



THE QUEST FOR EQUITABLE MULTILATERALISM

MAPPING SOUTH AFRICAN INTERESTS
IN REFORMING THE GLOBAL ORDER

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INTRODUCTION

Multilateralism can be defined as 'an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalised principles of conduct. Critical scholars argue that 'international institutions (as sites of both ideas and material power) act at both the domestic and international levels to transmit hegemonic norms'. The powerful use multilateral institutions to legitimise and strengthen their hegemony. At the same time, multilateral institutions are an arena where these hegemonic norms can be challenged by weaker states.

Democratic South Africa has played an active role in multilateral institutions, leveraging its history, geographic location, and diversity to position itself as a builder of bridges between the Global North and South, representative of Africa, and a champion of a rules-based world order. The Republic has used multilateral institutions to advocate for the maximum participation of all states (rich and poor, strong and weak) in global governance according to rules of the global order (applied equally to all), in order to ensure an equitable distribution of resources in the international system. In recent years, South Africa has become more vocal about the need to entirely rethink the multilateral system owing to the unequal application of international law in what is supposed to be a rules-based order. With its successful hosting of the XV BRICS Summit in 2023, its leadership of the African Peace Initiative to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine war, and its ground-breaking litigation against Israel for crimes of genocide in Gaza, Pretoria has asserted the Republic's role as a pivotal player in the debate on reshaping the world order.

The principles of the country's democratic foreign policy were set out by Nelson Mandela in an article in Foreign Affairs in 1993. While there have been shifts in emphasis and priority since the article was first published, these six principles continue to underlie South African foreign policy: the centrality of human rights in international relations; the promotion of democracy; justice and respect for international law; all nations should aim for peace and the resolution of conflict through internationally agreed, non-violent mechanisms; Africa should be the focus of South Africa's foreign policy; and economic development should be achieved through greater international and regional cooperation. Two of these principles lie at the heart of South Africa's foreign policy:

- The commitment to maintaining a rules-based international system that enables disruptions to the international order to be resolved fairly. This is the rule of law at international level, which ensures that decisions are made fairly and consistently for all states, regardless of size or power.

- South Africa has a responsibility to place Africa at the centre of its foreign policy and ensure peace, development, and security on the continent. This is referred to as the African Agenda. At the core of the African Agenda is a desire to strengthen African agency in global politics, in the context of structural power. Structural power refers to the ability to define and set the rules of interaction in the international system. South Africa uses multilateral institutions as a vehicle for African states to wield greater influence when addressing global challenges, especially those that directly involve them. This challenges the colonial/imperial model of the West, which dictates the terms of engagement for African states within the international system.



1 Ruggie, J.G. 1992. 'Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution'. International Organisation, 46(3): 561-598
 2 Robert Cox, "Multilateralism and World Order" Review of International Studies, 18 (April 1992)
 3 Dugard, John. "The choice before us: International law or a 'rules-based international order'?" Leiden Journal of International Law 36, no. 2 (2023): 223-232.
 4 N, Mandela. 'South Africa's Future Foreign Policy'. Foreign Affairs, 72(5): 68-97, 1993

This report provides a broad map of South Africa's orientation towards the multilateral order, focusing on key actors that shape or influence the country's multilateral engagements. It identifies the main international institutions in which South African actors engage, and outlines how these actors perceive the issues dealt with by those institutions. The report begins with an overview of the contemporary challenges facing South Africa, before exploring debates about South Africa's international identity. Subsequently, it identifies different state and non-state actors with interests in the multilateral system. The report will then discuss South Africa's engagement with the multilateral system in four thematic areas drawn from the foreign policy principles discussed above:

- Strengthening African multilateralism
- Peaceful conflict resolution
- Reform of Global Governance
- International and Regional Economic Cooperation
- Climate Change

From this discussion, the report sets out three possible fields of cooperation for South Africa to form progressive political alliances with similar countries worldwide.

SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

2024 marks thirty years since South Africa's first democratic elections. The past three decades have witnessed a profound transformation from a system of institutionalised racial segregation to an open and free society where power has transitioned peacefully over the past six general elections. Having said that, South Africa faces significant political, social and economic challenges. Democratic gains made during the first two decades of democracy with the establishment of a constitutional order and gradual reversal of the socio-economic exclusion of the majority of the population, have been undermined by a decade of weak economic performance and poor governance.

South Africa continues to be a dual economy with one of the highest rates of inequality in the world. This inequality is still defined along racial lines; with black people worst affected by poverty, poor services, and crime. The country is also an open economy vulnerable to the external shocks that have defined the last five years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, high global inflation, and interrupted global supply chains. Economic growth is projected at 1.6 percent in 2024, an improvement from 2023, but not sufficient for alleviating the 31.9 percent unemployment rate. The dysfunction of the state-owned power utility ESKOM has plunged the country into an energy supply crisis,

placing severe constraints on economic growth with many small and medium sized businesses being forced to close. Youth unemployment (15 to 34) remains stubbornly high at 43.4 percent. Despite the fact that the seventh general election takes place later this year, there are approximately 14 million unregistered eligible voters; mainly young people who are disillusioned with democracy and the political system.

State failure to provide quality health, education, and social protection is undermining development outcomes. Over the past ten years, the government has adopted austerity fiscal policies to balance the budget with spending cuts and tax increases. Critics argue that austerity has only worsened the country's economic woes and entrenched inequality because of the reduction in government spending on essential social services. The percentage of the population living in poverty increased from 55 percent in 2014 to 63 percent in 2023. Development efforts have also been undermined by corruption and maladministration. Local and foreign criminal networks are exerting economic and financial power to influence politics and administration across the country. While illicit financial flows and tax evasion are a significant drain on the treasury.

Despite its economic challenges, South Africa still boasts the second largest and most industrialised economy in sub-Saharan Africa. There has been a continuous flow of immigrants from the rest of Africa and other parts of the world, who flee from conflict and/or search for economic opportunities. The resurgence of violent conflict in many parts of the continent has increased the volume of immigrants seeking safe refuge. In the context of high unemployment and inequality, South Africa has seen waves of xenophobic attacks against (mostly African) migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in recent years. As we have witnessed in other parts of the world, immigration features high on the political agenda in this year's election. This has led to pressure on the government to withdraw from the UN Refugee Convention; a worrying sign of how fragile South Africa's multilateral commitments are. The shift to the right in popular sentiment is similar to that in Germany and other parts of the world.



SOUTH AFRICA IN THE WORLD

The Identity Paradox

A state's foreign policy is 'underpinned by a set of philosophical assumptions about the identity of that [state], its history, the values it believes in and promotes, a certain conception of the world at large and what to do about it'. Identity implies both an actor's understanding of itself and others' conception of the actor. South Africa's identity and place in the world is highly contested. Different domestic actors and international partners and observers have divergent views on what South Africa is, and how it should act on the world stage. This discrepancy has led many scholars to describe South Africa's foreign policy as inconsistent, contradictory, or paradoxical. This contested identity can be explained by South Africa's history and geography.

During colonialism and apartheid, the leaders of South Africa's white minority regime identified the country with the West, and positioned it as a protector of Western interests in Africa.

Apartheid South Africa had strong economic and military ties with Western countries, even though its racist politics deviated from the post-Second World War consensus on human rights. Foreign policy under apartheid was reactionary, aimed at justifying and protecting white minority rule, and countering isolation.

The negotiated settlement to a seemingly intractable political conflict imbued the country with a moral legitimacy that enabled it to pursue an ambitious foreign policy and punch above its weight in international affairs. The Republic's status was reinforced by the moral authority of its first democratic President Nelson Mandela, who came to embody principled and ethical leadership by steering South Africa towards a peaceful and reconciliatory transition. Scholars describe the transformation of South Africa's international image as 'so rapid and so profound as to be almost unprecedented in the annals of international politics'.

5 Republic of South Africa, National Treasury, '2024 Budget Review: Economic Outlook', <https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/National%20Budget/2024/review/Chapter%202.pdf>, (2024)

6 M, Mabunda, R Mukonza, L Mudzanani, 'The effects of loadshedding on small and medium enterprises in Collins Chabane local municipality', *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 12, 57 (2023)

7 Republic of South Africa, Statistics South Africa, 'The official unemployment rate was 31.9% in the third quarter of 2023', Media Release: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) – Q3: 2023 (2023) <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Media%20release%20QLFS%20Q3%202023.pdf>, 2023

8 T, Dooms, 'South Africa's 14 million unregistered voters could shake up politics', *The Africa Report*, 9 February 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/336266/south-africas-14-million-unregistered-voters-could-shake-up-politics/>

9 <https://www.iej.org.za/the-cost-of-austerity-lessons-for-south-africa/>

South Africa adopted a progressive constitution as the foundation of its democratic order, with strong protection for individual political and socio-economic rights, as a departure from its apartheid past. With the dominance of Western liberal political values in global governance, it was expected that South Africa's constitution would result in it adopting a traditional middle power role promoting democracy and human rights in international affairs, even when that infringed on the principles of sovereignty and self-determination.

These expectations ignored the fact that, as the party of the new leadership, the African National Congress (ANC)'s foreign policy was founded in anti-colonial struggle and was based on the demands of oppressed people for sovereignty, freedom, and self-determination. Post-apartheid South Africa identified as an African state, connected to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), committed to promoting human rights and democracy, respect for international law, and the combatting of racism and imperialism. The ANC was aware that it was coming to power at a time when there was an 'ever-growing conflict between the highly-industrialised and affluent North and an impoverished, under-developed, highly populated South'. This reflected the country's racialised economic inequality. This similarity influenced the Republic's foreign policy focus to defeat 'global apartheid', 'an international system of minority rule whose attributes include differential access to basic human rights, wealth and power'.

Landsberg characterises the tension in South Africa's identity as a clash between two orientations of South Africa foreign policy as "Afro-Solidarism" and those associated with "Liberal Cosmopolitanism". Some domestic and international observers still expect South Africa to act like part of the West, as it shares many of the same stated liberal cosmopolitan values and due to the strong economic and cultural links that continue even after the end of apartheid. Others expect South Africa to firmly identify with the interests of the Global South and use its foreign policy to combat imperialism.

