**FF Plus**

**Dr. C Mulder**

**10 May 2022**

**International Relations and Cooperation**

Hon. Minister and deputy ministers, hon. Colleagues,

It’s a privilege to participate in this debate on international relations and cooperation. And the hon minister started off by referring to the importance of the date 10 May being 29 years since the inauguration of President Mandela on that day. The two of us were both present at that occasion. I refer to what president Mandela set out as one of the core values of his policies of those days or his view, namely: justice, equality and peace. We will come back to that.

I want to specifically focus on programme 2, international relations as almost 50% of the budget, is spent in international relations, R3,3 billion. And the budget report stated as follows: The department will continue to pursue increased and improve access to South African products and services to foreign markets. We contribute to the aim of increasing manufacturing and thereby contribute to an export orientated economy. I think we all agree with that.

Secondly, the department intends to become a catalyst and operate as a networking agent for South Africa Incorporated. The missions in particularly are poised as key frontline role-players to the pursuit of economic diplomacy and its component pilar such as foreign direct investment pledges as well as contribution towards inbound tourism. The question is, how do we achieve that? How do we get to that to materialise? I had a look again and I remember what was said about Mr. Mandela’s foreign policy and it was described by some, as follows: I could be seen as idealism, importance of moral values and universalism. Further to this he adopted the principle of unveracity and in foreign policy he compasses universal liberal ideas and human rights specifically. That placed South Africa in the unique, respected position to mediate in conflicts around the world. You are respect4d as a country. The question is, is that still the case?

My concern is, Hon. Minister and Chairperson, that at the moment, it seems there is a change in approach in the world in various aspects specifically by the US, by the UK, by Australia and other countries which we could describe as the West. It seems they are coming with a different approach and they want to counter China’s involvement specifically initiative by China to build infrastructure in Africa. The impression that one gets is that they won’t see rhetoric and buzz words such as non-alignment on neutrality or as you stated today that those relationships with those countries should not be neglected. But they do not see that as sufficient necessarily to giving us access to their markets and agreements. I think that is a very important and sincere concern that we should have. I listened to your speech very carefully, hon. Minister and you placed a lot of emphasis on BRICS, obviously, and our involvement in BRICS. You referred to the Russia/Ukraine conflict and you are saying we are concerned about that conflict and you think a diplomatic resolution is the case and I think that is correct. You also emphasised the role BRICS could play in the processes going forward and you said the theme for BRICS is ‘Brics in Africa’

You referred to the other partners, US and Europe and you say they should not be neglected. My concern is, chairperson, that I don’t think that is necessarily enough. To tell them that we don’t want them to be neglected, I don’t think they would care if we neglected them. Maybe we should be more concerned about that. If you look at the reality, our exports to the US in 2022 was approximately $10,7 billion. 38 times more than we exported to Russia during that period. We exported $282.85 million. It is a huge difference. If we continue in that way, we run the risk that those markets becoming more and more difficult for us, and I was concerned that in your speech didn’t refer to the Agoa situation at all. Maybe the deputy minister who was part of the delegation will refer to that. I hope so. Unless we don’t care, we don’t mind that we are running the risk in terms of US and those kind of experts. The fact of the matter is it seems that our emphasis is so much on BRICS and everything surrounding that that we take the rest for granted. I think that will be a huge mistake. Perhaps the deputy minister will speak just now and he will inform us perhaps, of what was done in terms of the Agoa agreement. I think it is essential.