



150th IPU ASSEMBLY GENERAL DEBATE ON THE THEME: PARLIAMENTARY

ACTION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE

**HON T. DIDIZA, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, PARLIAMENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Honourable President of the Assembly,
Honourable President of the IPU, Dr Tulia Ackson,
Honourable Presiding Officers,
Fellow Speakers
Honourable Members; and
Distinguished guests,

It is an honour to address this 150th Assembly on behalf of the South African delegation. We also meet at an opportune time when we mark the 30 years following the Women's Conference in Beijing where a call for action was made on building an equitable society where both men and women can enjoy the freedoms that we have all fought for. Thirty years we have seen the progress in women's representation in parliaments and other walks of life. We have seen the increase in access for the girl child. We have seen progress in law making that has improved the lives of women. However there remains more than needs to be done. The impact of wars and conflict has affected women and children more. The gender based violence have increased. It is for this reason that we believe peace is critical for development and as the IPU we have the power to use our Parliamentary diplomacy to work for peace.

Today's debate on 'parliamentary action for social development and justice' serves as a reminder of the immense inequality that defines and remains a salient feature of our world. It is indeed unsettling to acknowledge that only 1 percent of the global population— continue to hold

a disproportionate share of global wealth. This distribution is further exacerbated in various countries, where a small affluent minority holds more wealth than 90 per cent of the population.

As parliamentarians, we must acknowledge our complicity in enacting legislation that primarily benefits the wealthy and multinational corporations, leading to excessive profits that disproportionately favour shareholders and executives. This acknowledgement brings to light weaknesses within our legislative practices and mandates.

Honourable President

The escalating debt levels and interest rates in developing countries continue to soar, pushing many towards crisis. Each interest rate hike forces developing nations to grapple with the choice between servicing their debt or investing in vital areas such as clean energy, education, health, and infrastructure. Shockingly, in 2023, developing countries spent a record of over 1.4 trillion US Dollars on servicing their debt, diverting scarce resources away from critical needs, as highlighted in the 2024 World Bank Group on International Debt Report.

Furthermore, the current climate of trade wars has only worsened these circumstances. Imposing tariffs and engaging in retaliatory actions have intensified global economic instability, ending up negatively affecting the most vulnerable regions. These trade conflicts exacerbate the existing global inequalities, adding another layer of hardship to the economic challenges faced by many countries.

It is imperative that we take action to create a world that upholds the values of fairness, human rights, and access to equal opportunities, irrespective of social, economic, or cultural differences. Social development and justice demand a continuous fight for fairness and equality for all, regardless of race, gender, or culture.

By addressing these weaknesses within our legislative frameworks, recognising systemic challenges, and acknowledging the negative impact of trade wars, we can work to establish more equitable and just systems that create opportunities for all.

Honourable President

Despite challenges and shortcomings, South Africa has come a long way in fostering unity in diversity and in promoting nation-building where everyone has equal opportunities to thrive. We have enacted various pieces of legislation to promote fairness and equality for all, regardless of race, gender, or culture. Among those, we have implemented the Employment Equity Act and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act to rectify past disadvantages. Our commitment to protecting the vulnerable is evident in enacting laws aimed at safeguarding women and children from all forms of violence and advancing their rights. Furthermore, the implementation of the Social Assistance Amendment Act has ensured the provision of social assistance, including old age, disability, child support, and social relief of distress grants. Additionally, our tax legislation is designed to create a fair and efficient tax system that supports social and economic development. It incorporates progressive taxation to tax high-income earners more.

To promote accountability, responsiveness, and openness, we have established various institutions to strengthen constitutional democracy. These include the South African Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Public Protector, the Commission for Gender Equality, and many others. Their establishment has ushered in a new era of accountability and respect for all.

Later this year, our Parliament will be hosting the 11th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit. This occasion is a significant milestone to galvanise not only financial resources for the Sustainable Development Goals but to push for innovative financing solutions to ensure a fairer and more inclusive financial system. Africa's relationship with the global financial system is characterised by significant imbalances, including high borrowing costs, restricted access to international capital market, and stringent conditions imposed by international financial institutions.

Remedying these challenges requires advocating for greater access to international capital markets for developing countries, fairer lending terms, and less stringent conditions. Hence, we will also be advocating reforms within international financial and governance institutions to make them more inclusive and responsive to the needs of developing countries.

Honourable President

The upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar presents an opportunity to create a new path—A path anchored by enhanced social protection systems targeting vulnerable groups to reduce inequalities and ensure digital inclusion, investment in sustainable infrastructure and protection of biodiversity and commitment to achieving gender parity in all sectors, including political representation, education, and employment. The World Summit further provides the international community with an opportune moment to strengthen measures aimed at combating all forms of discrimination, including racial and gender-based discrimination.

These efforts are critical steps towards addressing the weaknesses identified and creating a just and equitable systems of fairness, equality, and opportunities for all. Thank you.