For as long as the ANC's electoral dominance was secure and there was no threat to its security as the governing party, these debates on identity could be relegated to academic journals and university classrooms. However, with the fracturing of the electoral landscape and the growing likelihood of a coalition government at national level within the next decade, we cannot exclude the possibility of South Africa's role and position in the world order finding a new orientation once again. A mapping of the Republic's current and future perceptions of the multilateral order must be in line with the dynamic relationship between the domestic and foreign influences on the country's foreign policy.

SOUTH AFRICA'S APPROACH To The Multilateral Order

South Africa's government has adopted a reformist approach to the multilateral system that recognises the imbalances and inequalities of the global political and economic environment, while also seeking to maximise opportunities for the country to achieve its national interests within the existing international institutions. Since 1994, successive ANC-led administrations have pursued a foreign policy of cooperation and coalition-building with other countries in Africa and the developing world in a bid to reform global governance. South Africa's reformist agenda is based on a commitment to the UN Charter as the foundation of the multilateral order. It seeks to reinforce the Charter's principles of the sovereign equality of its members, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of international disputes, respect for the equal rights and self-determination of all peoples, and international cooperation in resolving international problems. South Africa has long been critical of how powerful states violate the Charter and other international law with impunity.

State Actors

There are number of state actors with interests in the international system. A plethora of national government departments, provincial and local governments, state-owned entities, and government agencies have engaged in international relations activities either bilaterally or multilaterally. The primary state actors responsible for South Africa's foreign policy are the President and the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation. According to the Constitution, the President is ultimately responsible for the country's foreign policy and international relations. This responsibility is discharged with the support of cabinet, primarily the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, who is delegated with the power to lead the formation, promotion, and execution of South Africa's foreign policy. Other government departments, including the National Treasury, Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTICC), Department of Justice (DoJ), and the Department of Defence (DoD)

are commissioned with overseeing South Africa's international relations on specific issues.

Since foreign policy is an executive function, Parliament's role has been limited to ratifying multilateral agreements and treaties, as well as overseeing the executive through the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation. This committee has not played a strong role in the development or pursuit of international relations since 1994. With the prospect of a coalition government on a national scale and the growing relevance of international relations compared to domestic politics, we could see Parliament become an arena for contestation over South Africa's foreign policy in the near future.



10 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/20/south-africa-mulls-major-immigration-overhaul>

11 Achille Mbembe, "The cultural politics of South Africa's Foreign Policy: Between Black (Inter)Nationalism and Afropolitanism" (seminar paper presented at the Human Sciences Research Council on 11 April 2006)

12 See Nathan, Laurie. 2005. 'Consistency and inconsistencies in South African foreign policy'. *International Affairs*, 81(2): 361-372, Bradlow, Daniel D., and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos. *Values, Interests and Power: South African foreign policy in uncertain times*. Pretoria University Law Press, 2020.

13 A. Klotz. 1995. *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY

14 Hamill, J and Lee, D. 2001. 'A Middle Power Paradox? South African Diplomacy in the Post-Apartheid Era'. *International Relations*, 15(4): 33-59

15 Hendricks, C. 'South Africa's International Relations: A New Dawn?', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56, 1 (2021)

16 James Barber, *Mandela's World: The International Dimension of South Africa's Political Revolution 1990-1999* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004)

17 African National Congress (ANC). 1994. *Foreign Policy Perspective in a Democratic South Africa*

18 S Booker and W Minter, 'Global Apartheid', *The Nation*, 21 June 2001
<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/global-apartheid/>

19 Chris Landsberg, 'Caught between Afro-Southern Solidarism and Liberal Cosmopolitan values: Four Turning points in South Africa's Human Rights Foreign Policy', *FES South Africa: Occasional Paper Series*

Table 1: State actors

Institution	Role and Relevance
The Presidency of South Africa	President has ultimate responsibility for the country's foreign policy and international relations
The Presidency of South Africa Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)	Minister is delegated with the power to lead the formation, promotion, and execution of South Africa's foreign policy and the everyday conduct of South Africa's international relations
Parliament of South Africa	Parliament is responsible for ratifying multilateral agreements and treaties.
Minister of Finance and National Treasury [including the South African Revenue Services (SARS)]	Lead South Africa's engagement in international financial institutions.
Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTICC)	Build an equitable global trading system that facilitates development by strengthening trade and investment links with key economies and fostering African development
South African Reserve Bank (SARB)	Participation in international fora and technical working groups for the regulation and supervision of the financial sector
Department of Defence (DoD)	Deployment of military capabilities and resources to support ordered external commitments, including peace operations
Department of Justice and Correctional Services (DJCS)	Managing SA's international legal relations, including negotiating human rights instruments, interacting with international tribunals and courts

Non-State Actors

South Africa has a diverse, vocal, and vibrant non-state sector that is influential in shaping public opinion and domestic policy. The non-state sector includes political parties, trade unions, think tanks and universities, non-governmental and community-based organisations, and youth groups. A notable feature of South African society is that the legitimacy of the multilateral system is generally accepted. Isolationist voices are rare. Civil society has a solid record of formal and informal engagement with the multilateral system and of influencing state actors on a variety of multilateral issues, including trade, climate, international finance, and peace and security. Civil society's approach can be summarised as 'we can't have policy for us, without us'. Even AfriForum, an African nationalist organisation aligned with the global right-wing, fought to be registered with the UN as an NGO with special consultative status, and regularly participates in the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues.

Results of the FES Global Census 2023 show that government's view of the primacy of multilateralism is shared by the South African public, who view both the UN and the BRICS favourably. Seventy-three percent of South African respondents to the survey supported the idea of UNSC reform. A majority of South Africans believe the UN has a role to play in addressing the global challenges of the next decade, but support the need to make 'fundamental changes to (its) leadership structures'.

SOUTH AFRICA'S MULTILATERAL AGENDA

01 Strengthening African Multilateralism

To achieve its African Agenda, South Africa promotes the development of continental multilateral governance institutions to enhance regional integration for a 'united and politically cohesive continent'. During the Mbeki presidency, South Africa promoted the 'African Renaissance' as its vision for reforming multilateral governance on the continent in pursuit of development and peace. Pretoria views regions as the building blocks of the multilateral order and bulwarks against the negative effects of globalisation. The two primary regional institutions that South Africa engages in are the African Union (AU), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

African Union

The AU aims to achieve greater continental cooperation and integration so as to enable African states to strengthen their social, economic, and political relations. Furthermore, it creates an institutional framework through which African states can effectively participate in a globalising world, especially in regard to accessing international markets and capital. The AU was created from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 2002. The rapid creation of the AU was a rare display of cooperation among African states, which fuelled hopes of a new era in continental politics. South Africa hosted the first AU Summit in Durban in 2002, and President Thabo Mbeki served as the first Chairperson of the new body.

South Africa has resisted pressure to play a dominant role in Africa, largely as a response to apartheid aggression in Africa and the concern that the Republic would face isolation once again if it adopted aggressive policies. Pretoria avoided the use of material power to exert influence on the continent. Instead, it opted to use 'soft power' instruments, such as providing ideational and institutional leadership in the AU and NEPAD. This strategy of 'co-operative hegemony' uses regional institutions as a foreign policy instrument of regional powers.

According to this argument, South Africa's conceptualisation and underwriting of governance institutions in Africa and Southern Africa is a strategy for exerting influence, without explicitly claiming hegemonic status. The Republic's relative economic and military power does not translate into the Gramscian sense of hegemony as the ability to have one's values accepted within one's sphere of influence. For example, South Africa's economy dwarfs those of Swaziland and Zimbabwe, yet it has struggled to turn its material power into an ability to exercise influence over the authoritarian regimes of King Mswati III and ZANU-PF. Pretoria has been unable to create what Burges calls 'consensual hegemony' by achieving consensus on its preferred values of democratic governance in the region.

While the government has emphasised a cooperative stance towards the rest of the continent, South African business has expanded aggressively into many African countries; raising concerns about a resurgence of neo-colonial or even apartheid economic relations. There have been calls to regulate the behaviour of South African multinationals on the continent. State-owned companies have

Under former President Zuma, South Africa played a more assertive role in Africa owing to the view that investment in continental governance must provide returns. This was seen most controversially in the campaign for Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to become Chair of the AU Commission, despite opposition from many member states. While Dlamini-Zuma was elected to this position, South Africa was accused of being a bully and suffered significant damage to its image on the continent. The controversy unfortunately distorted perceptions of Dlamini-Zuma's tenure as Chair. She made inroads in reforming the AU's bureaucracy in order to make it more cost-effective and to streamline processes.

She also led the formulation of Agenda 2063, the AU's fifty year vision for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Dlamini-Zuma championed gender equality in all her decision-making.

Thomas Tiekue argues that Africa's regional powers, such as South Africa and Nigeria, have difficulty turning their relative economic strength into 'effective diplomatic influence' because of their deep internal problems and resource limitations, as well as the history of colonialism that has made African leaders deeply resentful of powerful states. He argues that resentment drives 'African ruling elites to mobilise often against any hegemonic seeker' and the norm of 'pan-African solidarity' socialises African leaders to take a consensual approach towards international issues and defending each other in public. The relative frailty of African state sovereignty, which Robert Jackson terms the difference between empirical and judicial sovereignty, makes it difficult for any single African state, or even the AU, to play a hegemonic role. As will be seen in parts two and three, African states tend to fight to strengthen their sovereignty in international organisations, rather than to dilute it.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wakeup call to Africans on the value of cooperation and collective action. Faced with a sudden existential threat, states in the Global North retreated to protectionist policies including tariffs, regulations and vaccine nationalism. When he chaired the AU in 2020, President Ramaphosa led Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic using South Africa's position as the only African country in the G20 to advocate for equitable vaccine access, debt relief for highly-indebted African states, and development assistance to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. In the wake of increased geopolitical competition, Africa is being courted by a variety of great powers including the US,

China, Turkey, Russia, and the EU. This competition affords the continent with opportunities to exercise economic and political agency in a way that has not been possible to date. This is illustrated in the battle over military bases on the continent. Regional cooperation will allow the continent to engage from a position of strength.

