

Deputy Minister Reginah Mhaule: International Relations and Cooperation Dept Budget Vote 2018/19

15 May 2018

Address by the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation to the Joint Sitting of Parliament, Ms Reginah Mhaule on the occasion of the 2018 DIRCO Departmental Budget Vote Speech

Honourable Chairperson
Honourable Members
Esteemed Members of the Diplomatic Corps
DIRCO Officials
Esteemed guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to address you on the occasion of the DIRCO Budget Vote. To fittingly and appropriately celebrate the centenary year of our founding father, President Nelson Mandela, we must recommit to fight alongside all those who are yearning for their freedom, justice and prosperity. This is also the year where we celebrate Mam Albertina Sisulu under the theme "A Woman of fortitude". She was undoubtedly a woman of courage and resilience who advanced women's rights throughout her adult life.

We must also utilise the occasion of this centenary to re-energise the Pan African Women Organisation (PAWO). For almost 56 years PAWO has been at the forefront in mobilising women to fight for their liberation and must remain a strong voice for women in Africa and the world. I can attest that Mme Sisulu would have loved to ensure that this organisation remains relevant and championing the course of women at all times.

Honourable Chairperson

In this regard we take this opportunity to join Palestinians as they observe the Nakba Day which signifies the beginning of a painful journey that has entered its 70th year. It was on this day, 15 May 1948, when the creation of the state of Israel resulted in over 700,000 Palestinians being forced out of their own territories and therefore losing their birth right.

It is therefore important that when we continue to support the Palestinians in their quest for self-determination, Statehood and freedom, we impress further to Israel and its allies that their continued oppression and subjugation is unjust and a human rights violations. In this context let us draw inspiration from Tata Madiba's stance expressed during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, in Pretoria in 1997 and he said:-
"When in 1977, the United Nations passed the resolution inaugurating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, it was asserting the recognition that injustice and gross human rights violations were being perpetrated in Palestine."

Honourable Members,

We will continue to express our displeasure in regard to the volatility in the Middle East and call upon all parties to expedite the Middle East Peace Process. Our assessment is that prospects for peace are persistently shunned by the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory. Furthermore the decision of the United States of America to relocate its Embassy to Jerusalem exacerbate the already protracted conflict and by extension further hindering efforts to find a peaceful solution as witnessed yesterday.

As you are aware, in December 2017 at the 54th National Conference of the African National Congress, a resolution was adopted to downgrade our diplomatic representation in Israel. This is a matter that is currently receiving our careful consideration following governments' regulatory frameworks.

Ladies and gentlemen

We also would like to reiterate our deep concern about the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which seeks to ensure Iran utilises its nuclear capabilities for human development as articulated by the President's statement as he join other world leaders.

Such action undermines international mechanism and will have implications to fostering peace and stability in the Middle East and far afield. It must further be that the agreement was unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council in resolution 2231, which establishes a binding legal framework to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme. It is our hope that the remaining four signatories to JCPOA will honour their commitment.

Honourable Members

In a similar vein, we do believe that international interference and aggression will never bring about lasting peace in Syria and in the contrary will only further contribute towards increased loss of life and displacement. We wish to reiterate our position that the use of airstrikes conducted by the countries in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic are contrary to global governance and international law.

To this end, the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria cannot be a justification for military airstrikes in a territory of a sovereign state without the authorisation of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

We also condemn in strongest possible terms any possible use of chemical weapons by any party in the Syrian territory. We remain steadfast in our principled position that the issue should be resolved in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Security Council (UNSC).

Ladies and gentlemen

The Middle East characterises both emerging threats and emerging opportunities. To this end, our diplomacy should promote our values and our interests, from both a political and an economic approach. Thus we attach great value to our strong economic and trade ties with countries in this region and believe that they are critical to world trade, especially in the area of energy security.

This is demonstrated through the recent accelerated growth in export trade with the Gulf region. Peace and stability is required in the region so that our missions can increase their engagement with potential investors in pursuit of the investment targets leading up to the Investment Summit.

On a separate but peace and stability related matter, we are encouraged by the recent rapprochement between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). It is our strong conviction that it is only through dialogue and continued engagement that all parties involved in the Korean Peninsula can resolve their differences.

Ladies and gentlemen

In regard to Asia, in April 2017 we have successfully launched the South Africa-China People-to-People Exchange Mechanism, which has further added significance to the already existing strategic relations between the two countries.

In addition to the already existing Government-to-Government engagements, this initiative has created an opportunity for non-government entities across academia, business and civil society to interact more frequently through organized structures. During the launch, the co-Chairs witnessed the signing of six Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding in various areas of cooperation.

Furthermore, since October 2017, South Africa became the first African country to export beef to China. You will indeed agree with me that this an indication of progress in leveraging our international agreements for domestic benefits and opening markets for our products.

Honourable Members

The Pan African Parliament has just elected new President, Vice Presidents and members of the legislature from various regions and countries including our very own parliamentarians. It is our considered view that efforts must be directed towards strengthening institutional capacity and accountability to enable this august body to discharge its mandate. We must expedite its transformation towards a legislative body so that the PAP can further entrench democracy, good governance and transparency in our continent.

We have a role to play to ensure that we create conditions within which our private sector can contribute to the general wellbeing of our people. The recent launch of the Japan-Africa Public-Private Economic Forum bears testimony for this undertaking. We will accelerate public-private partnerships and create more opportunities among Japanese and African companies.

We were pleased by Japan's pledged during the launch to invest \$30bn into the continent over the next three years. While efforts are underway to integrate African markets, this is an opportunity to integrate Africa's economy into the global sphere. This was underscored by President Ramaphosa during the launch when he stated:-

“For Africa to grow and for its people to flourish, its economies need to be more effectively integrated into the global economy.”

Honourable Members

We are conscious that we shall contribute to the growth of our economy, Africa's development agenda and a better world by expending the limited resources in our disposal. In an effort to remain within the compensation ceiling of employees' as set by National Treasury, the Department will continue with the process of rationalising its personnel establishment at missions, where it will not affect service delivery adversely.

We have also frozen the filling of non-critical posts at Head Office and in Missions abroad, and will continue to do so during the 2018/19 financial year.

We are also doing our best to realise youth empowerment and capacity building. In essence we have prioritised the implementation of internship and learnership programmes since these were initiated in the public service.

In the past financial year 60 youth participated in the internship programme, with representation from all nine provinces. The next batch of interns from diverse backgrounds will be joining the department at the beginning of June 2018 for their internship in this current financial year.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Department will continue to position our Diplomatic Training and Development as a centre of excellence on the African Continent. It is my view, that this resonates perfectly with our objectives of equipping African diplomats with skills to optimally advance the continental developmental goals and Agenda 2063 in particular.

We have identified the intensification of Economic Diplomacy Training as a strategic priority for this financial year. This will contribute effectively to the Investment Indaba and will bolster the work of the Investment Special Envoys as envisaged by President Ramaphosa.

I Thank You!!