

Stevens Mokgalapa (DA) : South Africa needs a foreign policy that is bold in pursuing our domestic imperatives

Thank you Chairperson,

The world is in a fragile state. Currently there is an increasing defiance of the rules-based world order. Extremism, conservatism, protectionism, migration and territorial sovereignty are sources of these conflicts. Just take ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab for example. States are intensifying the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives to respond to this growing trend. States are becoming more aggressive in pursuit of their national interests.

What does this mean for South Africa? This means that we should redefine our foreign policy and step up our game to vigorously pursue economic diplomacy for the benefit of our people and fellow states.

Chairperson, the DA condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals. This is against the very essence of our Constitution and foreign policy ideal based on Ubuntu.

Chairperson, allow me to address you on the Department.

Programme 2 of the Department is titled International Relations and is mandated to promote relations with foreign countries. This is the core programme of the Department and receives the lion's share of the money although there has been a cut of R335 million in this financial year.

In the current belt tightening environment it means that the Department needs to be strategic and practical about its foreign missions. South Africa maintains 126 missions globally and desperately needs to reprioritise so that we are able to do more with less funding. Essentially we need to ensure value for money in our missions.

Currently the Department owns 133 properties and rents 800 properties worldwide, at a cost of R535 million. This is unsustainable and especially so considering foreign currency fluctuations. We call on the Minister to engage with her colleagues in Cabinet, such as the Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, Agriculture and Trade and Industry, who have a presence in other countries to share our missions in order to share costs.

It must also be understood that bilateral relations should not only be measured by the number of visits undertaken but, more importantly, by the amount of trade and business brought to our country by

these relations. Our missions must be well equipped and resourced to respond to this economic diplomacy. Furthermore, we should be careful of who we entertain and should not be rolling out red carpets to dictators like Robert Mugabe.

It is important that our diplomats are adequately trained and capacitated. Our diplomatic corps should not be a dumping ground for ANC rejects but a highly professional and effective group that can promote our brand and image abroad and bring business back home.

We hope the Foreign Service Bill will regulate and professionalise this service to attract quality diplomats and to avoid more embarrassment, such as the recent scandal involving questionable credentials of our diplomats in the United States and Japan.

Furthermore the leasing corruption scandal in Ghana is shameful. Our missions should have business intelligence and early warning systems in order to advise government appropriately about foreign policy developments.

Chairperson, Programme 3 of International Cooperation is also significant and should be about our influence and impact in the multilateral forum. But we need to prioritise quality over quantity. It's not about attending meetings of the African Union, the United Nations or the G20 to name a few, but rather about how much influence we are able to exercise.

South Africa needs to accelerate its efforts on regional integration. The Department must promote and increase intra-African trade and the establishment of a free trade area. To this end SADC must prioritise regional infrastructure to unlock the trade potential.

We acknowledge South Africa's continued role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. We would like to see more involvement in election observer missions, voter education and democratisation processes. Africa has a youth bulge that needs to be educated to be active citizens in decision making, voting, elections and political participation.

Chairperson, Programme 4 which is Public Diplomacy, is mandated to communicate South Africa's foreign policy and international obligations to people both at home and abroad. More funding and resources should be allocated to this programme to ensure that our foreign policy is easily accessible.

The establishment of the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) to replace the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF) is long overdue. The ARF has been plagued by allegations of maladministration and poor governance. Recently the Deputy Director

General of Public Diplomacy has been implicated. We call on the Minister to investigate and leave no stone unturned. We hope SADPA will deal better with governance and administration issues.

We also await the establishment of the South African Council of International Relations, 6 years after it was announced. Non-state actors and civil society have a positive contribution to make to foreign policy and it is in our country's best interest to involve civil society in foreign policy making.

The committee held discussions with academia to unpack and interrogate the draft white paper on foreign policy and concerns were raised. These concerns related to:

1. The inconsistent constitutional interpretation of issues of human rights versus economic commercial interests;
2. The meaning of Ubuntu and its interpretation;
3. The fact that consensus is still needed on the national interest and specifically non-negotiable principles;
4. The emphasis on South-South relations that creates a perception of a closed economy limiting our focus on opportunities globally; and
5. The need for clarification of our economic diplomacy and if this means market access, a larger role in the World Trade Organisation, or a change of power monopoly.

More engagement with civil society on this white paper is needed in order to achieve consensus. The committee would also benefit if we could engage with the Minister to raise these and other pertinent issues.

In conclusion we need a foreign policy that is bold in pursuing our domestic imperatives. A foreign policy that is principled, value-driven as well as clear and consistent. A foreign policy that promotes economic growth, creates jobs, has a capable professional diplomatic corps who can promote and protect our country's national interests, its image and brand.

A foreign policy that works for the interests of all South Africans not a few connected elite. A foreign policy of which we can all be proud.

I thank you.