**MINISTRY**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION**

 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY

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**4685. Mr M Tshwaku (EFF) to ask the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation:**

What **(a)** practical steps has the Republic taken over the past five years to support the struggle of the people of Palestine and **(b)** are the reasons that the specified steps have not included the cutting of diplomatic ties between the Republic and Israel? **NW5809E**

**REPLY:**

1. Practical steps taken by South Africa over the past five years include**:**
* In May 2018, South Africa downgraded the Embassy in Tel Aviv by recalling its Ambassador;
* The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) hosted the State of Palestine Africa Heads of Mission Conferences in South Africa during the periods 2018 and 2022;
* On 8 June 2021, the Permanent Missions of South Africa and Namibia to the United Nations (UN) in New York jointly hosted a Ministerial virtual side event in partnership with the State of Palestine on “*The Importance of Upholding the Principles of Self-Determination and Non-discrimination: Justice for the Palestinian People*”. The event was borne from South Africa and Namibia’s own experience against racial segregation and oppression in their fight for liberation against Apartheid.

The purpose of the event was to create awareness around the political, economic and social subjugation Palestinians face daily under Israeli laws; to recognise Israel as an Apartheid state, and to mobilise the UN and its member states, the international community and civil society to double its efforts to strengthen international action and coordination to uphold international norms and apply pressure on Israel to implement UN resolutions and to end its targeted violations of human rights and discriminatory practices;

* South Africa’s objection to the granting of official observer status by the African Union (AU) on 22 July 2021. The matter was raised by South Africa at the AU Summit on 6 February 2022. As a result of this action, the decision to grant Israel observer status was unanimously suspended. In this regard, a committee was set up to study the issue and the conclusions thereof to be presented at the AU Summit in 2023. The objection was based on the fact that, the decision to grant observer status to Israel was taken unilaterally and without adequate consultation with all AU Members. The AU strenuously objected to the deaths of Palestinians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. It is trusted that this misstep will be corrected; and
* In August 2022, Honourable Deputy Minister Mashego-Dlamini’s undertook a working visit Palestine. The main objectives of the visit to Palestine were: (i) To establish a strategic dialogue on all key issues; (ii) Reaffirm South Africa’s commitment to the Palestinian cause, domestically and globally; (iii) Review South Africa’s initiatives and strengthen bilateral relations, discussions on coordination of efforts aimed at the establishment of the State of Palestine based on UN Resolutions and international law, and strategies for galvanising support in the international community; and (iv) Exchange views on recent political developments in Africa and the Middle East.
* During the working visit, Deputy Minister Mashego-Dlamini together with her Palestinian counterpart, Dr Amal Jadou, launched the Strategic Dialogue on 21 August 2022. The formation of the Strategic Dialogue between the two countries is aimed at galvanising support for the Palestinian cause on the African continent, as well as in the international arena.

The Strategic Dialogue agreed to:

* Mobilise African countries to support Palestine and to enhance bilateral relations with Palestine on the Continent;
* Exchange views based on the South African experience that will assist to end Israeli domination in Palestinian territories, and raise international awareness of the plight of Palestinians, especially the increase of settlements by Israel in the Occupied Territory;
* Lobby for the withdrawal of Israel as an observer member of the African Union;
* Continuation of efforts towards support for the two-state solution and the right to self-determination;
* Support Palestinian efforts for full membership of the United Nations and the creation of positive, credible, and lasting international mechanisms to address the Palestinian cause based on international law;
* Formulate practical strategies towards taking up the Palestinian cause to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to declare Israel as an Apartheid state; and
* Mobilise civil society both in South Africa and Palestine, as well as internationally, to support the Palestinian cause.
1. As the custodian of foreign policy and inter-state relations, DIRCO gave effect to a resolution taken at the governing party’s 54th National Conference of December 2017, whereby the South African Government was directed to downgrade its Embassy in Israel to a Liaison Office.

The downgrade was aimed at giving “practical expression of support to the oppressed people of Palestine,” and the Government’s concern at the violation of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the refusal of the government of Israel to enter into meaningful negotiations.

The governing party’s resolution was also guided by a sentiment that given the continued intransigence and belligerence of the Government of Israel, that relationship with South Africa and the Government of Israel could not be typified as being ‘business as usual.”

To give effect to this decision, South Africa currently does not have an Ambassador accredited to Israel. The Government of South Africa recalled its Ambassador to Israel in May 2018, the South African Mission in Tel Aviv is currently headed by a Chargé D’Affaires.

The ongoing flagrant abuse of the human rights of Palestinians places a moral responsibility on South Africa to act. South Africa is therefore in the process of conceptualising a comprehensive South African Initiative on Palestine (SAIP), to support and consolidate the Palestinian cause, build international consensus, and recalibrate our relations with Israel.

South Africa cannot have normal relations with Israel until the creation of a free Palestine. In 2023, South Africa will continue to strengthen her fraternal relations with Palestine through the holding of various structured bilateral meetings, culminating in a State Visit by President Mahmoud Abbas to South Africa.