The interaction between regional international society and global international society will be a fundamental aspect of the nascent world order, and will inform both the dynamics of the system and the character of emerging primary and secondary institutions. This has an impact on the kind of multilateralism that will take shape, as well as the dynamics between constitutive actors and processes of institution-building/institutional reform



- 20 Thanks to Tanya van Meelis for this insight.
 21 <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/cpac-conference-hungary-views-viktor-orban-nationalism-model-follow>
 22 <https://afriforum.co.za/en/afriforum-wins-decade-long-struggle-to-register-with-un/>
 23 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and YouGov, 'Global Census: Public Opinion on International Cooperation', September 2023 https://ny.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/FES_Global_Census_2023_Key_Insights_Memo.pdf
 24 Flesch, D. 2009. 'Regional power South Africa: Cooperative hegemony constrained by historical legacy'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 27(2): 135-157
 25 Alden, C. and M. Schoeman. 2015. 'South Africa's symbolic hegemony in Africa'. *International Politics*, 52(2): 239-254
 26 Burges, S. 2008. 'Consensual hegemony: Theorising the practice of Brazilian foreign policy'. *International Relations*, 22(1): 65-84
 27 <https://news.uj.ac.za/news/au-chairwoman-nkosazana-dlamini-zuma-tried-reform-but-failed-writes-ufs-scholar-prof-adekeye-adebajo-2/>
 28 Tiekue, T.K. 2015. 'Theoretical approaches to Africa's international relations', in Tim Murithi (ed.). *Handbook of Africa's International Relations*, Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon
 29 Jackson, R. 2007. *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea*. Policy: Cambridge

02 Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Peace is a core value of South African foreign policy, which derives from the feat of a peaceful settlement of apartheid and negotiated transition to democracy. The ANC government gives precedence to constructive engagement between opposing parties in conflict, as opposed to condemnation and ostracisation from international society. This approach notably deviates from the campaign to isolate the international regime during the struggle for liberation. However, it is consistent with the values underpinning the negotiated settlement, in which the ANC chose a path of engagement and reconciliation instead of punishing former apartheid leaders. The peaceful settlement and forgiveness of past oppressors was celebrated by Western observers in particular. Therefore, South African policymakers view the condemnation of efforts to give the same recognition to present-day 'international pariahs' as being hypocritical, as they view their links with human rights violators as consistent with their constructive engagement of the apartheid government. South Africa's position can be summarised as:

Peace is our objective and we continue to stress that dialogue, mediation, and diplomacy are the only way to end current conflicts. Wars end when dialogues begin, and wars endure when there is no dialogue. It is tragic that many of the global military powers have tended in recent years to use force rather than diplomacy. It has become the norm to use military might rather than instruments of the United Nations Charter which advocate for diplomacy.

African Peace and Security Council (AUPSC)

Since 1994, Pretoria recognised that its own peace, security, and development were impossible without security and development in Africa. The state's perspective was captured by President Ramaphosa in February 2023, while South Africa chaired the AU Peace and Security Council:

- 30 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/-chains-of-colonialism-western-powers-in-africa-ying-for-control-geopolitical-edge/2956190>
 31 Thanks Lerato Tsebe for this insight.
 32 Flockhart, T. 2016. *The Coming Multi-Order World*, Contemporary Security Policy, 37 (1): 3 – 30.
 33 Thank you to Faith Mabera for this insight.
 34 Republic of South Africa, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, '2023-2024 Annual Performance Plan' (2023)

Growth and development across Africa contribute to our progress as a country... By the same measure, conflict, instability, and economic deprivation in other parts of the continent often have a negative impact on our country. South Africa is host to many refugees and asylum seekers... At the same time, South Africa has a high number of economic migrants. We have seen how this places a strain on many of our public services and how this has contributed to social tensions between our people and migrant communities. These tensions have sometimes led to violence against foreign nationals, which we must firmly condemn and work together to prevent... for the sake of our own stability and prosperity, we are duty bound to pursue, support and participate in interventions that will bring peace, stability and development to our continent.

Pretoria prioritised investments in its peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building capacity, but it soon became clear that South Africa did not have the resources to play the role of continental peacemaker on its own. Therefore, the country led efforts to develop the AU's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), including the Continental Early Warning System, African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise, and the Peace Fund. The AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) oversees this architecture.

Since its establishment in 2002, South Africa has been elected to a rotating seat on the AUPSC on multiple occasions, most recently from 2022 to 2023. Over the past thirty years, South Africa has played an active role in AU, SADC, and UN peace-keeping and peace-building efforts in Burundi, DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Sudan, Sudan. The country is currently the 15th largest contributor to UN peace-keeping personnel, with 1189 peacekeepers serving in various missions. It is currently the sixth largest contributor of women peacekeepers in line with its commitment to the women, peace, and security agenda. On 12 February 2024, the Presidency announced that President Ramaphosa had ordered the deployment of 2900 members of the SANDF to the SADC mission in DRC (SAMIDRC) to fight rebel groups in the eastern DRC. The SAMIDRC replaces the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC, MONUSCO, which withdrew after twenty years.

Multilateral Engagement on Non-African Conflicts

While South Africa's foreign policy on peace and security has focused on Africa, the Republic has played a role and adopted an active stance in other international conflicts, most recently the wars in Ukraine and Palestine.

South Africa's position on the Russia-Ukraine war illustrates its approach to peaceful resolution of conflict. The country has maintained a position of 'active non-alignment', calling for dialogue and a negotiated end to the conflict. External and domestic critics have accused the government of siding with Russia by abstaining on the issue in UN General Assembly resolutions. They accuse the ANC of choosing solidarity with Russia due to the Soviet Union's support of the anti-apartheid struggle. This is a simplistic view of South Africa's position. Pretoria has emphasised the right of states in the Global South to maintain non-alignment and neutrality to avoid 'becoming embroiled in the politics of confrontation and aggression that have been advocated by the powerful countries.' This is a lesson from the Cold War, which was 'cold' for the superpowers, but was certainly 'hot' in the many African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and South American countries, which were compelled to take sides and suffered the repercussions of destructive proxy wars in their territory. Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, African countries have faced shortages in affordable wheat and fertiliser from the Black Sea region, leading to food shortages. The continent has also become a geopolitical battleground for Russia, China, and the US to compete for influence.

In a demonstration of Africa's independence and non-alignment, African leaders embarked on a peace mission to Ukraine and Russia in June 2023. Led by South African President Ramaphosa, the delegation comprising leaders from Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Senegal,

Uganda, and Zambia, visited Kyiv and Moscow to present a ten-step peace plan. This was a significant milestone and paradigm shift, with African leaders brokering peace on European soil. The African Peace Initiative (API) was able to engage both sides, which few international actors had been able to achieve. This initiative does not appear to have achieved much, as the war approaches the point of a 'mutually hurting stalemate'; yet a negotiated settlement will be required. The API proposal could be a useful model for mediation and African states are well-placed to play an influential role in supporting the peace process. This marks a tectonic shift in the multilateral order.

Another example of the shift in the multilateral order is South Africa's case against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violating the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Democratic South Africa's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict is informed by its history of colonial occupation and apartheid. In 1947, South Africa was one of the countries that voted in favour of the partition of Palestine to create Israel, and the then Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, had supported the Zionist cause when he was a member of the British war cabinet in the First and Second World Wars. Relations between Israel and South Africa intensified following the 1973 oil crisis, and by 1990 Israel was one of apartheid South Africa's only international allies. The ANC's solidarity with Palestinians stems from the anti-apartheid struggle when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) provided political and military assistance to the South African liberation movement. Two weeks after his release from prison in February 1990, Nelson Mandela met with Yasser Arafat in Lusaka, Zambia stating, 'There are many similarities between our struggle and that of the PLO.

We live under a unique form of colonialism in South Africa, as well as in Israel'. Mandela's words highlight the parallels between the conditions of racial segregation and discrimination faced by Palestinians and black South Africans. In 1997, Mandela famously proclaimed that 'We know all too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians'. This call was taken up by young South African grassroots activists in the 2000s, who applied the lessons of the global anti-apartheid movement to support Palestinian civil society's call for a boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign. South Africa's liberation from apartheid has become a symbol of hope to Palestine 'as the teleological end to a narrative of resistance and international solidarity... that yields long-awaited liberation and the opportunity for self-determination'.



- 35 C.M Ramaphosa, 'Opening Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the meeting of the AU PSC of Heads of State and Government on the consideration of the situation in eastern DRC', February 2023, <https://dirco.gov.za/opening-remarks-by-president-cyril-ramaphosa-at-the-meeting-of-the-au-psc-of-heads-of-state-and-government-on-the-consideration-of-the-situation-in-eastern-drc/>
- 36 <https://southafrica.un.org/en/233889-united-nations-south-africa-observes-international-day-un-peacekeepers>
- 37 <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/south-africa-contributes-troops-sadc-mission-drc>
- 38 <https://theconversation.com/south-africa-to-lead-new-military-force-in-the-drc-an-expert-on-what-its-up-against-219264>
- 39 <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-do-global-south-politics-of-non-alignment-and-solidarity-explain-south-african-position-on-ukraine/>
- 40 DIRCO 2023
- 41 <https://saiaa.org.za/research/africas-potential-role-in-mediating-the-ukraine-conflict/>
- 42 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/african-peace-mission-one-step-forward-one-step-back#:~:text=Africa's%20Ukraine%20Russia%20peace%20mission,for%20a%20conflict%20outside%20Africa.>
- 43 <https://saiaa.org.za/research/africas-potential-role-in-mediating-the-ukraine-conflict/>
- 44 Michael B. Bishku, 'South Africa and the Middle East', Middle East Policy, XVII(No.3), Fall 2010
- 45 Michael B. Bishku 'South Africa's Anti-Israel Obsession', Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2023
- 46 Rajini Srikanth, South African Solidarity with Palestinians: Motivations, Strategies, and Impact, New England Journal of Public Policy, 27 (1), 2015; Salim Vally, 'From South Africa to Palestine, Lessons for the New Anti-Apartheid Movement', Left Turn- Notes from the Global Intifada, 9 April 2008

