

Guest Column: Peace and stability in Africa a priority as South Africa joins the UN Security Council, by Ndivhuwo Mabaya, News24, 02 January 2019

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Ndivhuwo Mabaya

South Africa has as of January 1, 2019 taken up its seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for a two-year term, following the country's successful election to this principal organ on June 8, 2018. South Africa received 183 votes from member states of the UN General Assembly.

Speaking after the vote in the UN General Assembly, International Relations and Cooperation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu welcomed the overwhelming mandate and the challenge given to South Africa to represent the Continent and its people and to be the voice on development, peace and security issues.

"We are humbled by this mandate and the confidence expressed to us by all nations of the world. We will work with all the Security Council members in maintaining international peace and security," Minister Sisulu said.

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In preparation for the two-year seat, South Africa met with all the permanent members of the UN Security Council to introduce its priorities and to also deliberate on some of the key international security issues of concern.

The Minister also stated that among South Africa's key priorities during its two-year tenure on the Council would be the silencing of the guns in Africa and addressing the plight of women and children in conflict situations.

"Women and children are the real victims of wars and situations of political instability on our Continent and across the world. We would want the Security Council to develop systems for nations to prioritise protection and supporting women and children during difficult times. South Africa will use its seat on the Council to address gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity wherever they occur. Our history requires of us to continue to be the defenders of human rights. This is a responsibility we must carry at all times," Sisulu said.

In an interview with the media, the Minister emphasised the importance of peace and stability as a catalyst for economic development and alleviating poverty in Africa. Peace, democracy and stable governments will play a big role in the smooth and fast-tracked implementation of the African Union's Continental Free Trade Area Agreement and other programmes for infrastructure development and economic empowerment of the people of Africa.

"The Continent has the potential to address all its economic and social challenges in the shortest time possible. We have all the ingredients required. Silencing the guns in Africa will direct the necessary financial resources to infrastructure development, education and technology, which is required for economic growth. It is for this reason that governments must prioritise peace, stability and strengthening democracy and democratic institutions," Sisulu added.

South Africa holds the view that emphasis should be placed on the preventative diplomacy approach in addressing conflicts and its root causes and also to assist countries emerging from conflict, from relapsing. In this context, South Africa will work towards promoting political processes and addressing the pivotal nexus between security and development.

Under-resourcing of conflict prevention remains an obstacle. South Africa will continue to highlight the fact that commitment to sustaining peace and conflict prevention requires adequate and predictable resources in support of these priorities, which will invariably lead to less spending on costly peacekeeping and humanitarian responses in protecting developmental gains.

Addressing the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in Russia, the Minister raised concern about the growth of extremist groups in Africa.

"Working with other members of the UN Security Council, we will seek to coordinate a united response to this challenge. We would like states to coordinate and also strengthen their response to the scourge of terrorism and extremism. No state can address this issue alone. This challenge requires cooperation of states and working together with different law enforcement agencies. States must also take action against their citizens who are involved in terrorism and extremist activities," she stressed.

As we start our tenure as a non-permanent member, we look forward to collaborating with the members of the Security Council in promoting the maintenance of international peace and security and the social well-being and advancement of all the peoples of the world.

- Ndivhuwo Mabaya is spokesperson and head of communications at Dirco.