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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

AT THE

63rd SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Your Excellency, the President of the UNGA, Father Miguel d' Escoto Brockmann
Your Excellency, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

My delegation and I join in expressing our congratulations to Your Excellency Father Miguel d' Escoto Brockmann on your election as the President of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly, and hope you have a very successful and rewarding term at the helm of this body. We express our gratitude to His Excellency Dr Srgjan Kerim for the excellent work done during his tenure as the President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly.

Your Excellencies and Distinguished Guests

Once again Mr. President, we have come to this august body to reiterate what we have always called for – “the need to implement all the promises and all the pledges we have made before”. The focus of this the 63rd Session of the General Assembly, is on the global food crisis, climate change as well as the reform of the UN.

The confluence of the food, fuel and financial crisis as well as the effects of climate change pose a real threat of undermining the progress made by developing countries in the struggle against poverty and under-development.

Despite the great strides it is clear that many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Part of the reason is that the global partnership for development, on which the achievement of the MDGs was also predicated, has not been fully implemented. That despite the various and lofty ideals we made at previous assemblies, we still fall short in meeting the commitments we made in implementing this partnership – in particular, trade, aid and debt relief.

During the Millennium Summit Declaration held in 2000, our Heads of State and Government adopted a declaration that communicated a message of hope and vision of a better world, among which is an important section on the Special Needs of Africa in which leaders declared that they “will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all the internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right of development”

Africa and many other developing countries have indeed taken responsibility in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and stability and human rights. They are also hard at work in rolling back the frontiers of poverty and underdevelopment.

We express the fervent hope that the High-Level meetings organised by yourself, Mr President and the Secretary-General on Africa's development needs, as well as on the MDGs, have served not only as important reminders of the challenges that we face, but as a catalyst to spur the world into a greater sense of urgency.

The necessary resources exist in the world to achieve the MDG's. We need to summon the necessary political will and compassion. We join the sister countries of our continent in calling for massive resource transfers through development assistance, investment, trade, technology transfers and human resource development. These will ensure that Africa achieves the development goals and successfully adapts to the devastating impact of climate change.

In order to accelerate the achievement of all the MDG's, a lot more attention needs to be focused on MDG 3 on the empowerment of women. Women need to be at the centre of development as agents of change both socially, economically and politically.

Mr President

Billions of the peoples of the world, that we are privileged to represent in this Assembly, have cast their eyes on this gathering of leaders. They do so because they have hope in this leadership to take the required measures in order to address poverty and underdevelopment. We dare not fail them.

The food crisis has to be addressed in the short and medium term. The Green Revolution that has been launched by the AU needs partnerships in order to succeed. Support for NEPAD will be a major contributor to the struggle against poverty and under-development.

In this context, allow me, Mr. President to quote from your statement to the General Assembly with regard to this socio-economic programme as well as the role of our immediate former President, Thabo Mbeki "During his presidency of the rainbow nation, spanning nearly a decade, he, along other African leaders, championed the vision of NEPAD we still pursue today. When the affluent listen to Africa and partner with it, that vision is within reach. To quote Nepad's founding document: "In fulfilling its promise, this agenda must give hope to the emaciated African child that the 21st century is indeed Africa's century".

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Doha development round has stalled despite seven years of negotiations. We are convinced that trade and increased market access will make a major contribution to the achievement of the MDGs. In this regard it is our submission that the Doha round of trade negotiations should not be allowed to die, but must remain focused on "development" as it was originally envisaged. We must rededicate our efforts to ensure the successful completion of the Doha Development Round.

Mr President

In recent years we have all witnessed the devastating effects of climate change especially on the Island States. The hurricanes have become more frequent and more vicious, so are droughts, floods or unpredictable extreme weather patterns in the rest of the world.

Climate change needs an urgent response. Having agreed in Bali last year on a roadmap for negotiations, it is our hope that the negotiations to be completed in Copenhagen in 2009, will necessarily set the stage for more concerted actions by all countries to address climate change and all its manifestations, with the developed countries taking the lead.

South Africa commits itself to approach the preparations for Copenhagen constructively and with a view to reaching an agreement that is ambitious, balanced and inclusive.

Mr President

We join the many leaders of the world who have expressed their support for the fundamental reform to the system of global governance including the United Nations as well as the Bretton Woods Institutions.

It is important to understand that the critical issues facing the world today - the current financial, food and energy crises - cannot be addressed effectively when so many other countries and regions of the world are left out of the key decision making processes of important institutions of global governance. South Africa stands ready to work with other members of the United Nations to advance the goal of reform.