While supporting Palestinian liberation, the ANC government has always recognised Israel's right to exist and advocated for a two-state solution to the conflict. Mandela championed the Oslo Accords and invited both Arafat and the Israeli president, Ezer Weisman, to his inauguration in 1994. In 1995, South Africa established formal diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA) created out of the Oslo process, sending diplomatic representatives to Ramallah and Gaza City, which the PA reciprocated. In 2002, while Chair of NAM, South Africa hosted a retreat with leaders of Israel and Palestine at Spier Wine Estate in Stellenbosch that was intended to contribute to the Middle East Peace Process. According to the Foreign Ministry (2004: 31) it was the first time both sides of the conflict had communicated with each other in over a year and 'the participants also praised the informal, non-prescriptive and constructive atmosphere created by the President and the South African hosts'. The Spier conference was intended to be the beginning of a multi-year initiative to bring together Israeli and Palestinian leaders to negotiate an end to their decades-long conflict. The Foreign Ministry stated that 'South Africa has remained consistent in its approach and, due to our own experience of negotiating a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, has credibility with those Israelis and Palestinians who are genuinely committed to forging their own peace agreement'. Under President Mbeki, South Africa provided one million US Dollars annual humanitarian assistance to the PA for a period of three years, as well as pledging an additional one million US Dollars annually from the trust fund of the multilateral group India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA).

Despite its solidarity with Palestine, South Africa has not given wholesale, uncritical support to Palestinian political actors. Aziz Pahad, the Deputy Foreign Minister in the Mbeki government, criticised Palestine's use of suicide bombs and President Jacob Zuma criticised Hamas' actions during the 2014 Gaza War. The South African government condemned Hamas' attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and called for hostages to be returned. This context is often ignored when criticising South Africa's ICJ case against Israel.

In December 2023, Pretoria instituted proceedings and requested provisional measures against Israel in the ICJ for violating the Genocide Convention in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza. The government's efforts were led by DIRCO and the Department of Justice and Correctional Services (DJCS). In its application to the Court, South Africa argued that "acts and omissions by Israel . . . are genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent . . . to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group". South Africa's landmark case has called attention to growing international fault lines, since the majority of countries supporting it are from the Global South, including Malaysia, Brazil, Turkey, Jordan, the 57-member state Organisation

of Islamic Countries (OIC), while the countries who have opposed the case and have openly supported Israel are mostly from the Global North, including Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The Court granted most of South Africa's provisional measures, but did not order a ceasefire. Israel has continued its military offensive in Gaza, with no regard for the provisional measures in defiance of the ICJ, and the situation has deteriorated. As violent events in Gaza continue unabated and the Netanyahu government threatens to attack Rafah, South Africa's leadership is using the multilateral judicial system to curtail Israel's actions.

Women, Peace and Security

Women's rights and gender equality are a common thread running through South Africa's multilateral engagement in all international organisations and on a wide array of issues. DIRCO describes gender mainstreaming as 'a priority' in South African foreign policy. The Constitution protects equal rights for all genders, and there are several laws and policies to enforce women's rights. South Africa is a signatory to international and regional instruments on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the 1995 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 2005 Maputo Protocol on the rights of women in Africa and the SADC protocol on gender and development (2012). In 2021, Minister Pandor launched the Charlotte Maxeke African Women's Economic Justice and Rights Initiative (AWERJ) to contribute to the Global Acceleration Plan for gender equality established by the Generation Equality Forum of UN Women. In 2023, South Africa hosted the UN's ninth Global Forum on Gender Statistics in collaboration with Statistics South Africa, which focused on 'the criticality of gender data to support evidence-based policies for an informed care economy'

- 47 Landsberg, C. and D. Monyae. 2006. 'South Africa's foreign policy: Carving a global niche'. South African Journal of International Affairs, 13(2): 131-145
- 48 Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). 2004. Strategic Plan 2004-2007. Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria
- 49 Vickers, Brandon. 2012. 'Towards a new aid paradigm: South Africa as African development partner'. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 25(4): 535-556
- 50 <https://dirco.gov.za/celebrating-the-spirit-of-charlotte-maxeke-pioneer-activist-artist-intellectual-internationalist-and-visionary-daily-maverick-by-naledi-pandor-23-august-2021/>
- 51 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/7/press-release-generation-equality-forum-concludes-with-commitments-and-global-acceleration-plan>

In 2020, South Africa finally adopted its National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2020 – 2025 (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325; twenty years after the resolution was passed. While the delay has been criticised (Rwanda and Liberia adopted their plans at least ten years before), the South African plan is unique in its combination of foreign and domestic policy imperatives. Scholars describe it as ‘an important step in ensuring that progressive foreign policy improves the lives of South African women’. The development of the NAP was a collaboration between DIRCO, the DOD, and the Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities. There were extensive consultations with and contributions by feminist activists and civil society organisations, including the Foundation for Human Rights (FHR), Greater Rape Intervention Programme, Khulumani Support Group, South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID), and the South African National AIDS Council. SAWID, ACCORD, and the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) have ongoing initiatives to ensure the implementation, monitoring, and promotion of the NAP

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC represents the pinnacle of structural power in the international system. It has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and is the only international body with the authority to authorise the use of force. By signing up to the UN Charter, member states effectively cede some of their sovereignty to the UNSC, whose 15 members can take binding action on their behalf. This includes authorising military intervention on behalf of the international community. One of South Africa’s criticisms of the UNSC is its excessive reliance on the use of military intervention instead of attempts to settle disputes peacefully through negotiation and other appropriate procedures. Since the 1990s, the majority of these military operations have been in Africa. In its first 40 years of existence, the UNSC authorised only one peace operation in Africa: the UN Operation in the Congo in 1960. Between 1989 and 2024, 30 operations were mandated in Africa with five that are currently ongoing. Although African conflicts take up over 50 percent of council meetings and 70 percent of its resolutions, no African country has a permanent seat and the penholders on African issues tend to be the P3. South Africa argues that this has perpetuated colonial relations between the Western powers and Africa. Britain, France, and the US are perceived as using their power to intervene militarily and economically on the continent.

South Africa has served three elected terms in the UN Security Council (2006 to 2007, 2011 to 2012, 2019 to 2020). In the absence of formal Charter reform, South Africa used its diplomacy in the UNSC to introduce practices and processes to increase African influence in its decision-making. In each of its three terms, South Africa has advocated for greater cooperation between the UNSC and AUPSC with respect to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter; this makes provisions for regional arrangements in preserving international peace and security in line with the principles and purposes upheld by the UN. This resulted in a hybrid UN and AU mission to Darfur (UNAMID), operating from 2007 to 2020, and the establishment in 2007 of annual meetings between the UNSC and AUPSC, which alternated between New York and Addis Ababa. These meetings have become an important practice for ensuring strategic cooperation between the two entities. In 2013, the AU agreed that the three elected African members of the UNSC (A3) should be established as ‘a caucus and a means of connection between the Council and the AUPSC on issues of common concern’ at any given point. South Africa prioritised this in its third term on the UNSC – in 2019 the A3 delivered 16 joint statements in the UNSC, and influenced Council decisions on certain African issues. In the current context of geopolitical tensions among the P5, ‘the A3 bloc plays a critical role in shaping Security Council debates, breaking geopolitical deadlock, and guiding the Council’s collective action’. Government is leveraging its participation in informal IOs, such as the G20 and BRICS to circumvent the great power stasis to circumvent the great

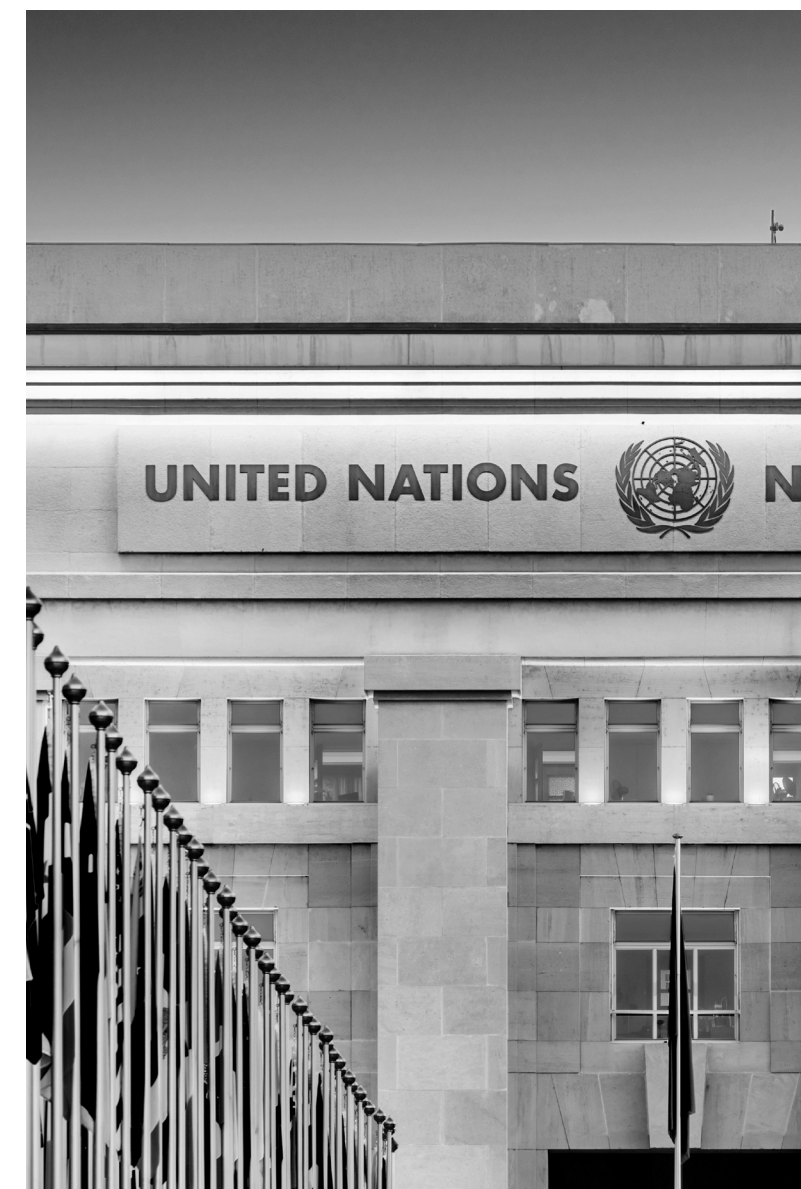
power stasis in the UNSC and put UN reform on the global agenda. This use of club diplomacy to facilitate the reshaping of institutions of the post-Second World War liberal international order can be seen as multipolarity in practice. In an address at the G20 Foreign Ministers meeting in Brazil, Minister Naledi Pandor stated South Africa’s support ‘for the reinvigoration of multilateralism and the reform of global governance institutions’ stating:

