

Address by H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah on 'Africa and the reform of the multilateral system'

On the occasion of the signature event on the sidelines of the 36th AU Summit jointly held by the Republic of Namibia and Amani Africa on 'Africa and the reform of the multilateral system' and as part of our coverage of some of the key events around the summit, we present in our 'Ideas Indaba' the Keynote Address by H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia.

Date | 20 February 2023

Keynote Address by

H.E. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah

**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
International Relations and Cooperation,**

**Delivered on her behalf by Ambassador Jerobeam
Shaanika, Deputy Executive Director of
Multilateral Relations and Cooperation, Ministry
of International Relations and Cooperation**

Director of Ceremonies

Distinguished members of high-level panel of experts

Distinguished invited guest

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this gathering which, I believe, offers an excellent opportunity to reflect on the new agenda for peace and the reform of the multilateral system, in order to assess whether it reflects present day reality and to determine whether the multilateral system is able to respond appropriately to geopolitical challenges in a fair and balanced manner.

The multilateral system has evolved since the First World War. Each time institutions have been created to respond to the challenges of the time. It should therefore be noted that these institutional reforms have been necessitated by a number of factors such as the increase in the number of Member States and the increase demands for equitable participation. Therefore, it is essential that we continue to scrutinize multilateral institutions and pose critical questions about their future relevance.

Distinguished invited guests

Multilateralism has demonstrated to be a cornerstone of global harmony and uniting nations large and small in advancing issues of common values and confronting threats to humanity.

It is worth noting that the responsibility of maintaining peace and security cannot be solely left to one member state or particular region. The indispensability of the multilateral system, lies in unity and global solidarity. The outbreak of Covid-19 has unearthed the urgent need of unity of purpose, in working together in solving common problems, as no nation large and small was spared by COVID -19.

Ladies and Gentlemen

COVID-19 has demonstrated that humanity can face a common

threat to our way of life. Thus, the pandemic has left a dent in all health systems throughout the world.

COVID-19 taught us useful lessons and the urgency of reforming the multilateral system. So that it speaks to the upholding of the dignity and worth of the human person in all nations, so that we do not speak divisive language, such as “them and us” when facing a common threat. Because no one is safe until everybody else is safe.

It started as a health emergency that quickly evolved into also a socio-economic crisis which disrupted socioeconomic and lives of peoples of the world. Despite good intentions, there were acts of discrimination perpetuated by some member states, in the form of vaccine hoarding, towards developing countries and Africa in particular. Instead of the pandemic to soothe geopolitical tensions and bring countries together, we witnessed inward looking policies being implemented by some of the multilateral institutions.

Yet, the multilateral system, with all its flaws and limitations, remains the only framework for imagining and working towards collective action in the face of this global threat. In one way or another, it is what we continue to and should rally around. Because, a safe world without multilateralism is difficult to imagine. Therefore, African Union and its members states must remain firmly committed to advancing the reforms of the multilateral system including the reform of the United Nations Security Council.

Distinguished invited guests

Africa as a continent has abundant resources that can be harnessed for the benefits of the continent. Likewise, Africa has enormous human capital that can develop the continent and propel its economic growth. Our Fauna and Flora attracts tourist from the rest of the world.

Therefore, there is no doubt that Africa’s resources

contribute enormously to global development, however there is a negative perception towards Africa viewed as a mere supplier of raw materials and all negative things. Therefore, there is a need to reflect on how the African resources are used to develop other nations to the detriment of the African continent. If we were to examine critically the composition of international soccer players and best performing athletes, majority of them are of African origin. The raw material from Africa are propelling the 4th Industrial revolution, the interesting question, is that not an African contribution to the development of the world?.

While Africa has all these abundances of resources, it has no say or little control in the global financial systems, hence there is a compelling need to reform the global economic trading and financial systems, to level playing field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While reform in this area is without a doubt challenging, the imperative for making the multilateral system to live up to its lofty ideals, in the face of difficulties facing many parts of the world, and, indeed our capacities as peoples of the world, are such that these challenges are not insurmountable.

With imagination and commitment, it is actually possible to inject reform to the governance of the global trading, economic and financial systems for unleashing the huge potential of the global order to deliver better and more equitably for all with enormous benefits for all social, economic and political actors.

