is the cause of much controversy in climate debates as countries tussle over how to allocate political and financial responsibility!

But that we can unpack another day. Today's meeting revolves around how the Convention's principles and rules on climate change action affect trade and also how trade tools can be utilized in approaches to mitigating and adapting to climate change.

It can be argued that a range of trade-climate change policy interfaces exist at multiple levels of governance. While these processes can provide an important basis to bolster climate change-fighting efforts, I must underline that our approach to analyzing and understanding that interface in Africa remains fractured and does not always convey coherent messages that feed into decision making processes. I ask you representatives of government and societies, how can African countries adapt to climate change and still pursue economic development if its responses do not factor in trade considerations and lag behind new developments and trends? There is evidently a need for effective dialogue and interaction between environmental and trade policy communities.

Distinguished guests, we must also not overlook the impact a deal in Copenhagen would have on global trade. Success in Copenhagen could set a powerful example; if Member States can find a way forward on an issue of such complexity; surely they can do the same for stalled trade talks. On the other hand,

failure in Copenhagen could lead countries to turn inward in an effort to handle the climate change challenge and competitiveness concerns on their own. We could see a wave of climate related protectionist barriers. This would undermine the international trade regime that has been painfully built over decades and could lead to trade anarchy. This would come at a very dangerous moment in the history of the global economy; I refer of course to the global economic crisis which continues to ravage large parts of the world. So it is important that a deal is reached in Copenhagen to enable trade to underpin development, spread green solutions and usher in a green economy. I hope that this gathering will discuss and indicate the means with which the upcoming negotiations can aid in reaching these goals.