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**STATEMENT
BY**

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
67TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Your Excellency, President of the General Assembly,
Your Excellency, Secretary General of the United Nations,
Your Excellencies and Your Majesties,
Distinguished Delegates and guests,

Thank you Mr President, for the opportunity to address the 67th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Let me start by congratulating you and the Republic of Serbia Mr President, on your election to preside over the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

We also acknowledge the contribution of the President of the 66th Session, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser.

Mr President,

South Africa fundamentally believes in the principles and purposes contained in the Charter of the United Nations, and correctly so given our nation's history.

This year, we are proudly celebrating 100 years of our people's selfless struggle for freedom led by the African National Congress movement.

We recall with great appreciation, the immense contribution of the UN to the creation of a free and democratic South Africa.

In 1966, the General Assembly labelled apartheid as a crime against humanity in Resolution 2202, which ultimately led to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, later known as the Apartheid Convention.

The UN defined the crime of apartheid as *"inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them."*

The Apartheid Convention was adopted by the General Assembly on 30 November 1973 and set the tone for vociferous action against apartheid around the world.

Let me repeat the words of our leader and international icon, President Nelson Mandela uttered in his very first address to the UN General Assembly in 1994, the first by a democratically elected head of state of our country.

He said;

"The millions of our people say thank you and thank you again that the respect for your own dignity as human beings, inspired you to act to ensure the restoration of our dignity as well".

Mr President,

The theme of this Session is most appropriate as it takes us back to the basics, to the founding principles of the United Nations.

The founders intended the UN to be the foremost multilateral forum entrusted with bringing about hope, peace and order to the world. Indeed, the UN enjoys universal membership and is at the centre of global governance and multilateralism.

The theme reminds us that peace is a choice. We can either choose peace as member states or choose the path of conflict.

The founders of the UN made this choice 67 years ago. They decided that the United Nations must lead the world to peace.

It is important for the UN and its organs, especially the UN Security Council, to execute the organisation's mandate of working for peace without fear or favour. We must not steer away from the founding objectives of this organisation.

The UN faces immense pressure when the world sees the unprecedented loss of lives as it is happening in Africa and the Middle East.

It is of concern when it appears as if the United Nations is unable to act and assist, and when it comes across as paralysed in certain instances, due to the actions of some member states.

We have seen a divided Security Council unable to muster the collective courage to say "no more" to warring parties in the interest of peace.

This brings to the fore, the need to continue and deepen the reform of the United Nations and its Organs to make it agile and nimble in addressing the contemporary challenges facing humanity.

The debate on the reform of the United Nations and its Organs in particular the Security Council, has been going on for the past eighteen years. However, there has been no significant movement forward.

I would like to focus in particular on the Security Council. Given its mandate, the Council has to be legitimate, democratic and transparent.

Its current composition has a propensity for deadlock and paralysis even in the face of crisis. It remains un-representative and undemocratic in both its composition and decision making.

We would like to see a more meaningful representation of Africa in the UN Security Council. About 70 percent of the agenda of the UN Security Council is taken up by issues from the African continent.

The Security Council has to be expanded in both categories, with at least two seats for Africa in the permanent category and five in the non-permanent category.

In addition to seats for the continent in its composition, the UN should also recognise fully and appreciate the role of Regional Organisations working with the United Nations, in conflict management and resolution.

In this regard, we urge closer collaboration with the African Union peace and security mechanisms, especially given the progress being made by the AU in conflict resolution and peace building in some parts of the continent since its formation 10 years ago.

Therefore, cognisance should be taken of Chapter 8 of the Charter, in particular when dealing with African issues.

It was for this reason, Mr President, that South Africa piloted Security Council Resolution 2033 during our rotating Presidency of the Security Council in January.

Currently, the AU continues to address one of the longest outstanding conflicts on the continent through one of its mechanism the African Union High Level Implementation Panel on Sudan.

Together as the international community we celebrated the creation of the state of South Sudan recently.

We wish to congratulate the Somalis and their leadership on choosing the path of peace, democracy and prosperity. The international community and the United Nations must continue to give the people of Somalia all the necessary support.

Africa is indeed making progress and with UN support, this would go further.

Mr President,

To promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, we also wish to emphasise that the Security Council should carry out its Charter mandate within the confines of international law.

Any member state or international body that implements Security Council Resolutions should be accountable to the Security Council.

This will ensure that we avoid the abuse of internationally agreed concepts like *Responsibility to Protect and the Protection of Civilians*.

These principles must not be used to amongst other things, justify the notion of regime change. These concepts exist to prevent mass atrocities, war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

We should continue the debate on these principles in order to develop norms and standards for accountability when actions are taken.