Distinguished invited guest

This is also an era when we have, on top of the health pandemic and the ensuing economic crises and further accentuating the foregoing challenges, the **existential** threat

posed by climate change. This threat is not something that will come in the future. It is a clear and present danger for today and now. We see this from

- the drought affecting parts of Southern Africa, and the longest drought that led to the perishing of cattle that is a source of livelihood for millions of people in the Horn of Africa
- the flooding in South Sudan and Sudan and in Nigeria, Niger and Chad
- And further afield the flooding that left tens of millions of people homeless and claimed the lives of thousand in Pakistan
- The heat waves, wildfires in Europe, the US and Australia

While the world has made good progress in establishing commitments and some instruments including financial arrangements to deal with this climate emergency, the pace with which commitments are implemented and the ways in which the instruments operate leaves a lot to be desired.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Herein respect to the climate crisis, we have a case that illustrates that the operation of the multilateral system in a business-as-usual fashion is inadequate to meet the needs of those bearing the brunt of this crisis and the imperative for saving humanity.

As if all of these are not enough, wars and conflicts are adding further fuel to the multiple challenges facing the multilateral system. One such case that drives home the deep fragility of the multilateral system is the inability to solve the problem and response to genuine call for people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination particularly in Palestine and Western Sahara, as well as imposition of unilateral sanctions meant to change governance

systems in certain countries.

Distinguished invited guest

Namibia was one of those countries whose people were denied rights to self-determination. The people of Namibia fought to gain their independence, with the help of international community, they managed to get their independence. Therefore, Namibia understands too well, what is like to be denied the rights to freedom.

The constitution of Namibia commits the state to pursue the policy that encourages the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. This out of our experience, having waged a long and bitter war of liberation struggle and to say, not again a generation will endure a scourge of war. Of course, it worth emphasizing that this is but one, of major, example of how the promise of the multilateral system, as encapsulated in the UN Charter, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados last September put it rightly that 'A survey of the global security situation, notably in eastern Europe and the Middle East, but in many other places as well, reminds us daily of the tragic inability of the international system to deliver more peace and more security to the many vulnerable people of the world.'

Ladies and Gentlemen

For us in Africa, partly it was this realization that prompted us to transition from the OAU to the AU and establish the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) for complementing and reinforcing, through regional collective action, the multilateral collective security system was founded on the provision of the UN Charter. Our conviction has been that, as we pursue the reform of the UN Security Council to address the historic injustice imposed on Africa by its exclusion from permanent membership and veto power, we also

have brought our efforts together to share the burden of the multilateral system and contribute to the global public good of international peace and security through the APSA.

Alongside the contribution from regional bodies like the AU, the urgency of the need for reform of the multilateral peace and security system has been highlighted, by ongoing wars and conflicts. Although the multilateral collective security system has not ceased to function in the face of these grave security challenges, it is clear that it is seriously battered.

Distinguished invited Guest,

This means that it is in need of intensive critical care which may require a wide range of interventions from surgery to blood fusion. Nothing less than such reform will suffice to revive multilateralism to its full health.

It is in this context and having regard to our contribution to the global public good of international peace and security through the APSA that we support the UN Secretary General's initiative for articulating a New Agenda for Peace. In addition to the foregoing, we believe that this effort needs to also tackle new forms of challenges to peace and security, not only existing ones relating to conflicts involving terrorist groups to emerging ones such as those that arose with new technology including in the cyberspace and in the use of automated machine systems in wars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Each of the foregoing major global challenges on their own present serious challenge to multilateralism. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of facing them one after the other.

Indeed, while many of these challenges are not completely new, it is clear that they are bigger in scale, unfold in the same timeline and tend to reinforce each other. They are also

taking place at a time of major global power shifts and worrying geopolitical rivalries not only along old ideological divides but also rivalries pitting old against new powers and major powers against middle powers.

In this context, it may all seem for us in Africa that there is little we can do to change. All that we have to do is to try to mitigate the consequences of these multi-crises. We have to remain ourselves that moments of crisis are also opportune moments for changing existing conditions for the better. And that change should not necessarily come from the powerful only. In any case, power is also a matter of how one masters the use of one's resources and on this we are endowed with not only huge natural resources but also being the largest block in the UN, which gives us, if we speak with one voice, an unparalleled influence in the process for the reform of the system.

For the continent of Africa, this would mean that our collective effort should go beyond presenting a good case for securing the interest of Africa. It should also include articulating proposals on how to reform the multilateral system in a way that also meets the just expectations and needs of the whole of humanity. This challenges us to harness ways of thinking that both attends to and transcends existing faultiness and divisions in the world.

I believe that we are capable of going beyond the usual and mobilizing such a bold thinking. This particular gathering and the process we are launching is meant to help us rise to this challenge and articulate perspectives from the people of Africa on how humanity can achieve the multilateral system and a world that we all want and deserve.

Our founding President Sam Nujoma, has taught that *"a united people striving to achieve a common good for all members of the society will always emerge victorious"*

I thank you for your attention and wish us all a successful deliberation and follow up high-level process.

The content of this article does not represent the views of Amani Africa and reflect only the personal views of the authors who contribute to 'Ideas Indaba'