

REMARKS BY H.E. DR. NALEDI PANDOR, MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA AT THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORMAL RECOGNITION OF THE TWO UNITED NATIONS NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA PRIZE LAUREATES AND ANNUAL OBSERVANCE OF THE NELSON MANDELA INTERNATIONAL DAY 20 JULY 2020 (VIRTUAL MEETING)

President of the General Assembly;

Secretary-General;

Excellencies;

Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Africa and His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa, it is an honour for me to deliver these remarks marking the 102nd birthday of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

We are delighted that this occasion also honours the two Laureates of the United Nations Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela Prize, which recognises the achievements of those who have dedicated their lives to the service of humanity in the spirit of Nelson Mandela. I therefore wish to congratulate the Female and Male category winners of the Prize, namely Ms Marianna Vardinoyannis from Greece and Dr Morissanda Kouyate from Guinea. The recipients, who are with us today, were selected following a rigorous selection process, overseen by you, Mr President. We hope that their outstanding example will inspire many more people, particularly the youth.

Mr President,

Suffice it to say that President Mandela, whom we consider the father of our nation South Africa, is also a truly global icon in the fight for human rights, peace, freedom and justice for all.

We are deeply saddened that this year's Nelson Mandela International Day takes place only days after the sudden passing on of Madiba's youngest daughter, Ambassador Zindziswa Mandela-Hlongwane, who had been serving as South Africa's Ambassador to Denmark. The thoughts and prayers of all South Africans are with the Mandela family at this time, and there can be no more fitting tribute to the memory of Ambassador Mandela-Hlongwane than redoubling our efforts in living up to the legacy of Nelson Mandela.

We celebrate President Mandela alongside the urgent battle against COVID-19. The pandemic reminds us of the indispensable value of multilateralism. We have seen that, like other contemporary challenges, no country acting alone can successfully deal with the pandemic. We are witnessing commendable collaboration amongst member states of the UN in seeking solutions and providing assistance to each other as we deal with the pandemic. We need to continue this collaboration, including in the search for vaccines, which should be global public goods available to all countries who need them. Let us also come together to design a global socio-economic response to the pandemic with the United Nations and its agencies such as the World Health Organisation playing a key leadership role. This is also a time to rethink the continued imposition of unilateral coercive measures on some countries as such punitive measures inhibit countries' ability to respond to the pandemic, with dire consequence for their populations, especially women and children.

Mr President,

2020 is also the year in which we mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. Nelson Mandela's values are intertwined with those of the United Nations. He was a strong advocate for human rights, peace-making, the socio-economic upliftment of people and respect for international law, as shown in mediation efforts and peacebuilding in Burundi and the DRC, amongst others.

As we celebrate this 75th anniversary Nelson Mandela would have asked us to recommit ourselves to the Charter of the United Nations. He would also remind us of the imperative to reform the United Nations so that its structures reflect the world of today, in particular expanding the membership of the UN Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories. A reformed United Nations will be a better institution for upholding the Charter and defending its values and principles in the service of humanity.

We were recently shocked by the murder of Mr George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement officers. His death reverberated around the whole world, bringing into sharp focus the rally cry, "Black Lives Matter". Nelson Mandela's Life was that of a global symbol of the struggle against racism. We are disappointed that despite all efforts the scourge of racism still rears its head in many parts of the world. Racism is inhumane, Its basis is the belittlement of others, casting them as inferior and therefore deserving of all manner of ill-treatment. Racism fuels deep hatred and divisions. The United Nations should use the aftermath of the death of Mr Floyd to revisit our work in its area and make our Organisation the lodestar of the fight against racism.

Mr President,

Nelson Mandela International Day and Madiba's life story offers us an important reminder that no matter how daunting our challenges may be, we must never abandon our principles and humanity and that all life has value and dignity. These lessons are echoed in those that we have learned from responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown again, that the many factors that we use to differentiate ourselves from one another are ultimately meaningless in the face of a deadly enemy such as COVID-19 that neither sees nor cares, about any of these differences.

Let us continue to draw lessons from the most humble servants of the people. The persons who have proven themselves invaluable during lockdown are those we must hold in high esteem.

Mr President,

As we celebrate Madiba's remarkable life we call on all nations of the world, developed and developing alike, to emulate Nelson Mandela's values of tolerance, dialogue, respect, unity and reconciliation and to embrace his qualities of humility, forgiveness and compassion and his dedication to the service of humanity.

I thank you.