SA CONTINUES TO FLY FLAG HIGH AS A GLOBAL PLAYER

Ubuntu Awards honour ambassadors who do the country proud

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SOUTH Africa is an influential player in regional, continental and global political, economic and trade affairs. In our capital city, Pretoria, we host the second-largest contingent of foreign diplomatic representatives in the world. SA maintains diplomatic relations with countries and organizations through 136 missions in 109 countries.

In tandem with our growing footprint in the world, South Africa’s international trade has escalated to high proportions, thereby contributing towards job creation and poverty eradication. SA is the second-largest and most dynamic economy on the continent, accounting for 29% of Africa’s GDP in terms of purchasing power parity. In 2013, 36% of our exports were destined for Africa. It is also significant to recognize that despite global Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) falling by 18% in 2014, South Africa was able to attract over R14-billion in the 2013/14 financial year. This is almost double the amount of FDI in 2013. Again FDI inflow into South Africa was registered at R13.13-billion from January 2013 to July 2015 with 5,607 jobs created.

In addition, and contrary to international trends, gross domestic fixed investment into South Africa has been growing steadily since the global financial crisis. Multinationals continue to find SA an attractive investment destination. There are about 700 companies from the 10 top operating in SA, 600 from the UK, 400 from Germany, 200 from Japan, 150 from France and 150 from India. Recently VW committed an additional R5.4-billion to its investment into the South African market.

For a country that was isolated by the international community just over two decades ago, the role we have played globally since 1994 is nothing short of remarkable. Our diplomats do the hard work behind the scenes. South Africans of all walks of life have made our country proud across various fields internationally, and they should be recognized and celebrated.

Accordingly, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation hosted the annual Ubuntu Awards recently in Cape Town under the theme “Celebrating Excellence in Diplomacy.” Awards are given to an organization or individual who have through excellence, innovation, creativity, social responsibility and patriotism distinguished themselves as true ambassadors of SA and contributed to promoting SA’s national interests and values worldwide.

The Ubuntu Awards cut across eight categories from economic diplomacy to social responsibility and the Hillary Clinton Lifetime Achievement Award. The initiative is inspired by SA’s foreign policy, which is driven by the desire to achieve a united African continent that is peaceful, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, and prosperous, and which contributes to a world that is just and equitable. South Africa pursues this vision, informed by the values of ubuntu (humanity). The spirit of ubuntu is tightly woven in SA’s moral fibre, more openly in our interaction with fellow Africans and the international community in general. South Africa is implementing its diplomacy of ubuntu (towards achieving its national interests within a very complex and dynamic environment).

This requires that we creatively navigate and find opportunities working with our people at home and friends and partners abroad. Central to SA’s national interest is to address the triple challenge of eradicating poverty, unemployment and inequality. Economic and political relations remain important vehicles for cooperation and promoting SA’s national priorities. The national priorities of government are also pursued in bilateral relations. Focus is also placed on strengthening economic relations to promote SA’s trade, investment and tourism potential and opportunities.

The African continent remains central in our foreign policy. We have been consistent in our support of regional and continental processes to respond to and resolve crises, strengthen regional sustainable development and opportunities in Africa. SA’s foreign policy engagement is aligned with Africa’s Agenda 2063 to contribute to the socioeconomic development of the African continent. The strengthening of the African Union and its structures is a strategic priority in deepening the continental integration process.

Closer to home, the integration of the Southern African Development Cooperation remains critical for the socioeconomic development of the region and for South Africa’s economic competitiveness.

In the execution of our foreign policy, taking into account this reality, we shall ensure that we remain an active and responsible global citizen, grounded in our values and principles.

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