

**WELCOME REMARKS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT THE
PRESENTATION OF LETTERS OF CREDENCE OF NEW HEADS OF MISSION
ACCREDITED TO SOUTH AFRICA**

SEFAKO M MAKGATHO PRESIDENTIAL GUEST HOUSE, TSHWANE

Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Directors-General in the Presidency and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you as the incoming Heads of Mission to South Africa.

Since achieving democracy in 1994, South Africa has built strong and meaningful relationships with nations across the world.

Many of these relationships have their roots in the bonds of solidarity and friendship that were forged during the struggle against apartheid.

We remain grateful to all those countries, many of which are represented here today, that gave our leaders and fighters refuge, that provided material and moral support, and that mobilised for the isolation of the apartheid regime.

Just as we value your presence here, we are greatly encouraged by the value your respective governments place in maintaining and deepening relations with South Africa.

Three years ago, the world was confronted with an unprecedented global public health emergency.

As much as the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on health, livelihoods and national economies, it also brought about new forms of collaboration between countries and strengthened existing partnerships.

It also exposed some of the imbalances in global relations.

Many lower-income countries had to look on while wealthy nations hoarded most of the world's COVID-19 vaccine doses.

Several African countries suffered from the imposition of arbitrary travel bans after new variants were detected in their countries.

From this pandemic, we have learned a number of lessons on how we engage with each other as countries and on the importance of mutual respect.

It is pleasing that all the continents of the world are represented here this afternoon since South Africa has always endeavoured to maintain friendly relations with all countries regardless of location, size or alignment.

We share a belief in the indivisible unity of humankind and in the centrality of international diplomacy as an instrument of progress, world peace and mutual prosperity.

With the pandemic in abeyance throughout much of the world, our most pressing priority is a swift and equitable economic recovery that leaves no-one behind.

Since 2020, South Africa has been implementing an Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan to lift our economy out of a prolonged period of slow growth, to create jobs and to undertake far-reaching economic reform.

At the same time, we are implementing programmes to alleviate poverty and inequality, to advance gender equality and to contribute our fair share towards addressing climate change and its impact.

Like most developing economies around the world, the pandemic has set back our national effort to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are nonetheless forging ahead.

We are also pressing ahead with our ambitious investment drive to significantly increase the productive capacity of our economy.

We are working to clamp down on corruption and to restore the integrity and credibility of key public institutions.

Central to this effort is restoring good governance and improving the financial and operational performance of strategic state-owned enterprises.

We are making progress in stabilising public finances, improving financial controls at all levels of government and rooting out graft and mismanagement.

We have instituted a number of key policy reforms centred on the network industries, including energy, ports and rail, telecommunications and water infrastructure.

All of these are part of the broader effort to make South Africa a country in which it is easier to invest and to do business.

Our expectation of diplomacy in the post-COVID era is that it should deepen bilateral trade and investment between South Africa and the countries with which we have diplomatic ties.

This is no doubt an expectation your respective governments hold in turn.

We anticipate that the African Continental Free Trade Area will not only benefit countries on the continent, but will also create conditions for greater flows of trade and investment between Africa and the rest of the world.

We share a responsibility to strive to settle differences within and between countries peacefully.

South Africa promotes the centrality of multilateral institutions in managing global affairs and we will continue to urge respect for international law and agreements.

We seek to work with our partners across the world to build a more democratic, just and equitable world order, one which prioritises the needs and interests of the poor and vulnerable.

As the peoples of the world, we have a shared interest in ending poverty and in ending disparities of wealth, skills, resources, and access to education, health and social support.

South Africa stands ready to work with all governments and peoples towards achieving these objectives.

We trust that your presence in South Africa will further aid our efforts to build a better world that is more egalitarian, that is free of war and conflict, where the rights of women and girls are respected, and where we all play our part to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In the words of our Freedom Charter, the forerunner to the South African Constitution, let there be peace and friendship.

We look forward to working with you to strengthen relations between our respective countries and to advance a global economic recovery that leaves no-one behind.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY GCIS ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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