



**STATEMENT BY HON. NETUMBO NANDI-NDAITWAH, DEPUTY
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND COOPERATION AND CHAIR OF THE SADC
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SADC
SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE WITH WESTERN SAHARA**

25 MARCH 2019

PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

Your Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Honourable.

Honourable Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Secretaries General or Chairpersons and Members of the Political Parties

Distinguished Representatives of Former National Liberation Movements

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me on your behalf express our deepest thanks and appreciation to our host Hon Lindiwe Sisulu, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa for the warm welcome extended to all of us and for having availed the magnificent facility for us to hold this Conference. We must also thank the Government and people of South Africa for the generous hospitality accorded to us since our arrival.

I would also on behalf of SADC Member States thank you Honourable Ministers, invited guests and other delegates from all over the world for having taken time to express solidarity with POLISARIO and the people of Western Sahara. As a child and product of our national liberation struggle, I can only say with confidence that it is such solidarity that sustained us during our protracted struggle. In this context, this Conference may be considered as a small measure in the scheme of things. However, it is extremely important, as it will make immeasurable contribution in the process of consolidating peace on the continent of Africa and by extension the world at large. It is therefore, particularly gratifying to have in our midst the Former Head of State of Nigeria, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo who will assist with our proceedings. Nigeria is one of those countries that have made a great contribution to the liberation of Southern Africa, as a member of the Front Line states; I am talking of the Front Line States and Nigeria.

I am also very pleased to have afforded this opportunity to open the discussion today and equally delighted by the attendance, which is a testimony to our unity on our common goal, which is the call for the right to freedom and self-determination of the people of Western Sahara as per various Resolutions of the OAU-AU and the UN.

A day before yesterday the 23rd March 2019 the people of Southern Africa celebrated Southern Africa Liberation at Cuito Cuanavale in Angola. We know it very well that with assistance from the International solidarity we have obliterated colonialism and apartheid from Southern Africa region where it was more entrenched. We thank the International solidarity for the unreserved support to us during the time when we were fighting for the liberation of our respective countries. It was the sacrifices made by the people in Southern Africa complemented by the international support and solidarity that brought about the implementation of numerous Resolutions of the UN and the then OAU, resulted into our freedom and independence.

Therefore, our task here today is to call for the end of Morocco's illegal occupation of Western Sahara through implementation of the UN Settlement Plan. As a continent we should not talk of illegal occupation in this century having defeated all the colonial powers. We will come the engagements going on between Polisario Front and Morocco being facilitated by the UN Secretary General envoy for Western Sahara Mr Horst Koehler, former Germany President. Those diplomatic engagements are very important and we call on both parties to take them serious. Both Western Sahara and Morocco are members of the AU and as children of the same house they must stay at peace with one another like all members of the AU. Our sister country Morocco as a member of the then Organisation Of African Unity (OAU) has rendered support to the people fighting for national independence and self-determination. To that end in supporting the mediation process that is going on we must call on all those involved in the process to reach out to one another. To enable the full implementation of the UN resolution that calls for a holding of referendum in Western Sahara for the people to determine their future as most of our countries did. To that end, it is expected of us to make a difference in the political process of Western Sahara. I wish to call upon you to support the plight of the Saharawi people just as we were supported during the dark days of our liberation struggle.

It is indeed our daunting responsibility to provide much needed assistance to our brothers and sisters of Western Sahara by providing their inalienable right to freedom and self-determination. No doubt until and only when the people of Western Sahara are given an opportunity to determine their future, the question of that country will remain an agenda item of the AU and the UN. It is therefore important that the leaders in the conflict have to take appropriate decisions that will make them go into history of having brought peace between the two African sister countries.

Before I conclude, let me once more again reiterate how pleased I am to have the Former President of Nigeria, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, and others

who will lead the discussions on this very important matter of Western Sahara during the working groups.

We look forward to their guidance during the Conference. Equally, I am looking forward to further engagement from the Honourable Ministers, Political parties, the Youth, NGOs, Media and all invited guests.

I now take this opportunity to declare the Working Groups officially open.

I THANK YOU ALL