

DA is leading from the front on international relations

*By **Darren Bergman MP** – DA Shadow Minister of International Relations and Cooperation*

South Africa has been well represented through a proud track record in international relations and calling out human rights abuses where they may occur. But this proud representation has not been from our current government.

This representation comes from an opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, which has sent its leaders to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Morocco and the Middle East. The DA Leader and his team have condemned the persecution of the Rohingyas; the ongoing war in Cameroon; warned of the dangers of Mozambique when it was still a civil war; urged the AU for more productive action in the Tigray region and of late even went to visit the war torn Ukraine after the DA had been calling since 2016 for South Africa to use its proximity to President Putin to mediate a peace process between Russia and Ukraine.

The ANC has tarnished South Africa's international image by failing to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, choosing instead to remain 'neutral' in the face of gross human rights violations and loss of lives. The world should know that it is the ANC, not South Africa, who are supporting Putin's war in Ukraine.

Worse still, for a party that claims to fight for Africa – the ANC is standing by and watching as the war in Ukraine threatens to send Africa to the brink of a food crisis. Minister, your government should be pressuring Putin to allow the opening up of Ukraine ports to allow the exports of grain and wheat that is currently trapped there. For once, stand up and fight for Africa before the continent is plunged into a full-blown hunger crisis.

We have so many missions, yet we are held ransom by the Department of Home Affairs as to when or how we can deliver consular services. It is high time that we stop threatening e-visas. If we cannot get the technology, we must outsource our consular services to private companies around the world like most other countries do.

Not only would we be able to close down many more missions and economise on our wage bill but our tight budget will be able to stretch to more worthy causes such as promoting South Africa as a destination open for direct foreign investment, tourism, and we could stabilise our diplomatic ship by sending career diplomats that actually represents our country favourably, rather than spending their time being chauffeured around to look for the most exclusive apartments to rent or sniffing out red carpet opportunities.

It is sad that one of the most costly Departments that is affected by currency fluctuations, which in turn can be made worse by the behaviour of the ruling party, has a relatively small budget and still manages to waste it. Under the DA, our foreign affairs would be focused on stimulating trade and not scaring off investment; building relationships with all mutually beneficial countries and not being paralysed in historic loyalties; and being consistent in our human rights lobbying without fear or favour.

DA ambassadors will wake up every morning with a clear objective in mind and that is to see an open opportunity society whereby we promote true reconciliation; we redress the injustices of the past; we acknowledge and embrace cultural diversity and protect everyone's rights and guarantee delivery and results.

As Richard Haass once said: *"Diplomacy can and will matter; little is inevitable in international relations."* That is why the DA Leader and his party are still flying our flag proudly on the international stage. Thank you Honourable Steenhuisen for putting yourself on the front line for putting South Africa first.