It is also of critical importance for the UN to closely guard its impartiality, independence and objectivity. The UN should never be dragged to take side with any party in a conflict under the guise of the Protection of Civilians.

Mr President,

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a concern to us in particular the Palestine-Israeli question.

The United Nations should play a central and decisive role in efforts to resolve this long-standing conflict in that region.

Any act of aggression or violations of international law should be condemned unequivocally by the UN at all times.

As the UN we cannot be seen to be strong in condemning some and on the other hand, being soft on others. As South Africa, we remain committed to the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders with Palestine and Israel co-existing side by side in peace.

Let me also emphasise that South Africa fully supports the application by Palestine for full membership of the United Nations. It is unacceptable that until today, Palestine remains outside of the membership of the United Nations. We trust that this matter will be concluded positively soon.

Mr President, in further promotion of the peaceful resolution of disputes, we believe that the sovereign right of states to nuclear energy for peaceful and civilian use should be respected in accordance with international law.

We have taken note that the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency has been able to draw the conclusion that all declared nuclear material in Iran is used for peaceful activities.

The clarification of the undeclared materials will enable the international community to have full confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme.

South Africa therefore encourages Iran to continue its cooperation with the Agency.

We should also remember that for as long as some states are allowed to operate outside of international agreed norms like the Non- Proliferation Treaty, it will be difficult to expect others to operate within the norms.

South Africa supports the long standing call for a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East. In this regard the peaceful resolution of the Iran Nuclear Programme is very important.

Your Excellencies,
Your Majesties,

Let me use this opportunity to reiterate our support of the ongoing struggle for the self-determination by the people of Western Sahara.

We urge the international community to support their quest for freedom, human rights and dignity.

We also reiterate our call for the lifting of the economic and financial embargo against the people of Cuba, to help the Cuban people to gain their economic freedom.

Mr President,

Poverty, underdevelopment, lack of opportunities and competition for scarce resources contribute to some of the conflicts in the developing world including Africa. Therefore the promotion of sustainable development and the fight against poverty cannot be divorced from the quest for peace.

In 2015, the United Nations will be 70 years old and will also reach the target year for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

World leaders committed themselves to eradicate extreme poverty; facilitate universal primary education; attain gender equality; improve maternal and child health; reduce the burden of disease through primarily combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; protect the environment and mobilize global partnerships for development by 2015.

The Heads of State also committed themselves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate truly sustainable development.

We urge the UN to continue promoting the achievement of MDGs and other instruments that have tenets that advance the human rights of women.

We are concerned that Sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to meet the targets for MDGs. The knowledge of this possibility should not make us give up. We must in the next three years accelerate the implementation of the MDGs.

We appeal to all who have made financial commitments to Africa for the achievement of the MDGs not to renege on those commitments.

We would like to express our appreciation to those development partners that continue to stick to their 0.7 percent ODA commitment in spite of the financial difficulties at domestic level.

We support the Secretary General's Panel to focus on the acceleration of the implementation of the MDGs and would appeal that much focus be on assisting Africa to meet all its targets.

However, we wish to caution against prejudging the review outcome and prematurely setting in processes that will undermine the ideals of the MDGs.

Mr President,

The protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms should be at the centre of our collective desire to resolve international disputes through peaceful means.

Racism and racial discrimination continue to be an affront to the very basic founding principles of the United Nations and must be fought relentlessly.

We should shun any idea that seems to suggest that there is a superior race or human being on the basis of skin colour in any part of the world.

The danger of such ideas is still fresh in our collective memory. We have learned from the evils of colonialism, two world wars and the system of apartheid.

We should all renew our commitment to continue to build on the solid foundation laid by the Durban Declaration and the Plan of Action that we adopted more than a decade ago, at the end of the World Conference Against Racism.

Mr President,

South Africa had the honour to host the United Nations COP 17/CMP7 climate change conference last December. Member states must ensure that agreements are implemented.

In this regard the Durban Platform offers an opportunity for progress which we must utilise to move forward.

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Your Majesties,

This timely debate is a reminder that ultimately, peace is a choice. Peace is achievable. The wise and brave choices that we have the power to make can deliver lasting peace to every corner of the world.

We are called upon at this 67th Session of the General Assembly to choose peace through reforming and strengthening the UN so that it can play its rightful role and deliver peace, security, sustainable development and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world. As the foremost multilateral forum bringing together all nations of the world, the UN is better placed to play this role. It requires our support as member states at all times, for our sake and that of future generations.

I thank you.