

Honourable Tsenoli, Deputy Speaker of Parliament
Honourable Masondo, Chairperson of the NCOP
Honourable Didiza, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reform
Colleagues

Deputy Speaker

It is an honour for me to participate at this parliamentary event to launch the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association National Branch and the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians Chapter (CWP).

I will not dwell too much on this history of South Africa and the Commonwealth as this was dealt with by the previous speakers. I will, as requested reflect on South Africa's approach to multilateralism in the context of being a member state of the Commonwealth group of nations.

The overall vision of our Foreign Policy is set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) and is driven by national, regional and continental priorities, for the promotion of a safe, peaceful and prosperous region, continent and a fair and just world. We recently agreed on a National Interest document that provides further guidance on how we advance our values and interests in a complex international arena.

The global political context is dynamic as political and economic interests of countries are not static. This dynamism is reflected in how countries organise themselves into groups and associations in the international arena and how as collectives and sovereign states they engage with formal institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations and its specialised agencies. The Covid-19 pandemic has added to this complexity as it challenged the commitments to global cooperation in the context of a disease that requires solidarity and cooperation to save peoples' lives, protect their health and to safeguard livelihoods globally. The lack of commitment by the richer nations of the world to ensure equitable access to the means to end the pandemic across all regions of the world has not only resulted in the loss of lives, but is also giving rise to a twin track global economic recovery. That is, rapid economic growth in fully vaccinated countries of the North and slower economic recovery and even stagnating economies in the developing world.

These issues are important as we launch these important chapters of the Commonwealth here today. The pandemic and its skewed responses to it have harmed the most vulnerable people globally. This includes women and the largely poorer constituencies represented by the majority of us as parliamentarians.

It is therefore worth recalling the political values of the Commonwealth which includes the promotion of democracy, human rights, international peace and security and human dignity. At the very first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), held on South African soil in 1999, the outcome document, known as the ***Durban Communiqué***, foregrounded the idea of People Centered Development in a globalising world. The Durban Communiqué sought to promote more equitable trade rules amongst nations, including within member states of the Commonwealth. The Durban Communiqué called for collaboration of the 'Commonwealth Family' at the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations at which the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established. Today I want to take this opportunity to again call for collaboration by this 'family', as we seek to negotiate a temporary waiver of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights in relation to therapeutics, vaccines and diagnostics, that will place peoples' lives and livelihoods, in all parts of the world, at the centre of building back our lives and countries.

The South African government will remind all members of the Commonwealth, of its values, that emerged from the Commonwealth Harare Declaration of 1991 and the Charter of the Commonwealth agreed to in 2012. These Declarations served to concretise the values of anti-racism, the promotion of human rights and dignity and commitments to reducing inequalities between its members at the forums that we, as the Executive engage in. These are the CHOGMS, meetings of Ministers responsible for International Relations and Cooperation and other sectoral ministerial meetings. We will also urge our business leaders to remind their counterparts of these values when they meet through the Commonwealth Business Council.

Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity to ask parliamentarians here today to engage with their counter-parts in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Chapters and especially with the global Commonwealth Women Parliamentarian chapters, on these principles.

We derive value from our engagement with our partners in this Commonwealth 'family' when we as South Africans, work to reinforce the Commonwealth's core political

values, which, are generally in line with our own vision of an ideal and **just** multilateral system that is based on inclusivity and legitimacy.

It is our view that we should always strive to build a better understanding and appreciation of South Africa's values and principles in the multilateral and plurilateral formations that we engage in. This does not always mean we get all the outcomes we want, but through consistently engaging in and leading in norm shaping discourses in these forums, over time, our values, principles and interests will be reflected in agreements that shape global governance agendas.

Deputy Speaker, I will conclude by reiterating our firm commitment to multilateralism as the best way for states to resolve conflicts and other global challenges. The 'Commonwealth Family' as it is referred to, is an important forum for us and we should engage strategically within it, to advance our national interests and values. I wish you all the best in taking up these tasks through your Chapters.

Thank you.