Equally, the reform of the UN Security Council need not be re-emphasised. We reiterate our view that a reformed Security Council would have more legitimacy and its decisions would have more credibility. We welcome the recent decision to launch in the General Assembly the inter-governmental negotiations on Security Council reform, to discuss plans for expanding the Security Council on both the non-permanent and permanent categories.

It remains a travesty of justice that Africa, which constitutes a large portion of the work of the Council, is not represented in the permanent category. Unless the ideals of freedom, justice and equality become the character of the UN- the dominant will continue to dictate to the dominated while the dream of the dominated will forever be deferred.

Mr President

My country will, in December this year, complete its tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. We are indeed privileged to serve the peoples of Africa and the world in this capacity. This was indeed a historic first for us as a young democracy. In this capacity we were indeed honoured to contribute meaningfully to global efforts to create peace and stability in all regions of the world. Accordingly, we express the humble gratitude of the people of our country to the general membership of the UN for the trust placed on us in helping the world discharge this mandate.

During our tenure, the Security Council also focused on the important question of the enhancement of the relationship between the UN and regional organisations, in particular the African Union. We were honoured to be able to contribute to this work. We congratulate the Secretary-General for appointing the AU / UN panel of distinguished personalities whose mandate is to explore financing modalities for AU led peacekeeping missions.

Mr President

Peace continues to elude the Middle East. As South Africa, we participated in the Annapolis Conference in 2007 with great expectation and hope that progress would indeed be made to advance the goal of peace in that region. We will continue to support all international efforts to help the people of Palestine and Israel in their endeavour to find a lasting peace to their challenges, leading to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, co-existing side by side with the state of Israel existing within secure borders. We understand fully well the pain, suffering and agony that conflict brings to bear on the lives of ordinary people- particularly women and children. These ordinary souls continue to cry out to this assembly of the world as they have done in the past, to help bring about an end to the conflict.

Mr President

South Africa will continue to work with the sister peoples of DRC, Burundi and Cote D'Ivoire in efforts to consolidate peace and democracy in their respective countries. With regard to Zimbabwe, you most certainly are aware of the recent developments, led by our former President Thabo Mbeki in his capacity as the SADC-Facilitator, which culminated in the signing of an agreement between the main political protagonists in the country.

We hope that the leadership of Zimbabwe will soon finalise aspects of this agreement to enable the formation of a new government that will help lay the basis to address the political and economic challenges facing their country. SADC, the African Union and the Facilitator stand as guarantors of this agreement. We call on the international community to spare neither strength nor effort in lending a hand to the people of Zimbabwe as they embark on the difficult path of reconciliation and reconstruction.

The situation in Sudan, especially Darfur, remains a matter of great concern. South Africa will continue to do whatever it can both bilaterally and in the context of the African Union and the United Nations, to help the people of Sudan find peace among themselves.

We remain concerned about the impasse on the question of Western Sahara. South Africa is committed to seeking a just, mutually acceptable and lasting solution to the problem.

Mr President

This year also marks the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. During the past six decades the Declaration has remained the key standard for human rights, justice and dignity.

We should therefore use the period of this anniversary to strengthen our resolve to defend human rights. South Africa has also had the honour to be reviewed under the Universal Peer Review Mechanism of the new Human Rights Council. We were also honoured with the appointment of our own Justice Navi Pillai to lead this very important international institution.

In conclusion, Mr President

We wish to reiterate our belief in the centrality of the United Nations. In the Millennium Declaration we reaffirmed that the United Nations "is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek to realise our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development". Leading South Africa's delegation to the Millennium Summit was our Former President, Thabo Mbeki, who reminded this very assembly that "billions among the living, struggle to survive in conditions of poverty, deprivation and under-development, as offensive to everything human as anything we decry about the second millennium".

It is this understanding that has correctly informed the engagement of successive leaders of our democratic state with this august body over the years. In this regard, we are touched and humbled by the kind comments made in this Assembly by the various Heads of State and Government and Heads of delegations, directed at our immediate Former President Thabo Mbeki. We most certainly shall through our government, convey these sentiments to that noble son of our people, continent and citizen of the world.

Accordingly, from this podium may I also express our sincere gratitude to the general membership of the UN for the support former President Mbeki and our country received over the past nine and half years of his stewardship of our country. As the leadership of our country passes on, we reaffirm that South Africa, under the leadership of President Kgalema Motlanthe, shall indeed continue to be a trusted and dependable partner in the common endeavour to strengthen our institutions of multilateralism, moving from the correct premise that multilateralism remains the only hope in addressing challenges facing humanity today, at the centre of which is the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

I thank you.