These repeated failures of the United Nations Security Council, which includes actions by one or two powerful countries, due to the disproportionate power they wield in the United Nations Security Council, has been at the cost of countless lives in Palestine, Ukraine and other conflict situations over many decades. This has to stop. The Security Council has to be reformed and it has to be done now. At the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg last year, two of the permanent members of the council committed to the urgent reform of the Security Council. We trust that other permanent members of the UNSC who are members of the G20 will follow suit.

The kind of incremental procedural reform that South Africa pursued during its UNSC terms often goes unnoticed and is not given the appreciation it deserves, but it can have a major impact on establishing new precedents and empowering elected (E10) members of the UNSC. During the past ten years of worsening relations between the P5, we have seen the E10 members exerting their influence more forcefully in order to overcome deadlocks. A recent example is the adoption of UNSC resolution 2728, demanding a ceasefire in Gaza during Ramadan, with 14 votes and one abstention by the US. The resolution was co-sponsored by the E10, and was adopted on 25 March 2024 after a US-sponsored resolution (on 22 March) received only eleven votes in favour and failed due to vetoes from China and Russia. Resolution 2728 was drafted by Mozambique, which led the negotiations on the draft text and managed differences among E10 members that resulted in all of them agreeing to co-sponsor the resolution. This exertion of influence by a small African state represents an important shift in the balance of power within the multilateral order towards the Global South. Procedural innovations such as this create UNSC reform by being astute, and achieves some of the Global South’s aims of democratising the Council’s practices.

Administrative Reforms

South Africa has been particularly active in efforts to improve the UN Secretariat’s administrative practices, such as ensuring that budgeting and management do not prejudice the interests of developing countries, especially in Africa. This is partly in response to the tendency of Western powers, especially the US, to withdraw funds from the organisation when they feel it is not acting in their interests. We recently witnessed this with pauses to funding of the UNWRA by Germany, the US, the UK, and others, owing to unsubstantiated allegations that their staff were linked to Hamas. South Africa led developing countries in advocating for five UNGA resolutions, increasing the number of personnel from the Global South in the UN Secretariat; making it easier for suppliers from the Global South to access the UN procurement system; improving the Secretariat’s accountability systems; renovating the UN headquarters; and financing the expansion of the Secretariat.



03 Reform of Global Governance

Peace is a core value of South African foreign policy, which The reform of the global governance architecture is a key priority in South Africa’s multilateral engagement. This encompasses initiatives to reform and democratise the UN and Bretton Woods institutions, as well as leveraging its participation in newer strategic clubs such as the BRICS, IBSA, and the G20 advocate for a more just and equitable multilateral order.

South Africa has been actively involved in the debate on UN reform since 1994. The Republic has sought to exert influence on four key aspects of the reform debate: Security Council reform; improving administrative and financial practices of the UN Secretariat for greater accountability and efficiency; procedural reform in the working methods of UN organs and committees; and the creation of new UN institutions to respond to contemporary challenges.

52 <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=16575>
 53 <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/AD738-South-Africans-see-gender-based-violence-as-a-top-priority-Afrobarometer-24nov23.pdf>
 54 <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa>
 55 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/women-peace-and-security-is-sa-a-global-champion-but-domestic-loser>
 56 <https://www.accord.org.za/work/women-programme-2/>
 57 <https://www.ijr.org.za/programmes/special-projects-women-peace-and-security/>
 58 Thomas Biersteker, Kofi Annan’s Legacy of UN Reform, Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy, 5(2), 2 September 2020

59 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/list-of-past-peacekeeping-operations>
 60 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council-reform-what-world-thinks-pub-90032>
 61 <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/03/how-can-african-states-become-more-influential-un-security-council/>
 62 Ibid

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

Another aspect of UN reform is the creation of new institutions to respond to contemporary challenges. South Africa was actively involved in the formation of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and it contributed towards making sure that the new Council had adequate resources and administrative support to make it more effective than its predecessor (CCR 2013: 17). It has served multiple terms on the UNHRC, and is currently a member of the Council until 2025. South African citizens have served or are currently serving in various structures of the UNHRC. In the aide-memoire supporting its candidature for the latest term, South Africa promised to protect the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) from 'the manipulation and influences of states', to continue funding the OHCHR without 'earmarking' the funding to particular issues, to 'support important funds and programmes within the OHCHR aimed at advancing the cause of human rights globally' and to promote a 'balanced agenda' of the HCR that includes the right to development and 'moral human rights issues such as the eradication of poverty'.

One of the specific issues that South Africa has led in the UN system is the follow-up process on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), which was an outcome of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR). In its 2023 to 2024 annual performance plan, DIRCO committed to fully participating in the HRC review scheduled for 2021 to 2026 to limit any 'far-reaching changes to the mandate of the HRC' and any attempts by Western countries 'to eliminate' any items currently on the Council agenda. The US and other Western countries have tried to remove certain subjects from the Human Rights Council's agenda, including the question of Palestine and other occupied Arab territories (item number 7) and the question of racism (item number 9).

South Africa has also used its membership of the UNHRC to advocate for LGBTQI rights, even when opposed by other African and Global South states. The country's progressive constitution prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the country was the fifth in the world to legalise gay marriage in 2006

In 2011, South Africa led a process in the UNHRC to have gay rights recognised as human rights despite criticisms from Nigeria and others in the Africa group. However, in 2016 South Africa abstained from a UNHRC resolution to appoint an independent expert on sexual orientation ostensibly because of 'the arrogant and confrontational approach adopted [by the sponsors]'. It was criticised by the South African Human Rights Commission and civil society organisations for its inconsistency. In 2022, South Africa joined the group of friends at the UNHRC that supported the renewal of the independent expert's mandate which was renewed for another three-year term. This was a notable example of government responding to criticism from civil society.



63 GNM Pandor, 'Statement by Dr GNM Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa During the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting', 22 February 2024, <https://dirco.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Statement-by-Minister-Pandor-Statement-at-the-G20-Foreign-Ministers-Meeting-22-February-2024.pdf>
64 <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/03/the-middle-east-including-the-palestinian-question-yesterdays-adoption-and-todays-briefing-and-consultations.php>

BRICS

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group is an important political project to reform global governance to be more favourable for the Global South, which accounts for 85 percent of the world's population. What began as a sensational Wall Street investment classification, 'BRIC' has evolved into an alternative power bloc in the multilateral system, creating new institutions and practices to enhance the voice of the Global South in decision-making and shape the global governance agenda. The BRICS recognise that the credibility of the old liberal international order is undergoing inevitable decline, and is well-positioned to replace it. This was most evident at the 15th BRICS Summit in 2023, chaired by South Africa.

The 15th summit was a watershed moment in the evolution of BRICS – the group expanded its membership to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and it set an ambitious agenda to reduce reliance on the US Dollar in trade and finance. Forty countries from emerging economies attended meetings on the margins of the summit, indicating the desire for an institution to coordinate consensus-building and dialogue among developing countries. South Africa's skilful management of the expansion negotiations (23 countries formally applied to join), and success in centring African interests in the summit outcomes, demonstrated its capabilities as a leader in a multipolar order.

Questions have been raised about whether the BRICS advocate a complete overhaul of the multilateral order, or if they seek change within the existing rules and norms. In general, the BRICS is a reformist body that seeks greater inclusion, representation, and consistency in the multilateral order, but does not necessarily aim to design a completely new world order. However, the extent of desired reform differs from one issue area to another, as we see in the 15th summit declaration. The declaration reiterates BRICS members' commitment to inclusive multilateralism and international law, including the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. On peace and security, climate, and development, most of the BRICS+ commitments are about reinforcing and consistently implementing existing international agreements. The declaration includes a call for UNSC reform with explicit reference to including Brazil, India, and South Africa. On finance and trade, the bloc's members expressed readiness 'to explore opportunities for improving the stability, reliability, and fairness of the financial architecture' and mandated the BRICS finance ministers to investigate the use of local currencies for trade instead of the dollar, as well as the development of alternative payment instruments and platforms. Prior to the summit, India and the UAE had concluded an agreement to trade oil in Indian rupees and

Emirati dirhams instead of the dollar. Given the US's practice of imposing unilateral sanctions and abusing international payment systems to contain or punish countries like China, Russia, and Iran, the BRICS+ view reducing dependence on the dollar as a critical step towards sovereignty and equality. The BRICS+ effectiveness in transforming multilateralism and serving the interests of the Global South depends on their ability to forge agreements on specific reforms and execute their plans, as they did with the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

A notable achievement for South Africa's chairmanship was the progress made on deepening interpersonal exchange through parallel civil society engagements, particularly the BRICS Youth Summit organised by the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), which successfully lobbied for the establishment of the BRICS Youth Council. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) organised the BRICS Trade Union Forum in 2023, in collaboration with other South African trade union federations, bringing together trade unions from all BRICS member states. Labour sought to use the BRICS platform for dialogue and consensus-building on the interests of developing nations and the Global South, which are 'undermined and ignored by the Bretton Woods Institutions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank'. However, some South African unionists spoke of the challenges engaging with their counterparts within the trade union forum, since member states have divergent labour regimes and views on labour rights. This illustrates a tension inherent in a multipolar order – building consensus and collaboration while respecting and not interfering with other states' domestic values and arrangements.



