

**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER EBRAHIM AT THE
SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS' 75TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE,
THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2009,
WHAT DO THE GEOPOLITICAL AND “GLOBAL
COMMONS” CHALLENGES MEAN FOR AFRICA**

Programme Director,
National Chairperson of SAIIA, Mr Fred Phaswana,
National Director of SAIIA, Dr Elizabeth Sidiropoulos,
HE, Mr Alpha Oumar Konare, Former Chairperson of the
AU Commission,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High
Commissioners,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour for me to address you today, on this occasion of the 75th Anniversary of SAIIA, an institution that has throughout these years, contributed to discourse and knowledge generation in our country about international relations and, specifically, South Africa's foreign policy. I therefore take this opportunity to wish SAIIA well in its future endeavours, and I hope, most sincerely, that it will continue to assist us to better appreciate the work that we are doing.

Programme Director,

Recently, the people of South Africa re-affirmed their confidence in the African National Congress (ANC) by overwhelmingly returning it to power. These elections took place a few years after our decisive Polokwane Conference, where among other things, the ANC reflected on the evolving nature of international dynamics and the changing balance of forces. We came out of that Conference with a view that the situation currently obtaining in Africa, gives us confidence and hope that we are indeed on the right path “towards a better Africa for Humankind.” We are still convinced that our conclusions were not misplaced. We have witnessed in the recent past positive progress being made in a number of protracted conflicts in Africa, and the continent taking strides towards its socio-economic development, through NEPAD.

However, we were not blind to the fact that a myriad of challenges still remain, that is why we confirmed that it is still necessary to consolidate our African Agenda. This agenda has found expression in the South African Government’s engagement in our continent through on-going support to the strengthening of the African Union

Institutions, including its Peace and Security Architecture, and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

We will not relent in doing this, because we know an unstable Africa would be a bane in our steps towards a better, more secure and a more humane world. Instability is caused by a number of factors including poverty, hunger, famine, food insecurity, lack of development, weakened institutions of governance, all of which form part of what we in Africa regard as global common challenges.

Other challenges, such as climate change, have wreaked havoc in many parts of the developing world through persistent droughts or heavy flooding and other climatic abnormalities. This should be of concern, not only for Africa, which contributes comparatively very little to climate change, but also for countries in the North. We are living in an environment where countries have become more interdependent and hence the need to work together even more to address these global challenges, but with an acute understanding that Africa is placed in a particularly vulnerable position.

One of the demands placed upon us by today's international political economy is that countries in close proximity ought to forge closer economic co-operation and work towards building and integrating their economies. As a response, Africa's leaders decided to build the African Economic Community (AEC) through, among other things, strengthening and harmonising existing regional economic structures. This we are convinced is our best hope in achieving better inter-and intra regional trade relations. However, in some of our regions, such as SADC, this project of better regional integration has been severely affected by the manner in which our partners have engaged with us on a number of issues including the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

Thus, on the one hand, as Africa attempts to respond to these global dynamics, on the other hand our efforts are frustrated by the choices of our partners, which apparently are not in the best interests of the continent. Whilst our partners in the North have committed themselves to working with us to build the continent and address its multifaceted challenges, we are yet to experience the full translation of those commitments into concrete action. As you may well understand international relations should be about reconciling the national interest with the broad

interests of the entire international community, in a world which has become more dangerous due to a plethora of global challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An irrefutable fact is that the African leadership collective is focused on ways to respond to most of the challenges currently facing the continent. For instance, African States have ceaselessly called upon the rest of the international community to support the full realisation and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and other internationally agreed developmental goals. We have done this, because we know that the full implementation of these goals will help us break the back of poverty, enhance the capacity to educate our people, improve our ability to respond to communicable diseases, and these are global common challenges.

The South African Government's international relations agenda is also informed by a view that the international system continues to be dominated by a few powerful countries located in the North. It is these countries, and their control of the resources of the world that continue to

contribute to a widening gap between the rich and poor. Traditionally, the poor of the world are found in Africa, and other parts of the world defined as the South. It is therefore in our own interest, and that of Africa, to craft an international relations strategy that aims to build coalitions of the progressive forces.

This commitment has found expression in our country's programme of South-South Co-operation. Difficult as it might be at times, but we remain committed to finding common positions on issues that affect us collectively. Therefore the small efforts we do in trying to strengthen relations between Africa and the Latin American countries, between Africa and Asia, are but attempts to forge relations that will, overtime, strengthen the voice of these countries in our endeavours to ensure that the character and content of the global agenda is not dominated by a few.

Apart from that, strong coalitions among the countries of the South will also open-up trade and economic opportunities which otherwise will have been overlooked had we not consciously sought to build such relations. This approach to international relations, allows not only South Africa but Africa as a whole to expand its options,

open its doors to other possibilities of co-operation in order to meet its challenges.

Those who are quite well vested with the changing nature of the international system will note that there are emerging powers such as China, Brazil, India and others. Countries that now possess great influence on global affairs and therefore raise eyebrows amongst traditional superpowers, especially with regard to the manner in which they are engaging in the various multilateral institutions.

It is of note that Africa has become central to the struggle for influence over global affairs. Hence, it is quite reasonable that Africa should craft a response to these changing dynamics. However, our efforts to forge relations with other countries, other than the traditional partners based in the North, are often perceived and analysed in pessimistic terms. Indeed at times, African leaders find themselves in positions where they have to defend their stance of pursuing co-operative relations with these emerging global powers. Nonetheless, it remains our view that engaging in initiatives such as the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) and the New Africa-Asia Strategic Partnership (NAASP) are strategic choices the

African leadership have made, as a response to global challenges such as those mentioned above.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I do not recall a time in the entire history of this continent, whereby a conscious decision was made not to engage with our partners from the North. On the contrary, Africa has taken all efforts to ensure that the relations with the countries of the North are strengthened, albeit with a view of ensuring that the peoples of the continent become the direct beneficiaries of such engagements. We have in the recent past, successfully fought to have direct engagements with the G8, among others.

It is a matter of common course that through these tactical engagements pledges have been made towards Africa in a number of areas that are global challenges, but very few of the targets have actually been met. However, it is in our own interest as a continent to maintain that dialogue, simply because of the central role that these countries still play in global affairs. In today's world, our tactical manoeuvres to be listened to by structures such as the G8, have started to enjoy support from a number of progressive forces across the globe, especially within

organs of civil society. The onus is on us as a continent to rally these forces around a common cause of honouring the commitments made.

The current global economic crisis is not just a reminder of the Great Depression of the 1930s, but it has also put the neo-liberal, Washington Consensus doctrine on the back-foot. States are now back and recognised as key players in the development of our countries. Africa can leverage this crisis to find space for innovation and creativity towards a lasting solution to our developmental predicament.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I do not see this conference as a talk-shop but as a contribution to on-going efforts towards a better Africa. This year and 2010 are going to be key for all of us with respect to the current intergovernmental negotiations on the reform of the United Nations and the review of the Kyoto Protocol and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. I am hopeful that this conference will help us enrich Africa's approach to these difficult issues and many others.

In conclusion, one of the leverages we have as Africa is the resilience of the masses of our people, who are increasingly aware how much they have been politically oppressed, culturally undermined and economically exploited as a result of an international order that favours the rich. It is therefore in their name that we will spare no efforts in our collective endeavours as Africans to engage with the rest of the world in manner that can only lead to a better Africa.

I wish you a successful conference!

Thank you