65 <https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/news/item/420-south-africa-abstains-from-un-vote-to-protect-human-rights-resolution-on-gay-rights-watchdog-passed-without-sa-support>
66 Ibid
67 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/22/progress-and-setbacks-lgbt-rights-africa-overview-last-year>
68 <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/8/22/can-brics-end-apartheid-against-the-global-south>
69 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/24/can-brics-dethrone-the-us-dollar-itll-be-an-uphill-climb-experts-say>
70 <https://www.nyda.gov.za/Portals/0/downloads/NYDA%20welcomes%20the%20BRICS%20Youth%20Summit%20Declaration%20-%202024%20August%202023.pdf>
71 <https://mediadon.co.za/2023/08/21/cosatu-statement-on-preparations-for-the-brics-summit-including-the-brics-trade-union-forum-2/>

04 International and Regional Economic Cooperation

As an open, middle-income economy, South Africa has an interest in the functioning of global economic governance institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Ministry of Finance, and the various state actors under its purview, including the National Treasury and South African Revenue Service, represent South Africa in different global financial institutions and promote reform of international financial institutions to serve the interests of Africa and the Global South.

The South African Reserve Bank tends to adopt a far more conservative approach towards global governance reform than other state actors. There is no reference to reforming or challenging global governance institutions in any of the SARB's official documents or statements. The bank strictly adheres to its mandate of protecting the value of the Rand by controlling inflation and has resisted calls to expand its mandate to include increasing economic growth and reducing unemployment. SARB represents South Africa in several international financial fora and has chaired various committees of the IMF, Financial Stability Board (FSB), and the Bank of International Settlements (BIS). The Governor of the South African Reserve Bank chairs the Committee of Central Bank Governors (CCBG) in SADC and its secretariat is hosted by the SARB.

Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs)

South Africa has been a member of the IMF and the World Bank since they were established at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. BWIs are controlled by the wealthy states of the Global North through ownership shares, funding, and voting rights. They provide loans and technical assistance to the Global South on conditions that fulfil the interests of political and business elites in the developed world. Since 1994, South Africa has had a complicated relationship with the BWIs due to the ANC government's ambivalence towards them. On the one hand, ANC leaders were very suspicious of the BWIs owing to structural adjustment policies' negative development impact on African states like Zambia and Tanzania, where many of them were in exile. On the other hand, the leaders of a newly democratic SA were eager to be seen as responsible custodians of the largest and most sophisticated economy, and acceded to the Washington Consensus' neoliberal policies that were being imposed on countries across the Global South.

South Africa's government resisted World Bank loans after 1994, but accepted technical assistance and other knowledge transfers leading to a general acceptance of neoliberal policies. South Africa's government internalised the free market political economic framework and adopted 'self-imposed structural adjustment' with budget austerity and privatisation. It was criticised for 'talking left and walking right' as it adopted an anti-imperialist rhetoric in multilateral fora, while promoting neoliberal economic policies at home.

Most recently, Pretoria was active in debates on the IMF's 16th General Review of IMF Quotas to better represent the current distribution of global economic power. At its 2023 summit, BRICS called for the review to 'result in increases in the quota shares of emerging markets and developing economies (EMDCs), while protecting the voice and representation of the poorest members'. The IMF failed to finalise the review prior to the 15 December 2023 deadline, largely as a result of geopolitical tensions between the US and China.

South Africa has joined other African states in calling for the issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to African countries to assist them in recovering from the economic crisis brought about by COVID-19. African countries only received 33 billion US Dollars (five percent) of the total 650 billion US Dollars of SDRs allocated by the IMF to support the global economic recovery in August 2021. By comparison, the US received 113 billion US Dollars or 17 percent of the total allocation. African countries are seeking a reallocation of 100 billion US Dollars in SDRs from wealthier countries, channelled through the African Development Bank and other multilateral development banks. SDR allocation requires the approval of 85 percent of the total voting power and the US has a veto.

As the country's economic situation has deteriorated due to poor governance, Pretoria accepted World Bank loans in the energy sector in an attempt to address the escalating energy crisis. South Africa has received a series of loans from the World Bank to tackle the power crisis through investments in green energy, the terms of which have been criticised by trade unions and progressive civil society actors. Progressive civil society argues that the Bank's promotion of a private sector-led fair energy transition through independent power producers harms the working class by increasing the cost of energy and providing little public support for mining communities affected by the move to clean energy. The South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) participated in the Global Counter-Summit of Social Movements in Morocco that was organised to counter the WB/IMF annual meetings in October 2023.

72 <https://www.resbank.co.za/en/home/about-us>

G20

From 1999 to 2023, South Africa was the only African member of the G20. It is one of the nine non-OECD countries that are part of the G20 Heads of Government meetings. As Africa's largest and most industrialised economy, the country used its position to influence the informal group's agenda in the interests of the continent. Since 2008, South Africa has chaired several working groups including Reform of the IMF, Development, Financial Inclusion, and the Climate Finance Study Groups. Pretoria views the G20 as a platform from which to advocate broader reforms in international economic governance, including a reform of the BWI. It has been able to leverage the strong technical expertise in the National Treasury so as to influence the agenda on issues such as financial inclusion and development.

In 2020, South Africa was actively involved in negotiations on the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and the Common Framework for Debt Treatment intended to provide debt relief to low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and rising inflation, LMICs, particularly those in Africa, have had to assume more debt to meet their liquidity needs. This has triggered a debt crisis that risks escalating to levels experienced in the 1990s, which triggered debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Africa's debt is the highest it has been in over a decade, and 20 countries on the continent 'are either bankrupt or at high risk of debt distress'. Between 2019 and 2022, 25 African governments spent more on servicing debt than public healthcare. In this context, it will be nearly impossible for Africa to raise the 1.6 trillion US Dollars required to achieve the SDGs by 2030. However, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana has criticised how the Common Framework has been implemented and has joined forces with other African finance ministers to draw up recommendations for restructuring the framework. Four African countries applied to restructure their debt through the Common Framework – Ethiopia, Zambia, Ghana, Chad. It has taken two to three years to reach agreements during negotiations with creditors. Ethiopia is yet to finalise its restructuring.

The G20 agenda has been hamstrung by geopolitics in light of strategic competition between the US and China, as well as opposition among some members to Russia's participation, undermining substantive progress on issues ranging from the Global South debt crisis to climate change.

The successive presidencies of the three IBSA states – India (2023), Brazil (2024), and South Africa (2025) – have raised hopes that a more progressive agenda will be advanced. During its presidency, India prioritised issues impacting the developing world including debt, development,

international taxation, food insecurity, and climate change. Brazil has taken this further with a focus on social inclusion and the fight against hunger, fair energy transition and sustainable development, and reform of the global governance institutions. In October 2023, the World Bank/IMF annual meetings were held in Africa for the first time in 50 years. Some of the reforms proposed by African states at the World Bank were increasing low-interest money available to African countries, re-channelling IMF special drawing rights to the African Development Bank, and confirming the African Union as a full member of the G20. The AU will join the G20 as a full member from 2024. South Africa's 2025 presidency of the G20 presents an opportunity to advance these African proposals, as well as the reform and inequality agenda set by India and Brazil.



73 <https://african.business/2023/10/finance-services/forget-moral-hazard-the-g20-common-framework-needs-to-modernise>

74 <https://data.oie.org/topics/african-debt/>

75 <https://theconversation.com/africas-debt-crisis-needs-a-bold-new-approach-expert-outlines-a-way-forward-223982#:~:text=Many%20African%20countries%20continue%20to, revenues%20to%20servicing%20their%20debt.>

76 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-14/africa-s-only-g-20-member-wants-to-reform-its-debt-framework>

77 <https://africaforafrica.org/news-and-media/press-releases/african-finance-ministers-demand-action-on-global-financial-architecture-reform/>

New Development Bank (NDB)

The New Development Bank (NDB) was established by BRICS in 2015 as a multilateral development bank specifically targeted at raising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). In the absence of substantial reform of the BWIs, the NDB was a way for the BRICS to create an inclusive and equitable international financial institution that fulfils the interests of developing countries. BRICS founding members have an equal number of shares and an equal amount of subscribed capital. All United Nations members are eligible to become members of the NDB. Governance and management responsibility is shared among the five founding members. The President of the NDB is former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and the remainder of the executive is made up of four Vice-Presidents from the other four founding member states. The Africa Regional Centre is based in Johannesburg.

At the BRICS Summit in 2023, President Ramaphosa used the NDB as a model for how global financial institutions could be reformed to be 'more agile and responsive to the challenges facing developing economies'. Ramaphosa explained that since its formation, the NDB 'has demonstrated its ability to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development in emerging economies without conditionalities'. South Africa has received a number of loans from the NDB for water and road infrastructure, COVID-19 emergency relief, and renewable energy development.

International Tax Reform

The issue of international tax reform is supported by both state and non-state actors in South Africa. Since 1994, the democratic government has viewed domestic resource mobilisation through taxation as an important source of sovereignty and a way to avoid the debt trap that affected many African states. Deregulation of trade and financial markets has made international capital increasingly mobile and transnational Countries of the Global South, particularly Africa, are forced to adopt capital-friendly economic policies at the expense of their people and the environment. The 2015 UN Economic Commission on Africa's (UNECA) High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, found that Africa was annually losing more than 50 billion US Dollars through illicit financial outflows. The panel argued that reversing this outflow was essential to ensure Africa's development could be funded 'as much as possible on its own resources'.

South Africa is a member of both the multi-country G20/OECD Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) and the OECD Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. These multilateral platforms seek to address tax avoidance, end tax evasion, prevent tax crimes, improve tax transparency, and enable development and capacity-building. As part of the Inclusive Framework, South Africa was active in negotiations on the Global Anti-Base Erosion (GloBE) Mode, which provides for a coordinated and comprehensive system of global minimum corporate taxation for multinational companies. Here, the aim is to guarantee that MNCs pay a minimum level of tax on their income regardless of the jurisdiction in which they operate. South Africa introduced legislation to implement the GloBE model rules in 2024. In 2023, the South African Revenue Service (SARS) co-chaired the Global Forum's 13th Africa Initiative meeting, where representatives from 26 African countries and partners discussed ways to improve tax transparency and exchange of information 'to stem illicit financial flows and increase domestic resource mobilisation'. The OECD initiatives have been criticised for failing to sufficiently include African countries and to adequately protect poor countries, while also containing provisions that are unsuitable for less developed countries.

Calls have been made for more wide-ranging global tax reform to benefit the Global South, led by the UN with its universal membership, in lieu of elite multilateral institutions such as the G20 and OECD. In his speech at the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development in September 2023, President Ramaphosa stated that 'the international tax system must reflect the diverse needs and capacities of both developed and developing economies'. South Africa supported the Africa Group's UNGA resolution to establish an United Nations Framework Convention on Taxation, which was passed on 22 November 2023. The CSO, Alternative Information & Development Centre (AIDC), was involved in a Global South research project to inform the UN process. AIDC supports an international taxation framework instead of the global minimum tax rate proposed by the OECD, as it provides for more wide-ranging limitations on illicit financial flows.

World Trade Organisation (WTO)

South Africa became a founding member of the WTO on 1 September 1995. Its approach towards multilateral trade negotiations has been to build bridges between developing and developed countries. For South Africa, trade plays an important role in development, and thus the country was active in defining the agenda of the Doha Development Round which started in 2001. International trade is the mandate of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTICC) which aims to:

build an equitable global trading system that facilitates development by strengthening trade and investment links with key economies and fostering African development including regional and continental integration and development cooperation in line with the AU Agenda 2063.

South Africa advocates for fairer global trade practices to enable African economies to achieve developmental benefits from their trade relations. Africa's trade is still locked into colonial patterns, with Africans exporting raw materials, such as minerals and other natural resources, and relying on developed economies (usually former colonial powers) for manufactured goods. Scholars observe that this colonial model was entrenched by neoliberal structural adjustment programmes enforced by the IFIs. Wealthy states, particularly the US and members of the EU, have resisted liberalising trade in agriculture, which would unlock development for many African countries. South African civil society has been active in contesting the status quo in multilateral trade

negotiations. Government invites a civil society delegation, made up of business and labour, to WTO meetings. COSATU representatives often provide strategic support and lend extra weight to government's progressive positions on a given issue by engaging with their CSO counterparts from other regions of the world. Some observers described South Africa's desire for developmental outcomes from the WTO as 'naïve' – WTO negotiations are driven by developed countries' economic interests, after all.

Trade inequalities have been entrenched by 'tools of economic protectionism', including 'trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), trade-in-services agreements, and the politicisation of tariff and non-tariff barriers'. In 2020, South Africa and India attempted to obtain a waiver of TRIPS related to Covid-19 so as to enable developing countries to gain access to affordable vaccines and other health technologies. More than 100 countries supported the waiver proposal and 63 countries co-sponsored it. CSOs, such as the Health Justice Initiative, were actively involved in this process but were critical of the June 2022 WTO TRIPS deal that provided a limited waiver.



- 78 <https://dirco.gov.za/address-by-president-cyril-ramaphosa-at-the-brics-business-forum-leaders-dialogue-22-august-2023/>
- 79 https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/?country=south-africa&key_area_focus=&project_status=&type_category=&pyearval=#paginated-list
- 80 <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/22695/b11524868.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
- 81 <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/22695/b11524868.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
- 82 <https://www.oecd.org/tax/transparency/what-we-do/technical-assistance/africa-initiative.htm>
- 83 <https://dirco.gov.za/remarks-by-president-cyril-ramaphosa-on-the-occasion-of-the-high-level-dialogue-on-financing-for-development-new-york-usa-20-september-2023/>
- 84 <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20231122/un-general-assembly-member-states-have-voted-majority-125-favor-adopting#:~:text=The%20resolution%20A%2FC.,for%20Africa%20and%20the%20world.>
- 85 <https://aidc.org.za/global-south-perspectives-on-international-tax-reform-report/> and
- 86 <https://aidc.org.za/aidc-welcomes-the-successful-vote-for-a-united-nations-tax-convention/>
- 87 <http://www.thedtic.gov.za/sectors-and-services-2/1-4-2-trade-and-export/>
- 88 Arina Muresan and Sanusha Naidu, 'Shaping the Future of Multilateralism: Could South Africa spurred by Covid-19 drive more equitable global trade norms'. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung E-Paper, June 2021
- 89 Mzukisi Qobo and Memory Dube, 'South Africa's foreign economic strategies in a changing global system', South African Journal of International Affairs, 22(2), 2015
- 90 Muresan and Naidu 2021
- 91 <https://healthjusticeinitiative.org.za/2022/06/30/the-wto-deal-explainer/>
- 92 Ibid.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to deepen intra-African trade by bringing together the 55 member states of the AU and eight regional economic communities (REC) to form a single continental market of 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of 3.4 billion US Dollars. Fifty-four member states have signed the AfCFTA agreement.

South Africa launched the start of its preferential trade under AfCFTA in January 2024 and will now be able to trade with twelve other African countries that have finalised the legal modalities to trade under the free trade agreement. South Africa also hosted the Council of African Trade Ministers in January 2024 'to consider further measures to strengthen the AfCFTA'. The EFF is the opposition party that has been vocal in championing intra-African trade, calling for the development of common logistics infrastructure to link regions of the continent, and advocating for African states to sign the AU Free Movement of People Agreement to foster regional and continental economic integration.

respect national boundaries' so they cannot be resolved by any state on its own. Global cooperation is the only way to find solutions and 'this underscores the importance of a predictable, equitable, and rules-based multilateral system and working towards the reform of global governance to give developing countries their rightful place in decision-making'.

South Africa has played an important facilitation role in international climate negotiations. It was part of the BASIC group (Brazil, China, India, South Africa) that first emerged as an alliance in 2009 at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In Copenhagen, the BASIC heads of state negotiated the final agreement with US President Obama in the final days of the conference. South Africa successfully hosted COP17 in Durban in 2011, which was widely referred to as an 'African COP'. In Durban, South Africa introduced the 'indaba' negotiation technique to break deadlocks in the negotiations and accelerate decision-making. This approach is widely credited for having enabling the adoption of the 2015 Paris Agreement to keep global warming below two degrees Celsius by all 195 UNFCCC member states.

In recent years, the focus of South Africa's multilateral engagements on climate change have been centred on climate finance.



- 93 <https://au-afcfta.org/about/>
- 94 <https://au-afcfta.org/2024/01/south-africa-to-launch-the-start-of-its-preferential-trade-under-the-african-continental-free-trade-agreement-afcfta-on-wednesday-31-january-2024-in-durban/>
- 95 2024 Election Manifesto
- 96 R. Scholes and F. Engelbrecht, 'Climate impacts in southern Africa during the 21st Century', Climate Impact Report, The Centre for Environmental Rights (September 2021) <https://cer.org.za/reports/climate-impacts-in-southern-africa-during-the-21st-century>
- 97 Climate Action Tracker, 'South Africa Country Tracker,' <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/south-africa/>
- 98 ANC 1994
- 99 'ANC Foreign Policy Perspective in a Democratic South Africa'
- 100 DIRCO Annual Performance Plan 2023 - 2024

Climate finance is the term used to refer 'to local, national, or transnational financing – drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing – that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change'. This stems from the recognition that although countries of the Global South contributed the least to climate change and have reaped few developmental benefits from the actions that caused it, they bear the brunt of its consequences. Therefore, there is a responsibility on developed countries to contribute financial resources to enable developing countries to implement the objectives of the UNFCCC. South Africa co-chaired the Climate Finance Study Group of the G20

South Africa launched a Just Transition Investment Plan (JETP) at the COP26 Climate Summit in 2021 partnering with France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union following 'engagements between the parties on the unique economic and social challenges of transitioning South Africa's fossil fuel dependent economy in a just manner'. The JETP political declaration provides for the international partners to raise 8.5 billion US Dollars of catalytic financing between 2023 and 2027 'subject to agreement on an investment framework'. The Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) that sets out this investment framework was launched in November 2023.

Trade Unions and CSO's have criticised the lack of transparency in how the JETP finance is structured, and are concerned that it primarily consists of loans instead of grants; placing a strong financial burden on future generations and replicating the unequal power relations it purports to resolve. Researchers at Wits University who have been tracking the grant allocation of the JETP, found that only 24 percent of the grant funding went to South African implementing agencies, while 76 percent went to foreign companies and organisations:

For example, about R1.7-billion goes to GIZ, the German development agency, and R2-billion to KfW, the German development bank. Therefore, more than R3.7-billion, which is more than a third of the total grant financing and covers all the grant financing given by Germany, goes straight back into its own development agencies and bank (and a handful of German research institutions). When asked about this at COP28, a German official stated that obviously this money is only going through these agencies as they are just the implementers and not the final beneficiaries. However, this then acts as a mask for where this money really goes, defeating the transparency goal of the register. In most cases, these agencies take a significant cut of the funds to cover their own (substantial) costs and often hire their own consultants to support the work. A key question is what proportion of these funds trickles down to the final beneficiaries.

In June 2023, President Ramaphosa shared the lessons learned in developing this plan at the Roundtable discussion on Green Growth Partnerships at the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact. He emphasised the need for energy transition partnerships to be: country-led and country-owned'; be clear about their definition of 'just', especially in terms of social impact in the country undergoing the transition; be flexible enough to take account of concerns such as energy security; translated into 'tangible financial support' at the scale required for a successful transition with grants forming the majority of the support rather than loans; and accompanied by 'green industrialisation; through the transfer of technology and skills'. Climate finance is a good example of how South Africa is leveraging its participation in international organisations to address domestic challenges, while also trying to reshape the power dynamics of the multilateral order. However, it also illustrates the limitations of such initiatives in the absence of adequate consultation with social partners and proper negotiations on the terms of the agreements.



- 101 Hochstetler, K. and M. Milkoreit. 2015. 'Responsibilities in Transition: Emerging Powers in Climate Change Negotiations'. Global Governance, 21: 205-226
- 102 Vickers, B. 2013. 'Africa and the rising powers: bargaining for the "marginalised many"'. International Affairs, 89(3): 673-693
- 103 <https://unfccc.int/topics/introduction-to-climate-finance#:~:text=Climate%20finance%20refers%20to%20local,that%20will%20address%20climate%20change.>
- 104 <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/sources/scis-news-and-opinion-pieces/take-the-money-a-conundrum-for-african-biodiversity-and-climate-negotiators.html>
- 105 <https://www.climatecommission.org.za/south-africas-jet-ip>
- 106 Ibid
- 107 <https://www.stateofthenation.gov.za/assets/downloads/JET%20Implementation%20Plan%202023-2027.pdf>
- 108 <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/research-news/2024/2024-03/what-happened-to-the-just-energy-transition-grant-funding.html>

Recommendations: Opportunities for Collaboration by Progressive Partners

In the context of global conflict and division, there are opportunities to build progressive transnational alliances so as to revive the multilateral system. These initiatives should focus on young people and aim to build cross-national and cross-cultural solidarity. Despite social media and technology opening up access to the world, it seems as though people from different parts of the world are more removed from one another than ever before. The rise in xenophobic and racist nationalism, even among young people, highlights these divisions. Progressive organisations have a duty to build coalitions based on the ethics of solidarity and common humanity.

This section identifies two areas for potential collaboration:

01

Reform of the International Financial Architecture

Reforms to the international financial architecture are long overdue and vital for ensuring the health of the global economy. The rules of international banking, the regulations enforced by the BWIs, the dominance of ratings agencies, and the failure of developed countries to meet their development assistance commitments combine to create chronic indebtedness and economic dependency. Carlos Lopes describes this situation as one in which 'wealthy nations enjoy the luxury of lenient regulatory frameworks and ample fiscal space... African countries are left to fend for themselves in an environment rife with predatory lending practices and exploitative economic policies'. Economic instability in Africa is giving rise to a resurgence of violent conflict and authoritarian governments. It also manifests itself in the migrant crisis that has had a major impact on European electoral politics. The stability of the future world order requires the inclusion and approval of the countries that are home to 85 percent of the world's population. The debt crisis facing low-income and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) and efforts for international taxation afford opportunities to build campaigns for accelerating broader structural reform of the international financial architecture.



There is a need for more comprehensive solutions to the conditions creating the debt crisis. In fact, low-income African countries have the smallest share of global public debt, yet face prohibitively high interest rates and are forced to borrow in dollars or euros. This leaves them vulnerable to the monetary policy shifts of Western central banks. In recent years, China became Africa's largest bilateral lender. Unfavourable interest rates have dramatically increased debt service costs, with African countries' interest payments accounting for 3.2 percent of GDP compared to 1.5 percent in developed countries. The BWIs' policies contribute to the debt spiral facing poor states. The World Bank's focus on lending for poverty alleviation and climate change overlooks other urgent spending needs and forces governments to look to predatory lenders in order to boost liquidity and enable expenditure on services. The IMF imposes interest surcharges (additional fees) on countries with high or longstanding outstanding credit. This effectively punishes countries with high levels of debt and channels resources away from development. BWIs loans to poor countries often serve the interests of lenders rather than the people of the countries in distress.

Another area in need of reform is the international tax regime. Tax evasion and illicit financial flows are problems confronting both developed and developing countries. While progress has been made through the G20/OECD global tax initiatives, this process involves a small proportion of the global community and does not address the needs of the majority of developing countries, especially in Africa.

109 <https://dirco.gov.za/remarks-by-president-cyril-ramaphosa-on-the-occasion-of-his-participation-in-the-round-table-discussion-on-green-growth-partnerships-at-the-summit-for-a-new-global-financing-pact-22-june-2023/>
110 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/how-africa-can-escape-debt-doom-loop-by-hippolyte-fofack-2024-04>

Possible opportunities for collaboration:

- The world needs a global movement to combat the current debt crisis, similar to the Jubilee 2000 campaign that led to the cancellation of 100 billion US Dollars in debt of HIPC's. A movement focused on transparency, restructuring multilateral development banks to meet the needs of developing countries, and tackling tax avoidance and evasion through a multilateral regime. South African civil society organisations are already contributing to work in this area. A global campaign to push the IMF to 'drop the surcharges' is gaining momentum. Three South African CSOs and four German ones are signatories to a letter signed by 540 worldwide CSOs to the IMF Executive board calling for a review of surcharge policies. AIDC is part of a global coalition to end austerity and explore alternative solutions to the public debt crisis.

- Progressives should build alliances to influence the global governance reform processes currently underway, including the World Bank Evolution Roadmap. The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) joined a coalition of global civil society organisations to develop a response to the World Bank's 'Evolution Roadmap' and initiate a reform of its mission, operations, and resources. These organisations criticised the WB's proposed roadmap and called for one that 'prioritises people, participation, and the planet over profit and economic growth'.

- There is an opportunity to form progressive alliances between partners in developing and developed countries so as to bridge differences on the regulation of international tax. African countries favour a UN framework with input from all UN member states while the EU joined the US and UK in opposing the UN Framework on tax reform because it prefers to work through the OECD, which represents a small proportion of the global community. They seem reluctant to allow countries outside the OECD to have a meaningful influence on global tax rules. Transnational companies exploit us all to varying degrees. Multilateral collaboration is the best way to fight this exploitation. South Africa's hosting of the G20 in 2025 affords a good opportunity to organise around this issue and to involve government, civil society, and political parties. With the AU's inclusion as a G20 member, African concerns must take centre stage.

- South Africa's G20 presidency is a major opportunity for the country's progressive CSOs to set the agenda on BWI reform. Brazil's integration of civil society in Sherpa and Finance track working group engagements and the innovation of a Social Summit to be held on the eve of the G20 Leaders' Summit should be continued in 2025. The Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD), MISTRA and SAIIA are South African CSOs organising around the G20



111 German signatories are: erlassjar.de, Urgewald eV, WEED – World Economy, Ecology and Development, Zukunftskonvent Germany. South African signatories are: Ecology Africa Foundation, Labour and Social Studies Group and Natural Justice. <https://gcap.global/news/gcap-along-with-540-csos-calls-on-imf-to-end-harmful-surcharges/>
112 <https://aidc.org.za/alternatives-to-austerity-dealing-with-rising-levels-of-public-debt/>
113 These include Bretton Woods Project, European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad), Christian Aid, Third World Network, and the Women's Environment and Development Organisations (WEDO). See more: https://www.iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CSO-reaction-to-WBG-evolution-roadmap_FINAL-1.pdf
114 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2023/01/13/world-bank-group-statement-on-evolution-roadmap>
115 <https://www.iej.org.za/world-bank-evolution-roadmap-needs-revisions/>
116 <https://igd.org.za/2024/01/22/g20-in-2024-brazils-big-boost-for-the-global-south/#:~:text=G20%20Social%20as%20an%20encouraging%20new%20innovation&text=The%20highlight%20will%20be%20the%20Social%20Summit%20to%20be%20held,both%20in%20Rio%20de%20Janeiro.>

02

Reforming the UN System at 80

We are currently living in an era of the greatest tension between the global North and South. The UNSC's failure to deal with great power conflict among its members has made it important to resolve the defining conflicts of this historical moment: Gaza and Ukraine. The dichotomy between Western and non-Western understandings of justice, international law, human rights, humanitarianism, democracy, and global governance is starker than ever. It is as if we occupy different planets. Yet, despite all its flaws, the UN is the only multilateral mechanism we have for collective action on issues including peace and security, development, and climate and sustainability. The planned UN Summit of the Future scheduled for 2024 is an opportunity for cross-national collaboration to address the gaps in global governance and to initiate the process of reform to restore trust in the multilateral system. Chaired by Germany and Namibia, the Summit of the Future could act as a focal point around which to organise progressive actors from the Global South and North.

Specific areas for progressive collaboration:

- The Zero Draft for the Summit of the Future Pact for the Future was published in January 2024. Hundreds of CSOs from around the world have submitted inputs to the draft. The draft addresses UNSC reform, sustainable financing for development, reform of international financial institutions, and specifically mentions the AU as a partner in future peace enforcement. African states have been curiously restrained in their engagement with the Zero Draft. Besides the AU's Economic Social and Cultural Council, there have been few consultations on the Pact on the continent. Progressive civil society in South Africa has an opportunity to engage with counterparts on the continent to contribute towards the Pact.

- The Declaration on Future Generations is an annexure to the Pact of the Future, and is intended to form one of the outcomes of the Summit of the Future. Progressive youth organisations in the Global South should be mobilised to contribute to the development of the Pact. This is particularly important for Africa, which has the youngest population in the world. Seventy percent of sub-Saharan Africans are under the age of 30. Young Africans are expected to make up 42 percent of global youth by 2030 – Africans are the future. Youth organisations like the NYDA, COSATU Youth Forum, and South African Youth Association for Global Affairs should be collaborating with their counterparts in order to shape the future of the UN.



Dr Sithembile Mbete wrote this paper in the context of a global study project coordinated by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's New York Office (see <https://ny.fes.de>). Commissioning similar studies in various G20 countries, the project aimed at charting different takes on multilateralism, its most pressing problems as well as hopes and interests for reforms.

In South Africa, FES supports progressive voices from the labour movement as well as from feminist and other social movements to shape debates about international politics. Firstly, to bring issues of economic and social justice to otherwise often very narrow foreign policy agendas. And secondly, using its global network, to build international alliances for a more inclusive and just multilateral order. After all, international relations are too important to be left to governments alone.

117 <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>

118 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/time-running-out-for-africa-s-input-on-the-summit-of-the-future>



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